

## THE LOLLARD BIBLE

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THE year 1950 marked the centenary of the publication by Forshall and Madden of their monumental edition of the Lollard Bible; and since then two works have appeared to remind us how many problems their edition and the scholarship which has been founded on it have failed to solve.

Professor Margaret Deanesly can claim special authority for her lecture,<sup>1</sup> and our respectful attention, for it comes as an agreeable echo of her pronouncements, thirty years ago, in *The Lollard Bible*, upon almost every matter connected with this field of study. Her major work received Coulton's *imprimatur*, and although it shows her, as do all her writings, as an impartial, generous and urbane figure, it served further to show that the facts were on Coulton's side, in his vast and unedifying conflict with Gasquet, when he contended that St Thomas More, writing that he had seen English Bibles, 'fair and old', in the houses of his friends, who used them with the approval of the Church, could not possibly be referring to an orthodox, post-Wycliffite translation, because no such new translation was ever made.

In this recent lecture, Professor Deanesly presents the Lollard Bible to us not as Coulton saw it, as a great act of charity that Christ's hungry might be fed, but rather as an instrument of Wycliffe's policy, the grand design being the replacement of canon law by an English text of the Scriptures as the authority to which he might appeal. Wycliffe the Poor Preacher she regards as a romantic invention; and she shows us to him instead as an adroit and agile theologian, a trained controversialist, a don high in the esteem and secure in the protection of his university.

Although it was doubtless impossible for such a public lecture as this to be so adequately documented as could have been wished, it is unfortunate that we are not shown how well this estimate of Wycliffe's character agrees with Professor Aubrey Gwynn's assessment<sup>2</sup> of the essentially political nature of Wycliffe's earlier

<sup>1</sup> *The Significance of the Lollard Bible*, the Ethel M. Wood Lecture delivered before the University of London on March 13th, 1951 (University of London, The Athlone Press, 1951).

<sup>2</sup> *The English Austin Friars in the time of Wyclif* (Oxford University Press, 1940).

activities, and of the influence upon his political theory and upon his attacks on canon law of the writings of the mendicant orders, notably the Austin Friars. Some among Professor Deanesly's readers may differ from her on points of detail which she uses to promote her thesis: the wills of the fifteenth century often show, for example, that small, cheap Bibles were not so rare as she suggests; and her view of the importance in Western Europe of medieval French Biblical translations is now less generous and less just than in her previous book. But it is when she comes to establish her principal thesis itself that she is hardest to follow. Within the space at her disposal she has not, it may be thought, sufficiently proved how, in controversy with opponents as familiar with the Vulgate text as he was, Wycliffe in any way advanced his cause by pleading and illustrating it from a new English translation; nor does she adduce any text to show that that was what he did. As we survey the range of Wycliffe's Latin tracts, the old-fashioned, unambitious view that he argued with his learned opponents in Latin and from Vulgate texts, and that he caused the English versions to be made for the benefit of the laity, the first in the mistaken belief that a traditional, literal translation would serve for this purpose, may still commend itself.

But even if we think that we understand the significance of the Lollard Bible for the early Lollards and for their orthodox contemporaries, we are still far from understanding the part that it played in the religious life of this country from the time of the constitutions of the Synod of Oxford until the Reformation. Fr Philip Hughes has recently written, in a chapter, 'Catholic Life and Thought'<sup>3</sup> which, as he shows, owes much to Pierre Janelle's study,<sup>4</sup> the following reminder of the problems raised but not solved by Coulton and Gasquet: 'About the existence in these years—and the use—of a Catholic Bible in the English tongue there has been great controversy: about the fact that in the fifty years which followed Caxton's introduction of printing into England no printer was moved to print even a single Sunday gospel in the vernacular, no controversy is possible. There is, of course, no doubt, either, that what the local English ecclesiastical law forbade was not the use of translations, but of translations not authorised by the bishops. No man who knows anything at all of

<sup>3</sup> *The Reformation in England. I: The King's Proceedings* (Hollis and Carter, 1950).

<sup>4</sup> *L'Angleterre catholique à la veille du schisme* (Paris, 1935).

Thomas More will doubt his word when he vouches for the authorised use of existing translations; nor that he spoke sincerely when he said, in refutation to Tyndale, 'No good man would be so mad as to burn a Bible in which they found no fault'. But the saint, who himself favoured the policy of circulating a translation of Holy Scripture, is also himself witness that 'this was not the policy which (he is writing in 1528, with the storm of the Reformation still rising and spreading in northern Germany) commended itself to the clergy generally.'<sup>5</sup>

All this is very true, and very justly expressed, except that one would prefer Fr Hughes not to seem to beg the question by writing of 'a Catholic Bible in the English tongue'; but he, relying as we all must on Forshall and Madden's edition and the criticism based on it, cannot take us any further. What was the practice of individual bishops after the enactment of the Constitutions? Who applied for their licence, and to whom was it granted? Did precise regulations in any diocese or religious order govern the use of the English Bible: could they be used for study but not for devotional purposes, or, as the author of *The Chastising of God's Children* seems to imply, for private devotions but not for any quasi-liturgical end such as the recitation of psalms set for religious by their confessors as penances? How often were owners of English Bibles arraigned before ordinaries, or before *ad hoc* watch committees such as that at Cambridge described in one manuscript of the *Speculum Vitae*? Who owned the extant manuscripts, to what uses were they put, and, above all, what kind of text do they represent? How many of them show the careful breathing-punctuation characteristic of manuscripts intended to be read aloud, or the careful corrections of manuscripts which have been so used by a succession of lectors? Do the marginalia which most manuscripts at a casual inspection reveal conform to any principles of revision, or show individual scholarly care? Did the Lollard Bible keep pace with the great changes which the English language underwent in the fifteenth century, or did even its second version rapidly acquire the character of a *textus receptus*?

In chapter xiii of *The Lollard Bible*, 'Bible Reading by the Orthodox, 1408-1526', Professor Deanesly herself canvassed some of these questions, and marshalled the evidence which she had amassed in an endeavour to answer them. Confronted by a host of

apparent contradictions, she showed great care and ingenuity in seeking to reconcile them: but her method, which was to assume, wherever fifteenth-century practice (as illustrated, for example, by the extant manuscripts which belonged to the unimpeachably orthodox) conflicts with fifteenth-century theory, such as Archbishop Stafford's out-and-out condemnation, as bishop of Wells, of the ownership under any circumstances of such translations, that the rule was in accordance with the theory, and that the contradictory evidence is of an exceptional nature, is not one by which such investigations can satisfactorily be pursued. Nor was all the evidence which could be made available, especially the linguistic evidence, examined by her.

It will always be to Professor Deanesly's credit that her writings will serve as a guide and an example, even to those who may use her findings to reach conclusions different from her own. But no fresh examination of the secondary sources, such as the episcopal registers and probates of the age, will be of use unless it is coupled with a full and detailed study of the manuscripts of the Lollard Bible itself.

The last hundred years have seen the invention of many mechanical devices which can now be used by the textual critic to accelerate, even if not to lighten his labours; but any Arbeitsgemeinschaft which undertook the preparation of a new critical edition of the Lollard Bible would be faced with a task far greater than that which Forshall and Madden carried out. Many more manuscripts than they used are now known, and few of them could be dismissed with a summary inspection, for it is chiefly the evidence of disagreement between them, of contamination, and of their subsequent use, study and correction, which students will look for in a new edition. To provide such a critical apparatus would call for vigilance, patience and endurance from many workers; and their work, when completed, could only be published at a cost which, a century ago, would have seemed unbelievable. It is hardly surprising that no one has yet felt himself called to undertake such a task; but until it is carried out, we who are concerned with the problems sketched here must remain in much the same state of indecision, our judgment indefinitely suspended, as *Piers Plowman* scholars have endured (or should have endured) for sixty years and more. Their time of waiting, it seems, is now almost at an end. Let us hope that once the A, B and C

texts are safely published, some of those who are drawn to the ardours of textual criticism will turn their eyes in the direction of the Lollard Bible, A and B.

## THE MYSTIC AND THE WORLD

EDWARD SARMIENTO

THE 'ordinary Christian' who is attracted by the magnetism of the 'mystics' is baffled by a problem that is hard to solve from a scrutiny of the lives of some of these contemplative saints, either because, like the Fathers of the Desert, they are virtually unknown to us in any intimate sense, or because their natural personalities, before their supernatural development takes place, do not appear to have experienced the need out of which this problem arises. A Saint Rose of Lima, for example, or a Saint Mariana of Quito, seem, from the usual accounts of them at least, to have had that capacity for living in an almost vacuum, the incapacity for which on the part of most people constitutes the problem here in question. St John of the Cross preaches his *nada*, and the admiring but ordinary Christian feels that even supposing he had the courage to deny self so consistently, how in fact would he carry out the programme of annihilation short of, in fact, ascending to the top of a very tall column and quietly settling down to starve? A temperament really directed to love of creatures, however many ounces of ash are sprinkled upon the dish of spinach, will always leap forward to delight in the grey and green colour-scheme. Solitude can never be absolute, and the kind Romanus who brings the hermit his food will surely be rewarded with his love. Is it possible to examine the lives of any mystics in sufficient detail to discover whether there is a solution to this difficulty, and even one which the ordinary man may, in due proportion, make his own?

In the correspondence,<sup>1</sup> preserved in 458 letters to a great variety of recipients, we can see something of the outer life of St Teresa of Avila. This remarkable woman is possibly the saint about whose inner and outer lives we have the greatest amount of information—at least, among those whose natural personalities

<sup>1</sup> *The Letters of St Teresa of Jesus*, translated by E. Allison Peers. Two volumes, 3 guineas. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne.)