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978-1-108-04248-2 - Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History: Composed during the Period from the Accession of Edward III to that of Richard III: Volume 2

Edited by Thomas Wright

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Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History, Composed during the Period from the Accession of Edward III to that of Richard III

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VOLUME 2

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RERUM BRITANNICARUM MEDII ÆVI
SCRIPTORES,

OR

CHRONICLES AND MEMORIALS OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND IRELAND

DURING

THE MIDDLE AGES.

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THE CHRONICLES AND MEMORIALS
OF
GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND
DURING THE MIDDLE AGES.

PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHORITY OF HER MAJESTY'S TREASURY, UNDER THE
DIRECTION OF THE MASTER OF THE ROLLS.

ON the 26th of January 1857, the Master of the Rolls submitted to the Treasury a proposal for the publication of materials for the History of this Country from the Invasion of the Romans to the Reign of Henry VIII.

The Master of the Rolls suggested that these materials should be selected for publication under competent editors without reference to periodical or chronological arrangement, without mutilation or abridgment, preference being given, in the first instance, to such materials as were most scarce and valuable.

He proposed that each chronicle or historical document to be edited should be treated in the same way as if the editor were engaged on an *Editio Princeps*; and for this purpose the most correct text should be formed from an accurate collation of the best MSS.

To render the work more generally useful, the Master of the Rolls suggested that the editor should give an account of the MSS. employed by him, of their age and their peculiarities; that he should add to the work a brief account of the life and times of the author, and any remarks necessary to explain the chronology; but no other note or comment was to be allowed, except what might be necessary to establish the correctness of the text.

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The works to be published in octavo, separately, as they were finished; the whole responsibility of the task resting upon the editors, who were to be chosen by the Master of the Rolls with the sanction of the Treasury.

The Lords of Her Majesty's Treasury, after a careful consideration of the subject, expressed their opinion in a Treasury Minute, dated February 9, 1857, that the plan recommended by the Master of the Rolls "was well calculated for the accomplishment of this important national object, in an effectual and satisfactory manner, within a reasonable time, and provided proper attention be paid to economy, in making the detailed arrangements, without unnecessary expense."

They expressed their approbation of the proposal that each chronicle and historical document should be edited in such a manner as to represent with all possible correctness the text of each writer, derived from a collation of the best MSS., and that no notes should be added, except such as were illustrative of the various readings. They suggested, however, that the preface to each work should contain, in addition to the particulars proposed by the Master of the Rolls, a biographical account of the author, so far as authentic materials existed for that purpose, and an estimate of his historical credibility and value.

*Rolls House,
December 1857.*

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POLITICAL POEMS AND SONGS

RELATING TO

ENGLISH HISTORY,

COMPOSED DURING THE PERIOD

From the Accession of EDW. III. to that of RIC. III.

EDITED

BY

THOMAS WRIGHT, ESQ., M.A., F.S.A., HON. M.R.S.L., ETC.,

CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE INSTITUTE OF FRANCE,

(ACADÉMIE DES INSCRIPTIONS ET BELLES LETTRES.)

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INTRODUCTION.

JOHN GOWER was the principal political poet of the John Gower. reign of Richard II. His writings of this class are nearly all in Latin verse, and ostentatiously designed for the most educated classes of society, and he was no advocate of the popular cause, but was evidently guided by his personal partialities to the nobles who led the opposition to the court; yet the changes in his political views were coincident with those which agitated society during Richard's reign. In its earlier period he had written in praise of the young monarch, and sought court favour; but, as we have seen in our former volume, he subsequently took part warmly with the opposition, and attached himself to the party of Henry of Lancaster, and the last of his Latin poems written before the accession of that prince to the throne are bitterly hostile to the person and government of king Richard. The present volume opens with the latest known of these Latin poems, and probably the latest which ever came from his pen. They were professedly written to glorify the COMPLIMENTARY VERSES ON KING HENRY IV. new monarch, by commemorating the ruin which had threatened the kingdom under his predecessor, the patriotism and courage Henry had displayed in saving it, and his just title to the crown. We have, ADDRESS OF JOHN GOWER TO HENRY IV. however, another poem by the same author, addressed also to Henry IV., but written in English. In this

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Gower begins by pointing out the manifest interposition of God in promoting that prince to the sovereignty of his country, and he urges this circumstance, whereby the people had been no less evidently saved from tyranny and oppression, as one of the strongest proofs of his right to the crown, and at the same time as a substantial ground for the hope that the new government would be prosperous and beneficial to the country. England was still at war with France, but this had been carried on without honour to our country, and Gower expresses the strong feeling of the people in general, in his earnest desire for the establishment of peace. He recommends the king to petition heaven for wisdom in ruling his own people, rather than for the faculty of conquering others. Solomon, who had his choice, chose the former, and his reign was one of peace and glory. Alexander chose the other alternative, and was enabled to carry his conquering arms over the whole world; but, says our poet, the world was then all heathen, and full of sin and confusion, but now, under Christ's faith, everybody is bound to eschew war and to seek peace. The advantages of peace are contrasted in some rather vigorous lines with the injustice and tyranny of war; and the poet advises the king against taking to his councils any partizans of the latter. Christ, he says, came into the world to establish peace, so that war is contrary to our faith; and yet, at this time war prevailed throughout Christendom, and even in Christ's church itself, which was then disputed between two rival popes. Where there was disease in the head, the body must needs suffer; and under these circumstances it behoved the Christian kings to promote peace among themselves for two causes; first, for the protection of the church against internal division; and, secondly,

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to defend Christendom against the infidels, who at this time were making dangerous attacks upon it. These blessings were to be hoped from the known character of Henry of Lancaster.

The only manuscript of this poem with which I am acquainted is contained in a volume in the library of the duke of Sutherland at Trentham in Staffordshire, which was made well known by Wharton as containing Gower's French sonnets.¹ There appears sufficient reason for believing this manuscript to have been presented to king Henry, after his accession, by the poet, who seems to have been rather vain of his French verses, and the two pieces here printed were probably written on the occasion. They are accompanied by a shorter piece, in Latin elegiacs, here given at the end of the English poem, in which Gower states, that at this time, which was the first year of Henry's reign, he was struck with blindness; and he complains of old age (*torva senectus*), and announces his resolution to write no more, but to leave literature to a younger generation. In fact, there are reasons for supposing that he must now have been considerably advanced in years—perhaps not far short of eighty; he died in 1408.

Gower, though, as a layman, conscious of many abuses in the ecclesiastical state, and wishful for their reform, was still a staunch catholic, and no favourer of what he considered as innovations in religion, and he urged the king above all other things to give the whole support of the secular government to the church. Henry's father, John of Gaunt, had been notoriously a favourer of the Wycliffites; and Henry himself, previous to his accession to the throne, had not been considered a very zealous son of the church;

¹ These were printed by the late duke of Sutherland, when earl | Gower, as a contribution to the | Roxburghe Club.

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New Act
against the
Lollards.

so that, at the opening of his reign, the religious reformers took courage, imagined that they were at least sure of toleration, and employed themselves with extraordinary activity in spreading their doctrines. But, to their great disappointment, they soon found their mistake. Henry is accused of having deliberately purchased the support of the Romish clergy in his designs upon the crown by at least a verbal engagement to suppress the sect of the Lollards, and all other heretics; and, be this as it may, the clergy began immediately to display an active spirit of persecution which rendered it not improbable, and the commencement of his reign was marked by a statute against the religious reformers of a severity then unexampled. By the Act of the 2nd Hen. IV., chapter 14 (A.D. 1400), heretics were ordered to be punished by burning at the stake, and this cruel law was immediately carried into effect in the case of William Sautrey, a parish priest convicted of heretical opinions. These proceedings naturally carried consternation among the Wycliffites, but, as is usually the case, persecution on the one hand only increased and embittered the zeal of the persecuted, while some acts of severity on the part of the crown against a few Romish ecclesiastics who had engaged in treasonable conspiracies encouraged them still to hope for a change in their favour. Under these circumstances the Wycliffites slackened nothing in their activity, but they united more warmly with those who were struggling for social and political liberty; and the popular dislike to the Romish priesthood, and especially to the four orders of friars with whom people came into closer communication, was greatly increased. The watchword of this party was still the same which had been raised with so much vigour in the poem of Piers Ploughman, and which demanded the emancipation of the oppressed peasant. But the name of Piers Ploughman had been

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exchanged for that of Jack Upland, which was exactly equivalent, as it signified simply Jack the countryman, Jack Upland, or Jack of the country, in contradistinction from the town. About the date just mentioned there appeared a poem under this title in alliterative verse, intended evidently to be circulated among the populace, in which the popular character, Jack Upland, is introduced propounding the various heads of the complaints of the Wycliffites against the Romish church in a series of questions addressed to the friars, who were the most active agents against the professors of the new opinions. This poem appears to have given great alarm, or offence, to the friars, one of whom, whose real name, it is intimated, was John of Walsingham, but who wrote under the assumed and more popular name of Daw Topias, put forth a reply to these questions, compiled in exactly the same style, but sprinkled here and there with rather violent abuse of Wycliffe and the Lollards. A Wycliffite took up the cudgels immediately, and retorted in a similar style, and this last writer alludes to an event as then recent which seems to fix the date of all these pieces to the year 1401. Of the first of these no manuscript appears now to be known, but a copy had been found in the sixteenth century by Stow, and was inserted, without any reason, in the folio black-letter edition of the works of Chaucer. The other two, which may be considered among the most remarkable of the popular records of the history of the religious movement during this period, are preserved in a contemporary manuscript in the Bodleian Library, in which the friar's poem occupies the page of the vellum, and the reply of the Lollard is written in a smaller hand in the margins above and below. It was the common practice to write the alliterative poetry as prose, with a slight stroke of the pen to mark the divisions of the lines. Such is the case with the manuscript in the Bodleian Library,

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where the divisions of the lines are very distinctly marked. But the copyist of the first poem for the edition of Chaucer, who evidently understood the English of his original imperfectly, and was not at all acquainted with the principles of the old alliterative verse, had really mistaken it for prose, and not only copied it for such, but substituted for the obsolete words with which this class of poetry abounded others which were then better known, and often paraphrased the language in the belief that he was making it better understood. Thus in some parts all traces of its metrical character is lost, and we may judge in many cases how much it is corrupted by comparison with the quotations from it in the strictures of "Daw Topias." At the same time it must also be remarked that with the beginning of the fifteenth century the alliterative verse began already to be written very loosely, and, the rhythm being preserved, the alliteration was often left imperfect, or entirely neglected.

JACK
UPLAND.

To begin with Jack Upland, the popular satirist commences with stigmatizing the church of Rome as Antichrist and his disciples, and complains that the worst of these "diverse sects" were those last brought in, the different orders of friars, who neither showed obedience to the prelates of the church nor allegiance to the crown, but sought only to indulge their own selfishness, while they pretended to have the power of selling heaven and earth to whom they liked. After taunting the friars with their great pretensions to knowledge, he proceeds to put certain questions to them, requiring that the answers should be grounded "in reason and holy writ." His first question is a very simple one—if there be so many different religious orders on earth, one must be supposed to be better than another, or there need have been no more than one; and if these orders are not better than the order

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which Christ himself founded, namely the Gospel, why should they choose any one of them in preference to it? Moreover, for which should a friar be more severely punished, for breaking the rules of his order or for breaking God's commandments? He asks further, why should a friar be considered an apostate for leaving one order for the purpose of joining another, where they were all considered to belong to Christ's church? In a number of consecutive questions, the friars are accused of placing their religion in their habit, and of furnishing themselves with clothes of rich materials for no other cause but vain-glory; of placing undue importance in vain things, such as particular colours of cloth and particular places; of obtaining dispensations from duties which were uneasy to them; and of pretending to embrace with their profession a life of mortification—to be as dead men; whereas they were the most active beggars alive, and, instead of graves, which were appropriate to dead men, they affected to live in mansions which exceeded in extent and splendour the palaces of the greatest nobles. As proofs of the selfish motives of the orders of friars, it is stated that fixed districts were farmed out to certain limitors, or begging friars, as the name intimates, and that they were not allowed to trespass within each others' limits; that they were exempted from the visitations of the bishops; that they sold for money, and never gave in charity, letters of brotherhood, by which people were entitled after death to a share in their merits; and that they induced people to give them large sums of money for their prayers, on the assurance that these would bring them out of purgatory or hell, while they were ignorant where they should go themselves. Jack Upland asks, with some reason, why, if they had this power, they should not employ it out of love for their fellow men as well as for gain. They are accused also of

Pretensions
and motives of the
friars.

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Their simony.

“stealing” men’s children in order to bring them up in their order, a charge which is proved to be true by a collective force of contemporary evidence. They sought only to perform the two sacraments, shrift and burial, which brought in most money; and only, therefore, to those who could pay, rejecting the poor. “According to your own doctrine,” says the reformer, “holiness consists in poverty, and why, therefore, do you refuse to receive for burial those who are “poor?” The friars, we are told, disapproved of preaching, and condemned the secular priests who practised it; they sold God’s mass for a penny, and therefore set that sum either on “God’s body,” which was worse than the crime of Judas, who sold it for thirty pence, or sold their labour, which was bribery and covetousness, or sold the service of the church, which was simony; they entered in their table books the names of those who purchased their pardons, as if God was not likely to remember them; and they justified their system of mendicity by the example of the Saviour, who, they pretended, had gained his living on earth by begging. In some further questions these particular charges are dilated upon; the reformer complains that the multiplication of friars and other ecclesiastics was an unnecessary and unjust burthen upon the people, and alleges that when Christ had but twelve apostles and a few disciples his work was done much better than since the number of workmen had been so greatly increased. Just as a man works better with four fingers and a thumb to his hand, than he would if the number were doubled; so the superfluity of workmen in the church only encumbered it and made it inefficient. These unworthy workmen locked up the bible from those who were able and willing to read and preach it, and persecuted as heretics those who sought to make its doctrines public. The reformer again repeats the charges that

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the friars only sought riches and self-indulgence; that one of them who brought home most money to his house received full absolution for whatever error he might have committed in obtaining it; that they neglected the poor, and chiefly sought out rich men, who could afford to pay them well for their religious consolations; and that these consolations were of such a kind that they encouraged lords and ladies to sin worse than before, instead of amending their lives; and he then again puts some home questions to the friar as to the superiority of one religious order over another. If the friar replied that his own order was the best, he assumed that the other orders were inferior to it; whereas each friar of one of the other orders would give him the lie and say that his own order was best; yet one only could be the best, and therefore three must be false, while there was no means of knowing which was the true one. And this contradiction between the orders was so great that a friar who left his own order to enter another was looked upon as an apostate. Also these orders and rules were assumed not only to be superior to one another, but to be superior also to that rule which had been given by Christ, otherwise why did they not follow Christ's order in preference to all others? Thus it was assumed that St. Francis or St. Dominic was superior in power and knowledge to God himself, an evident blasphemy. "Canst thou, friar, point out any default in Christ's rule of the Gospel, with which he gave all men the certain power to be saved, if they kept it to their ending? If thou sayest it was too hard, thou accusest Christ of untruth; for he said of his rule, 'My yoke is soft and my burthen light.' If thou sayest that Christ's rule was too light, that cannot be alleged as a fault, for it only made it the easier to keep. If thou findest no fault in Christ's rule of the

Their contradictions and presumptuousness.

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“ Gospel, since Christ himself said it is light and
 “ easy, what need was there for the founders of
 “ orders of friars to add other rules to it, and so
 “ make a harder religion to save friars than the re-
 “ ligion of Christ’s apostles by which his disciples
 “ obtained salvation ?”

REPLY OF
 FRIAR
 DAW TO-
 PIAS, AND
 JACK UP-
 LAND’S RE-
 JOINER.

These questions of Jack Upland are put simply, and in a form to be easily understood by minds not accustomed to abstruse reasoning. His opponent, Daw Topias the friar, shows far less temper, and an inclination to browbeat rather than to convince or persuade. He begins by lamenting the degraded state of society which rendered it necessary to reply to such questions, and he reproaches the Lollards in rather abusive language, alleging that Jack Upland’s questions were ignorant and foolish, and proclaiming his readiness to answer them, although himself only a “ lewd ” or uneducated friar. It was, in fact, an attempt on the part of the Romish clergy to encounter the reformers in their own popular field. Daw Topias denies that the friars were other than liege subjects to the king ; and asserts that they professed obedience to the bishops, though not in the same degree as the secular priests, inasmuch as holy church had given them exemption. Jack Upland, who repays the friar with language as rude as his own, replies that their non-allegiance to the crown—meaning thereby disobedience to the laws of the realm—was notorious ; for when a friar lay under the charge of any crime or vice, his prior took him out of the hands of justice, without the king’s authority, and thus, however guilty, he escaped punishment. “ Oft,” says he, “ ye seduce men’s wives, “ and are put in the stocks, but your captains, or “ superiors, lay claim to you and ask no leave of “ kings.” In reply to the charge of laziness brought against the friars, Daw alleges that each class of society had its particular province, and that, as in a

Disloyalty
 and lazy-
 ness of the
 friars.

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man's body, the hands were made to work for the support of the head and the feet and the eyes, so the common people were made by God to labour for holy church and the aristocracy. To this it is answered, that St. Paul and the apostles gained their living by the labour of their hands, and that yet at the same time they performed the duties of the ministry much better than the clergy of modern times, and hated above all things such "bold begging" as was practised by the friars. "You accuse us," says the popular advocate of the old religious system, "of being confounders of prelates and lords . . . but give us any examples of prelates or lords thus confounded. But since that wicked worm named Wycliffe began to sow the seed of schism in the earth, sorrow and ruin have made their appearance everywhere, and are bringing disgrace equally upon lordship and prelacy." On the question of selling the sacraments by simony, the friar endeavours cunningly to throw this charge upon the parish priests, alleging that the only sacrament the friars had to dispense was the absolution of sins; and in retaliation for the charge of interfering unduly in families, he accuses the Wycliffites of seeking to make converts of women, with an evident intimation of something further, which is not declared openly. We know how many women embraced the opinions of the Wycliffites, and suffered martyrdom for maintaining them. In reply, the advocate of the reformation repeats the charge of incontinence against the friars, and offers to forfeit a hundred pounds if the friars can fix a similar charge on any member of the sect of Lollards. Daw justifies the splendour of the ecclesiastical buildings by the example of Solomon's temple, and passes on to a long string of more abuse of the reformers, who, he says, were the plagues sent upon earth by the "blastes" of the seven angels in the Revelations. "The third

Attacks upon Wycliffe.

Splendid buildings of the friars.

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“ angel sent down a star from heaven, fiercely burning as a brand, it was called wormwood ; this truly was Wycliffe your master ; he shone brightly in appearance at his beginning, but by his false doctrines afterwards he created much trouble, and by his rash presumption fell from the church . . . The heretics Maximinus and Manichæus never caused more mischief.” This attack on Wycliffe roused the indignation of the reformer, who replies : “ I wonder, Daw, thou darest thus to lie on so great a clerk, who was known well in his time by rich and poor as a vertuous man, but thou, as blind as Bayard, barkest at the moon, like an old miller’s dog when he begins to doat. But I know well that thy barking, however loud thou liest, will not diminish this saint, who lived and taught so truthfully.” After several pages of general abuse, the apologist of the friars returns to the questions of the reformer. He justifies the number and diversity of the religious orders by alleging the various orders of angels in heaven, and he proceeds to give an explanation of the former, which was certainly not calculated to satisfy one of the reformers. His own order, he says, was that of Christ, who taught obedience, chastity, and poverty. “Nay,” is the reply, “ there is hardly an individual in thy order who can boast of possessing these three virtues, in regard to which ye rather follow Antichrist than our Lord Jesus. As to chastity of body, ye break it continually ; and ye have no chastity of soul, for ye forsake Christ your spouse, and are become apostates from his church. In respect to true poverty, ye are the most covetous men in the world, for what with simony, and with begging, and with selling absolutions, you plunder both great and small.” Daw alleges further, that Christ ordained two manners of life, the one con-

Wycliffe
defended.Vices of
the friars.

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templative, the other active, to the former of which the monks belonged, while the latter was represented by the friars. He represents their begging as the collecting of alms, and refuses to tell what they themselves gave to the poor, on the plea that charity should be exercised in secret. He defends the richness of the cloth worn by the friars, and explains the different parts of the costume symbolically, retaliating upon his opponent by sneering at the Lollards for affecting to dress in plain grey, which, he pretends, was intended to imply simplicity, while the wearers were ravenous wolves in Christ's fold. Others of the peculiar observances of the friars are explained in much the same manner, or defended in general terms, mixed with a large amount of abusive language addressed to the Lollards; to which his opponent replies with not much more temper, and utters a Prophecy of the downfall of the friars and monastic orders, not unlike that which has been so often remarked in the older poem of Piers Ploughman; "and yet," he says, "the time shall come when Josiah shall reign, and make an end of such fiends, and restore Christ's rule."¹

The friars were celebrated for the splendour of their conventual buildings, and this circumstance furnished a never-failing ground of attack to the reformers. It is one to which both the advocate and the opponent recur; and the former finds a rather singular reply to the charge of lavishing money on these great

¹ The passage in Piers Ploughman is as follows :—

" Ac ther shal come a kyng,
 " and confesse yow religiouses,
 " and bete yow as the Bible
 " telleth
 " for brekyng of youre rule ;
 " and amende monyals,
 " monkes and chanons,

" and puten to his penaunce
 " ad pristinum statum ire.

" And thanne shal the abbot of
 " Abyngdone,
 " and al his issue for evere,
 " have a knok of a kyng,
 " and incurable the wounde."

Piers Ploughman, p. 292.

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edifices instead of expending it in charity to the poor. "Jack," he says, "is not a man better than a rude beast? Yet you"—of course, addressing him in his assumed character of the uplandman or ploughman—"make a shed for your sheep, and a stable for your horse; and meanwhile there is many a man who has no roof over him, but the open air only is his house, and the beasts stand covered. Why dost thou not house the poor man as well as thy beasts?" The reformer finds a ready answer to this "monkey's argument," as he calls it, by which, he says, it might be proved that "he that drinks a quart of wine, must needs drink a gallon. But I grudge no reasonable house; and, though you speak scornfully of it, I have a sheep-house, for which I have better warrant in God's law than you have for your Cain's castle. I thank God, I built it with honestly gotten goods; but you built yours with the produce of begging, contention, and robbery." It is curious enough that the friar here—for there can be no doubt that it was the *bonâ fide* composition of one of the order who chose to encounter the popular preacher on his own ground—not only uses arguments which are in general very easily demolished, but he loses few occasions of displaying a feeling of spiteful hostility, which is known from other sources to have existed, towards other orders of the Romish clergy. In an earlier part of his writing, when accused of selling the sacraments, he attempts to throw this charge upon the parish priests; and now, in reply to the charge of farming out the country in districts to the limitors, he asserts that this was not done by the regular friars, but suggests that it was probably done by the pardoners, and the friars of some less regular orders. The clergy claimed a general exemption from secular taxes, and, when reproached with the example of Christ, who caused his disciples

The splendid buildings defended.

Hostility of the friars to the parish priests.

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to pay the tribute to the emperor, our Daw Topias pretends that the Saviour did not do this as a duty, but merely as a matter of policy, that it might not be made a charge against him in his trial before Pilate. At length we come to the grand charge of kidnapping the children of people of property in order to bring them up in their order, with a view, of course, to future profit. The existence of this practice is notorious, for it was a subject of complaint not only with the Lollards, but with the commons assembled in parliament, who proposed an act forbidding the reception into the orders of friars of any men under twenty-one years of age; but the king, ruled by his fear of the clergy, gave only a partial assent; and it was enacted that in future no boy under the age of fourteen should be received into an order. Daw Topias, therefore, does not attempt to deny the fact, but he justifies it in rather a singular manner by the example of Christ. "Thou accusest us," he says, "of felony, for stealing children to draw them to our sects. I hold it no theft to draw people towards God, unless you call Christ a thief, who did the same, saying to the rich man (Matt. xix. 21): 'Go and sell thy goods, and give them to the poor, if thou wilt be perfect; and afterwards follow me, and be my disciple.' And, in the same gospel, see what he saith also (Luke xiv. 26): 'Whoso forsaketh not his father and his mother, his son and his daughter, his sister and his brother, his land and his tenements, and himself also, he is not worthy to be my follower.' And again he said to his twelve chosen (John xv. 16): 'Behold, from the world I have chosen you all, that ye go and bear fruit, and your fruit may remain.' And thus to plunder the world, and spoil it of its subjects, it is no robbery, but theft approved by Christ." In regard to the keeping of prisons by the clergy, Daw Topias argues that they

Kidnap-
ping of
children.Defended
by the
friars.

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have the same right to have prisons as the secular authorities. For, he says, if we take the Gospel literally, neither emperor nor king would have the right to imprison or put to death, but only to reprimand offenders, and then set them at liberty; whereby murderers, robbers, and all kinds of malefactors would go unpunished. The pope, the archbishop of Canterbury, and the bishops in general had, he says, their prisons, with the king's permission; and it would be a bold thing to pretend that this was contrary to God's law. But his opponent replies that the two cases were very different, that the sentences and punishments of the bishops were arbitrary and unjust, and generally directed against the innocent; whereas the king caused the law to be executed by judges who were bound to administer justice with impartiality, "as he did now " lately, when he hanged you traitors." Some friars had been hanged for treason in the course of the year 1401.

Right of
the clergy
to keep
prisons and
hold courts.

The remainder of this very curious poem is chiefly occupied with a defence of the various means by which the friars obtained money, and of the use they made of it. Daw Topias justifies the style of preaching of the friars, and the character of their sermons, which had become a subject of ridicule to the reformers, by urging that the means are justified by the end; and that if the people were taught the right faith, it mattered not how they were instructed in it. On the other hand, he accuses the Wycliffites of having conspired to destroy Christ's church and turn it to idolatry; and adds that he considers it more "wholesome" to pursue a heretic to prison, or to the fire, than even to consecrate a church. In answer to the charge of selling the sacraments, he pretends that the friars administered them freely, and that they also received freely the offerings of those who partook in them, and argues that there was no more simony