which he had taken on receiving the crown. By the tem­poral nobility, and the popular representatives, it was far­ther determined, that should the pontiff commence his threatened process against the monarch of England, as his vassal, the strength of the nation should be instantly call­ed to the king’s aid.”@@1 But the most gross and scandalous usurpations will always find a sufficient number of defend­ers, when the usurpers have the power of bestowing a suf­ficient number of rewards. The claims of the pope were maintained by some nameless monk, who on this subject published a tract, in which he called upon Wycliffe to re­fute his arguments. In this appeal to him by name, we discover an obvious proof that his character had already become very conspicuous; and although it was apparently the writer’s intention to do him an injury rather than an honour, he did not decline the challenge which had thus been given. He published a work in which he endeavour­ed to circumscribe the arrogant claims of the church, and to fix the legitimate extent of civil authority : he main­tained the right of the king and his parliament to refuse the tribute claimed by the court of Rome, to subject all ecclesiastics to the secular jurisdiction in all civil cases, and even to alienate the property of the church. Some of his opinions are so much at variance with the doctrines of the canon law, that he had evidently made no inconsiderable progress in his retrograde motions from the popish stand­ard of orthodoxy.

The question respecting the wardenship was finally de­cided in the year 1372, when the king confirmed the sen­tence of the pope. Wycliffe now found other employment in the university. Having taken the degree of D. D., says Lewis, he “ publickly professed divinity, and read lectures in it; which he did with very great applause, having such an authority in the schools, that whatever he said was re­ceived as an oracle. In these lectures he frequently took notice of the corruptions of the begging friars, which at first he did in a soft and gentle manner, till finding that his detecting their abuses was what was acceptable to his hearers, he proceeded to deal more plainly and openly with them.” It is more than probable that the influence which he exercised over his own age, is in some degree to be ascribed to the circumstance of his occupying a theologi­cal chair in this university, which about that period was frequented by a great multitude of students. The in­vention of printing had not yet afforded the means of dis­seminating knowledge with great facility, and with great rapidity : books, which could only be multiplied by the slow process of transcription, were necessarily sold at a high price; and the number of individuals capable of read­ing them was surprisingly small. But the voice of the public teacher was raised with living energy ; and his opi­nions, inculcated with learning and fervour, could not fail to influence those who in their turn were to become public teachers.

In the year 1374, he was employed in an embassy to the pope, Gregory the Eleventh, whose residence was at Avig­non. The first person named in the commission is the bishop of Bangor, and the second is Dr Wycliffe. Their mission had a reference to one of the flagrant abuses of that period, the papal reservation of benefices in the Eng­lish church. The ecclesiastical revenues, to a very great amount, were appropriated in this manner, and in many instances were most unworthily bestowed upon foreigners who were entirely unacquainted with the language of the country, and who were sometimes of too tender an age to be intrusted with the cure of souls. Against this branch of pontifical usurpation, the statute of provisors had been enacted in the year 1350. The embassy was not received

at Avignon, but at Bruges ; and with most of the pontiffs it would have been an act of wisdom to keep all strangers at a distance from their ordinary place of residence, which was too commonly the fountain-head of all iniquity. John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, had at the same period repaired to Bruges on another diplomatic mission ; nor is it impro­bable that Wycliffe may thus have had a favourable oppor­tunity of recommending himself to his powerful protection. The duke, as Dr Vaughan has remarked, is “ the only son of Edward the Third, whose name is connected with the religion of that period, and who is known as the patron of Chaucer and Wycliffe.” It is not certain that the latter returned to England before the year 1376 ; but in the mean time he received different marks of the royal favour. He had formerly been nominated one of the king’s chaplains. In the month of November 1370, the king presented him to the prebend of Aust, in the collegiate church of West­bury, in the diocese of Worcester, and about the same pe­riod to the rectory of Lutterworth in Leicestershire, the presentation to this benefice having devolved upon the crown, in consequence of the minority of the patron, Lord Ferrars.

Wycliffe had now risen to high distinction, and if his views had been directed to the ordinary objects of a mere church­man’s ambition, it is probable that he might have obtained much higher preferment. Many individuals of the middle classes were gradually added to the number of his converts ; nor was the duke of Lancaster the only man of rank and influence who regarded his person and doctrines with a favourable eye. But his proceedings must for a long time have excited the watchful jealousy of those who enjoyed the principal emoluments of the church, and were suspi­cious of all spiritual innovations, lest they might eventually lead to some encroachment on their own temporalities ; for it has been remarked in every age, that those well-beneficed clergymen who, by the general tenor of their conduct, indi­cate the most perfect indifference as to the vital interests of religion, are yet the most loud and vehement in proclaim­ing the danger to which their “ excellent establishment” must be exposed by the slightest change or concession. Being accused of heresy, he was summoned to appear be­fore the convocation, which commenced its sittings in the month of February 1377, and in which Courtenay, bishop of London, made the most conspicuous figure. This pre­late was son to the earl of Devonshire, by a grand-daughter of Edward the First, and added the pride of royal descent to the arrogance of priestly elevation. Wycliffe made lus appearance at St Paul’s on the 19th of the same month, and, to the no small dissatisfaction of the bishop and his partisans, was accompanied by the duke of Lancaster, and by Lord Percy, earl-marshal of England. So great was the concourse of people, that it was not without consider­able difficulty that the marshal could procure him an ave­nue to the presence of his judges, Archbishop Sudbury, and other prelates, who were assembled in our Lady’s chapel, behind the high altar. “ Dr Wicliffe, according to custom, stood before the commissioners, as one cited to ap­pear there to hear what things they had to lay to his charge ; but the earl-marshal, out of tenderness for Dr Wicliffe, and having but little regard to a court which owed all its authority to a foreign power, bid him sit down, telling him he had many things to answer to, and therefore had need of a soft seat to rest him upon during so tedious an atten­dance. The bishop of London, hearing that, answered, , he should not sit there ;’ for, says he, ‘ it is neither ac­cording to law nor reason, that he who was cited here to answer before his ordinary, should sit downe during the time of his answer adding, ‘ that if he could have guessed

@@@, Vaughan's Life and Opinions of John de Wycliffe, D. D., vol. i. p. 280, second edition. Lond. 1831, 2 vole. 8vo. See the Edinburgh Review, vol. li. p. 221.