

THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

NO. 20.—APRIL, 1892.

I. THE QUESTION OF INSPIRATION IN ITS BEARING ON THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE.

HOWEVER Christian men may differ respecting the nature and extent of inspiration, they are all agreed in regard to its importance. In the estimate of all it is looked upon as presenting the gravest question the church has ever encountered. Nor is this estimate of its importance to be wondered at when we consider the relation which this question sustains to all the doctrines of revelation. There is no question respecting the being and attributes of God, the mode of the divine subsistence in three persons, the origin and original state of man, the fall and the state into which it brought mankind, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, the atonement and intercession of Christ, the office of the Holy Spirit, the nature and prerogatives of the church and her unity as the one body of Christ, the doom and destiny of the finally impenitent—there is not one of these questions whose solution does not depend absolutely upon the testimony of the Bible. Within the sacred volume, and there alone, have we any reliable information on any of these subjects.

It must, therefore, be manifest that all questions in regard to the trustworthiness of the sacred record are questions in regard to the very foundation of Christianity. When a passage from this record is adduced in support of a particular view on any of these subjects, the question arises, of necessity, on what ground is it brought into court, and why should it have any weight in determining the issue? As the ultimate authority on

V. JOHN WYCLIF.

“The Holy Scripture is the faultless, most true, most perfect, and most holy law of God, which it is the duty of all men to learn, to know, to defend and to observe.”—*John Wyclif*.

THERE are a few men whose lives are an epitome of their age. Not those who merely reflect the thought or action of their times, such as a Medici, a Sydney, a Voltaire, an Addison, a Wellington or a Jefferson. For they won the applause of men because they did best what many were doing well. They sum up, indeed, the conscious life of the era, while they leave out of sight the deep silent influences, often at deadly odds with the cherished ideals of the day, which work beneath the surface of society. Consequently they exercised a far greater influence on their own generation than on posterity, so that we are sometimes at a loss to explain their influence over their contemporaries. Nor yet do I mean those strange, striking characters who have again and again burst upon the world, men of titanic mould, who have sought to shape the world by mere strength of arm; men of prophetic gaze, who have seen the splendor of a far future day and tried to hurry forward a laggard world to realize its glories. Men who have accomplished little; who have broken and been broken; marvellous in gifts, out of temper with their times, magnificent anachronisms. Among such men were Savonarola, and Frederick II. of Germany, whom all men called *Stupor mundi*, but none ever dreamed of calling great. It is a far higher type than either of these to which I refer, one which by unerring instinct grasps not merely the conditions of the time, but its tendencies and its needs; which lives the life of the day, but boldly leads the way to the new life of the future. History is forever playing the same dramas—now tragedy, now comedy, now a mock-heroic melodrama, now a broad farce,—with only changes in the stage setting and the actors. These great characters she is forever casting in new rôles, so that they appear to be, not the peculiar property of their times, but the common possession of the ages. They are

naturalized citizens in every land. Were we to meet them on our streets to-day we should recognize in each one of them the highest traits of the man, the truest instincts of the gentleman. We should find nothing uncouth about them, nothing antiquated, but feeling the spell which ever emanates from the truly great, we should obey their behests as those of natural right leaders of men.

A catalogue of such men might be difficult to make. Yet many of them are sufficiently conspicuous, and, happily for the world, no great cause has ever wanted, not merely some great mind of this type, but many, constantly appearing and approaching the work from one or another position; reasserting old truths, restating old propositions, re-proving old problems. They stand at this and that turning point in history testifying to the universality and the perpetuity of truth, and revealing over and over again its simplicity and sufficiency. In times of storm and stress we sometimes fear that the truth of God shall want some one sufficiently versed in human wisdom to bring home the wisdom of God to those who either want a shepherd, or whose shepherds have neglected the care of their flocks. It is profitable now and again to remind ourselves how many and how noble are the men who from time to time have proved that the wisdom of God is the highest wisdom of man; aye, more, is so much higher than the mere wisdom of man as to supply, not only sufficient wisdom for man's daily need, but also to awaken a deep yearning in the heart never to be satisfied in this world. A yearning of this sort, however incompatible with the self-satisfaction of human self-love and conceit, is wholly compatible with that thirst for knowledge which is content to be progressive rather than final. In this day, when the truth of God as revealed in his blessed Word is being assailed on so many sides, it is of interest to turn back the pages of history and contemplate the quiet grandeur of one and another of those who have been the proponents and the defenders of his Word. Scarcely any one of these is more worthy of our attention than John Wyclif.

By profession a secular priest, Wyclif became step by step the most learned of English schoolmen; a bold and unfaltering patriot,

the most fearless of reformers, the most aggressive of protestants, the founder of English prose literature, but something far more and far better than these, by God's grace the first to translate the Holy Scriptures as a whole into a modern tongue, the protomartyr of the cause of a free and infallible Bible for Englishmen. When he was born we do not know, nor certainly the place. It was probably the little north-country town of Wyeclyff. The year of his birth may with some certainty be put in the third decade of the fourteenth century. About the age of fifteen, poor, of obscure parentage, without power or influence, he entered the University of Oxford as a candidate for clerical orders. For many years he lived unnoted and unknown except within the precincts of the university; so much so that we cannot with any certainty mark the steps of his career until he became master of Balliol College, in the year 1351. While his name appears not infrequently in the records of the university prior to this time, it is impossible to disentangle the careers of the, certainly, two, perhaps three or even more, persons of the same name then in residence. Yet he must have been a by no means undistinguished person at the time of his election to the mastership of this great college. And from that time forth he was one of the most conspicuous figures in the little world of the university.

He came upon the scene at a time of change. England was undergoing a transition from feudality to nationality; from local exclusiveness to commercial expansion; from absolutism to comparative liberty. It is the first stage of these changes and characterized rather by the decay of the older ideas and institutions than by the appearance of the new. Wyclif was one of the few actors upon the scene whose life belonged rather to the new era that was dawning, than to the old era that was dying in brilliant colors against the evening sky.

In one sense the most conspicuous transition of all was less in the external world than in the domain of thought, less in the facts of life than in the point of view from which they were regarded. The first centuries of the Middle Ages were dominated by splendid dreams. The greatest of these were the ideals of a world empire and a world church, which took form in the Holy Roman Em-

pire and the Roman Catholic Church. The former being temporal had not substance enough to endure from age to age, though Charlmagne, Otto the Great, Frederick Barbarossa, and many other powerful rulers, built their lives into its tenuous fabric. The church, as its empire was over the mind rather than over the body, was more real, more successful in its efforts and more permanent in its results. But the church of Gregory VII. and of Innocent III. fell short of the ideal church almost as far as did the empire of Otto III., *Mirabilis Mundi*—as a wondering world hailed him—of that golden dream which deluded his brilliant mind and lured him to his end. Out of these dreams sprang others only less strange and unreal than themselves, as the dream of the permanent recovery of Jerusalem, and all the strange phantasmagoria which that dream brought upon the world stage, of which the most marvellous is the spectacle of ten thousand little children, helpless and unprotected, setting out to achieve the conquest which the armies of Europe had failed to accomplish. Not even the pathway of these little ones, stained with the blood of their innocent feet, marked through all its miles and miles with here and there a little heap of bleached bones, served to awaken the world to a sense of reality. But the crusades wore out the world, and the reaction from them did more for Christendom than they. Exhausted by vain and misdirected efforts, princes and people alike sank into a lethargy from which the entreaties of popes, who still sought to awaken religious enthusiasm, failed to rouse them to crusading fervor. And as they fought for life in wasted lands and ruined homes, they found a spirit of change abroad and began to see things in their true light. The great empire of the world now appears as but a figment of men's brains. The emperor was seen to be in himself the feeblest ruler in Europe, and kings but shadowy overlords to powerful feudatories, while the people were ground under the hard hand of the rude and reckless baronage; but, worst of all, the great world church, the glory of the world, was seen in all its nakedness, fallen from its high estate, the instrument of the pride, the lust of power, the love of luxury and the greed of gain, of a corrupt prelacy. Italy had long recognized this. The outside world was now slowly

awakening to a realization of the scandal to Christendom. That cold, cruel, unscrupulous prince whom history knows as Philip "The Handsome," of France, was destined in the opening years of the fourteenth century to dispel many a shade of the lingering night, and first of all he directed himself to this papal pretence.

By craft and cunning, by pitting the legalism of the civilians against the casuistry of the canonists, by using French gold more freely where Italian gold was freely used, finally by opposing to the perfidious prelates of Italy the unscrupulous bishops of France, he broke his way into the close circle of Italian clerical politics, secured the election of a French ecclesiastic to the papacy, hailed his minion to Lyons for consecration, and then held him a prisoner in France. It was an evil omen. A bishop of Rome consecrated in Gaulish Lyons! And the omen was surely fulfilled. From that day forth Clement and his successors in the papacy went not forth from France for seventy long years. Seventy long years, the splendid church, which at the close of the thirteenth century proudly claimed to dictate to the world not only in things spiritual, but in things temporal, bowed the neck beneath the foot of princes of an effete race, who sat upon a tottering throne. Boniface VIII. had blinded men's eyes by the pomp with which he paraded the streets of the Eternal City, preceded by the drawn swords, symbols of the temporal and spiritual powers which the pope affected to wield as the vicar of God on earth. Now amid the extravagance and debauchery of his court at Avignon, Clement V. sat, a spectacle which smote all Christendom with sorrow and shame. But though the vileness of the papal court was stripped naked before every eye, the pope relaxed no whit of his pretensions, no jot of his claims. His throng of impure simoniacal followers held the richest of preferments in every land. In England, French Cardinals held the most desirable livings; the English priests held what they could get. Among others the deaneries of York, Salisbury and Lincoln, the diaconates of Canterbury, Durham and Suffolk, the prebendaryships of Thane, Massingdon and York, were in such hands. Indeed, the revenue which the papal court drew annually out of England was no less than five

times that which passed into the royal exchequer. And yet the local clergy, especially the mendicant orders, had become so corrupt, that despite this terrible display they did not revolt. The exhibition of the rottenness of the church gave Philip an opportunity to destroy the Knights Templar, one of the blackest deeds upon the pages of history.

What Philip did to the Templars every prince in Europe was constantly doing to the Jews, and no man spoke a word of protest. But this was different. The order blazed up in one last burst of heroic constancy. Broken upon the wheel, torn upon the rack, lacerated by all the devices of inquisitorial ingenuity, surrounded by the blazing fagots of the stake, they with one accord declared the purity of their order and the innocence of their lives. The whole world wept for them. The vicious captive pope could neither be coaxed, cajoled, bribed or forced into complicity in their destruction. Stripped of their wealth, shorn of their glory, the world which had envied their state and feared their power, in the day of their adversity honored their fortitude and bewailed their suffering. But it was in vain. The day of public opinion had not dawned. What the king commanded and his greater vassals sanctioned no man might gainsay.

There is a power which not even feudal nobles could long sin against without reaping their reward. And men said that God visited the sin upon Philip and his house. Certain it is, that he died shortly afterwards from the effects of a trivial accident aggravated by anxiety of mind. He was still young, his handsome face had lost none of its elegance of line, none of its freshness of color; his heart had not softened one whit from its stony hardness. He left three tall sons to inherit his wealth and power, and dreamed that the ancient line of Hugh Capet should continue long in France. One by one they died, leaving no heirs; in fourteen years there was not one of his house left to sit upon his throne. The sins of the father were visited upon the sons.

What little of glory the age was to know was to be derived from England. The two Edwards, the king and the Black Prince, laid France at the feet of the English throne without substantially advancing the cause for which they fought. For though they won

battles, though they beat and baffled the French at every turn, they lacked the generalship to reap the fruits of victory. The result of it all was that France became almost a desolation, even in times of truce the prey of roving bands of ruthless soldiery. And England, flooded with ill-gotten wealth, was plunged into a gay and reckless luxury such as the Island realm had never known before. Out of the midst of the court circle rings for us the song of gay "Dan" Chaucer the precursor of modern English poetry. What a picture he paints of the wild debauchery and hollow skepticism of the court, while with acute insight and pitiless irony he penetrates the glittering bubble and shows how empty it was! Underneath all this there was suffering scarcely less than that of France, and it is pictured for us with painful plainness in another poem of the time, the strange oldfashioned poem of the "Vision of Piers Plowman," by William Longland. Longland was a London cleric, silent, moody, pinched with poverty, embittered by a sense of the wrongs of the laboring classes, and generally regarded as a madman. The picture which he paints stands out in strange contrast with the bright canvasses of Chaucer; it is a picture infinitely sad. But he has found the key-note of the future. The burden of Chaucer is "eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow ye die." The burden of Longland is, "work, work for self, work for the world." The inexpressible sadness of his song lies upon the heart. Its solemn warnings thrill and move the soul, but it seems as if there was, there could be, no hope, as if the work it inculcated was to be but a distraction from the pain of thought.

As if the hand of man were not heavy enough upon the world, the hand of God suddenly fell upon the devoted lands. Unheralded, coming whence no man knows to this day, going whither no one will ever know, the most fearful pestilence broke out and spread with terrible rapidity over all Europe. Beginning at Constantinople, it swept Cyprus, Sicily, Italy, brooding with especial malignity over the fair city of Florence, and marking for one of its victims that lovely Laura of whom Petrarch sang; sweeping on it nearly depopulated the cities of Provence, leaving in the city of Avignon, where Pope Clement VI. held the most extravagant and dissolute court in Europe, scarcely a fourth of its gay and godless

citizens. In France, its victims were more than half of the people. In England, London was reduced to a feeble five and thirty thousand. Yarmouth, from ten thousand sank to three. Norwich, the first city in the north, out of perhaps 100,000 inhabitants lost "57,374 persons, besides religious and beggars." In Bristol, the first city in the west, "the living were scarce able to bury the dead and the grass grew several inches high in the Broad street and High street." In the abbey of Croxton, in Lincolnshire, all the inmates died except the abbot and the prior. Of the fifteen hundred parish clergy in the diocese of Norwich, a thousand died.

Upon such a world rose the star of John Wyclif, the one benignant influence of the age.

Wyclif had been deeply touched by the sufferings of the people at the time of the first ravages of the Black Death, and took up his pen. But his time had not come. He sank back into his place in the University, pushed on with his scholastic studies, now and again in that sphere coming in conflict with the pope and papal methods, but in this he only walked in the way of his predecessors. Says John Richard Green:

"Of all the scholastic doctors those of England had been throughout the keenest and most daring in philosophic speculation; a reckless audacity and love of novelty were the common note of Bacon, Duns Scotus and Ockham, as against the sober and more disciplined learning of the Parisian schoolmen, Albert and Aquinas. But the decay of the University of Paris during the English wars had transferred the intellectual supremacy to Oxford, and in Oxford Wyclif stood without a rival. To his predecessor Bradwardine he owed . . . the tendency to a predestinarian Augustinianism which formed the groundwork of his later theological revolt. His debt to Ockham revealed itself in his earliest efforts at church reform. Undismayed by the thunder and excommunications of the church, Ockham had not shrunk . . . from attacking the foundations of papal supremacy or from asserting the rights of the civil power. The spare, emaciated form of Wyclif, weakened by study and by asceticism, hardly promised a reformer who would carry on the stormy work of Ockham: but within this frail form lay a temper quick and restless, an immense energy, an immovable conviction, an unconquerable pride. The personal charm which ever accompanies real greatness had only deepened the influence he derived from the spotless purity of his life. As yet indeed even Wyclif himself can hardly have suspected the immense range of his intellectual power. It was only the struggle that lay before him which revealed in the dry and subtle schoolman the founder of our later English prose, a master of popular invective, of irony, of persuasion, a dexterous politician, an audacious partisan, the organizer of a religious order, the unsparing assailant of abuses, the boldest and most indefatigable of controversialists, the first reformer who dared when deserted and alone to

question and deny the creed of the Christendom around him, to break through the traditions of the past, and with his last breath to assert the freedom of religious thought against the dogmas of the papacy."

Following this strong national tendency, and drawing his arguments both from them and from such continental schoolmen as Marsiglio of Padua, Wyclif early showed himself on the side of the freedom of England from papal pretensions. He declared that the English people needed no grant to their king from the pope, saying: "All we need for a true dominion over the realm is to keep ourselves from mortal sin, and give our wealth rightly to the poor, and so hold our kingdom, as hitherto, immediately from Christ." Time-servers in the University marked his tone, and whispered it about that his heart was set upon a bishopric. So lightly do evil natures impute base motives to others whose lofty natures are above their comprehensions. It was not long before the pope made a direct demand of tribute money as a feudal acknowledgment. At once Wyclif stepped to the front in the role of the patriot priest. It was a point which Edward III. never dreamed of yielding, and which the parliament treated with scorn, but there was urgent need of a champion, learned in the doctrine of the schoolmen, and the casuistry of the canonists to justify before the world and the people of the realm the position which king and parliament so boldly assumed. By the breadth of his learning and vigor of his dialectic, Wyclif utterly refuted and forever set at rest the papal pretensions, and not content with the temporary discussion of the matter, he summed up the theory of government which he had so vigorously expounded in the treatise, "On the Divine Dominion." It may be said that there was nothing new in the treatise, that the truths were as old as the gospel, as plain as the most patent principles and precepts of daily life. In just these particulars lay its power. Happy had it been for more than one of the great emperors, if in their struggle with the papacy, there had been some one to thus clearly formulate the doctrine of individual responsibility of rulers and of the coördinate, rather than the dependent, relation of the temporal power to the spiritual; never was it so powerfully enforced, since it had been preached to Rome by the swords of Charlemagne and Otto.

The court recognized the value of their champion, and for a time the quiet priest basked in the sunshine of courtly favor. It was a brief period, short and sweet as a golden day in mid October. So long as the struggle was between England and a French pope his services were in active demand. In 1372, he withstood to his face a papal nuncio, showing his personal perfidy and falseness to solemn oaths, and at last in a sudden burst of righteous indignation declared the pope was not infallible, but an erring sinner. Two years latter, he was sent in almost princely state to Bruges in Flanders, as second in a solemn embassy of which the bishop of Bangor was the leader, to meet the legates of Gregory XI., and to seek for some adjustment of differences between pope and king. The embassy accomplished nothing, but the experiences of the mission deepened the conviction in Wyclif's heart of the need of resistance to popish abuses. He set out as one likely to develop in the line of the great national prelates, such as Stygand and Grossetete had been before him, such as Woolsey and Cranmer were to be after him. He returned with the seal of the reformer set upon his heart. The needs of the nation, while never forgotten, were henceforth to be subordinate to his zeal for the necessities of the world. A few years before, he was willing to admit that the pope was the vicar of God on earth; now he brands him with superb courage as "Antichrist."

The attitude which Wyclif occupied with respect to the court might have blinded the eyes of a less sturdy man to the evils of the day by the opportunities of preferment held out to him, or distracted a less far-seeing man from the real cause of the reckless life which the court fostered and encouraged. But while Wyclif gave the heartiest coöperation to all the national measures of the court, he scrupulously guarded himself against any compromising relations with it. He stoutly condemned its excesses, but seeing with unfailing clearness of vision, that the corruption of church and clergy was the centre of evil, he reserved his strength for constant and telling assaults upon them. There was no use of lopping off here a branch and there a branch; the axe must be laid to the root of the tree. He valued and made the best possible use of the support he received from the court, especially from John of

Gaunt, but it had little effect upon his conduct. With fearless eloquence charge after charge, supported by incontrovertible evidence, flowed from his pen. He boldly proclaimed them from the pulpits of Oxford and London, and his disciples spread them throughout England. The archbishop of Canterbury cited him to appear before the bishop of London, on the 13th of February, 1377. On the appointed day Wyclif appeared, accompanied by the Duke of Lancaster, Lord Harry Percy, the Earl Marshall, and their retainers. The bishop became enraged, hot words followed with Percy and the Duke of Lancaster, and the trial broke up in a riot. The only result of a definite character was that Wyclif was left free and allowed to go his way.

But it was only because a surer blow was being prepared. Fifty grounds of heresy were extracted from his writings and sent to Avignon to form the basis of a charge of false doctrine. Of these, nineteen were chosen as grounds for trial, and five bulls were issued by the pope, addressed to the king, the prince, the bishop of London and the universities, directing them to summon him to answer the charges. The king died before the bulls reached England, the University of Oxford "treated it with contempt"; the Synod of London was broken into by the citizens of London, who were Wyclif's ardent supporters; then the queen regent (for the old king being now dead, the young son of the Black Prince sat upon the throne as Richard II.) forbade further proceedings. In a short time the pope died, and hostilities were suspended.

The death of Gregory XI. precipitated the Great Schism. The Babylonian captivity had been scandal enough; now the world beheld for forty years the spectacle of two popes, one in Rome, the other in Avignon, each claiming to be the infallible representative of the Prince of Peace, levelling anathemas at each other and hailing each other as Antichrist. Every faithful heart in Christendom was oppressed with shame. What wonder that the heart of Wyclif burned within him, and that with tongue and pen he poured forth a ceaseless impeachment against "these wolves in sheep's clothing who were rending the flock of Christ."

Wyclif, the representative national churchman, won the king

and court; Wyclif, the reformer, won parliament and the people; Wyclif, the tender-hearted preacher, the friend of the suffering, the poor and the oppressed, had taken firm hold on the humble classes; they alone were to be unfalteringly his friends in his next great step. He had gone too far to stop. By one bold stroke he now cut himself adrift from pope and prince, and by one sweeping declaration placed himself alone and unsupported upon the broad platform of the truth, and by that act became the first protestant.

The mediæval church had built up its supremacy upon the foundation of the doctrine of transubstantiation. That doctrine affirmed that the act of consecration of the elements used in the celebration of the Lord's Supper transformed the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of the Lord. The church claimed that the truth of this doctrine had been proved by countless miracles; that the bread had shed blood before the eyes of the doubting; had even assumed the form of the Christ-child. The act of consecration thus came to be counted in itself a miracle; "it was by his exclusive right to the performance of the miracle which was wrought in the mass, that the lowliest priest was raised high above princes." In 1381 Wyclif formally denied this doctrine and defied the prelates to refute his position. For the first time he stood utterly alone. The university, hitherto his faithful supporter, at once condemned him. John of Gaunt bade him be silent. Calmly in the midst of the general uproar he replied: "I believe that in the end the truth will conquer."

But how should men judge of the truth who knew it not? We know not when Wyclif first entertained the idea of translating the Bible into English, but certain it is, as soon as the denial of the doctrine of transubstantiation was promulgated the work was pushed eagerly forward. Hitherto only the Psalms had been translated into English. Now Wyclif was determined to give the Word of God to Englishmen in their own tongue. He retired to his little parish church of Lutterworth, and, aided by a little band of faithful men, the good work went grandly on.

Never till now were his full powers revealed. "A flood of denunciation" was poured forth upon him in the form of countless

pamphlets, which he answered with amazing rapidity and splendid ability. Not a moment did he falter. Inspired by his courage, his friends rallied to his support. In the years of his preparation he had formed an order of preachers known as "Poor Priests," who were trained in the truth of the gospel, a love of the suffering poor, and a bitter hostility to the corruptions of church and clergy. They now went forth, and "tower and town and hamlet" heard the Wyclifite doctrines. The seculars in the university rallied to his aid, turned out the regulars, and the university once more gave him its support.

An attempt was made to throw the blame of the peasants' revolt under Wat Tyler, which occurred in the autumn of 1381, upon Wyclif, but in vain. It was plain that his teachings drifted that way, for that revolt was, in its inception, a revolt of the unjustly oppressed against a cruel condition of life. The Wyclifite doctrine, like all true protestantism, spoke plainly of liberty, preaching liberty to the captive, and the breaking of chains to them that are bound. It was one with the spirit which animated the French on the plains of Ivry, the Germans on the field of Lützen, the English on Marston Moor, and our ancestors at Bunker's Hill. It had nothing in common with the wild excesses of the Jacquerie, or the fury of that "rabble, devil-born," which one hundred years ago besmirched the fair name of liberty in France.

Like fire amid a field of stubble the new doctrines spread. They could have had no better introduction to the people than the hostility of the church and court. In vain the name of "Lollards," or "idle babblers," was given to the Wyclifite preachers. The people gladly welcomed them and the truth they preached. In a few years their enemies declared that every second man one met was a Lollard. The regular clergy prepared once more to stamp out this heresy. Courtenay, now primate, summoned a council at Blackfriars. An earthquake shook the building as they were about to begin their sittings. The prelates were terrified, and would fain have left Wyclif alone. But the resolute archbishop declared that "the expulsion of ill humors from the earth was of good omen for the expulsion of ill humors from the church," and pressed on the condemnation of Wyclif. Then Courtenay

turned upon Oxford. At first the university was defiant, and St. Frideswide's church—now the cathedral—heard the truth of the teachings of Wyclif iterated and reiterated. After a fierce struggle, the church succeeded, with the aid of the crown, in suppressing the Lollards in the university; "but," says Green, "with the death of religious freedom all trace of intellectual life suddenly disappears. The century which follows the triumphs of Courtenay is the most barren in its annals, nor was the sleep of the university broken till the advent of the new learning restored to it some of the life and liberty which the primate had so roughly trodden out."

But the grand old man still lived on. From his retirement came pamphlet after pamphlet with ceaseless rapidity, and at length a bold petition to king and parliament asking leave to publicly defend his teaching. Summoned to convocation at Oxford, he perplexed and confused his opponents with his subtle scholastic logic, and totally baffled their efforts to gain from him any statement which they might make a subject of condemnation. It is a singular spectacle. To-day he pleads in plain, simple, rough-hewn English with the people; to-morrow he puzzles, with the subtlety of his scholasticism, the most learned doctors. To-day he fearlessly faces the combined camps of prince, pope and prelate; to-morrow he proclaims the gospel of the Prince of Peace to the unlearned in his little parish church. To-day he fulminates terrible accusations against the powerful; to-morrow dwells with simple eloquence upon the needs of the people, who were indeed sheep without a shepherd. And all the while with steady persistence the great work of translating the Scriptures went on. The moral effect upon his contemporaries must have been tremendous. Even the bold Courtenay halted and hesitated. At last it was determined that Wyclif should be summoned to Rome. The English prelates were doubtless glad enough to put the problem in other hands. When the summons reached him, he answered with calm irony: "I am always glad to explain my faith to any one; above all, to the bishop of Rome." But age and the strain of unremitting labor were telling on him. The splendid vigor of the noontide of his life was now softened into a mellow golden light in the sunset of his days. All the gentleness and tenderness

of his disposition appear. He sends forth a little volume intended to "teach simple men and women the way to heaven." But most of all, he gives himself to his translation of the Bible, and at length sees it completed—the capstone of the noble structure it had been his life-work to rear.

Merely from a literary point of view it was a great work. Upon it our modern English prose was built. "Were the great reformer to be restored to life to-day," says an authority upon our language, "he would probably be able to read our common Bible from beginning to end without having to ask the explanation of a single passage." Indeed, not merely the language, but the diction and the phrasing of our ordinary version of the Scriptures is the fruit of the labor of Wyclif. From such a point of view he stands side by side with his contemporary, Geoffrey Chaucer.

But it was not from the literary standpoint that Wyclif viewed this work. He declared that: "Christian men should stand to the death for the maintenance of Christ's gospel, and the true understanding thereof, obtained by holy life and great study, and not set their faith nor trust in sinful prelates and their clerks." And again that: "The Holy Scripture is the faultless, most true, most perfect, and most holy law of God, which it is the duty of all men to learn, to know, to defend, and to observe." It was to him the bread of heaven, which, when denied to men, caused them to die for soul hunger, tenfold more bitter and more deadly than bodily hunger. How well he succeeded let an enemy testify: "This Master John Wyclif hath translated the Bible out of Latin into English, and thus laid it more open to the laity and to women that can read, than it had formerly been to the most learned of the clergy; and in this way the gospel pearl is cast abroad and trodden under foot of swine."

Learned as he was, Wyclif had no doubt that God, who had spoken through Galilean fishermen, could be understood by simple-minded Englishmen. He, too, was more eager to discover what the gospels contained and to lay them open in their perfection to men's minds, than curious to inquire in what way the truth of God could be made of none effect. Even to this day those scoffed at "women that can read" discern more than some of the "most learned of the clergy."

It was the impulse which did not die away, but lay in the hearts of the people, ready to be awakened and show itself, when, more than a hundred years later, the reformation came with overwhelming power.

Meantime Lollardy was to continue more or less active in England. Erasmus long years after complained that it was to be hoped that Lollardy, or the persecution of it, would cease before winter, as the frequent burning of these simple preachers raised the price of fire-wood. It was to spread to Europe and to make converts of Huss and of Jerome of Prague, and bring them to be burned at the stake by the edict of the Council of Constance; to go on, indeed, filling the whole world of Christendom. Luther, to his own surprise, woke up one day to the consciousness that he was a Hussite and a Wyclifite. Calvin and Knox were distinctly so.

Indeed Wyclif, following St. Paul and St. Augustine, anticipated all the advances of sixteenth-century reform. Not less eager in the cause of the highest learning than Erasmus, he mingled the sweetness of character of More with the fervor of Latimer and the invective of Knox; assailing the abuses of the papacy before Savonarola, the scandal of indulgences before Luther, the doctrine of transubstantiation before Zwingli; he anticipated Tyn-dal's zeal for an open Bible, and Calvin's predestinarianism; while, like all the great reformers, he based the hope of salvation on faith alone. He even anticipated the eighteenth-century work of the Wesleys, and sent forth scores of "simple preachers," who spoke the truth of God with simplicity and power.

In the last days of 1384 he was stricken with paralysis and died peacefully in the rectory of Lutterworth, on the 31st day of December. Many had prophesied that he should die a violent death, but he died peacefully, in the midst of friends, with the serene consciousness that his earthly work was done and that it had been done nobly and well. His body was laid to rest in the little churchyard.

If you should go to the pleasant little town of Lutterworth to-day you would find the old church of St. Mary's, an interesting specimen of the Gothic architecture of the thirteenth century, standing

much as it stood in Wyclif's time upon the banks of the little river Swift. There are still to be seen the little pulpit of carved oak from which he preached, the massive oaken table on which he wrote, the great arm-chair in which he died, and upon the vestry wall hangs his portrait. It is easy among these relics of the man to conjure up some idea of how he seemed when he walked upon the earth. If you turn thence to the churchyard you will seek long enough before you find the grave in which he was laid peacefully to rest. Forty long years his body rested there, then that church which battled with him in vain in life ordered in the Council of Constance that his poor mortal remains should be torn from their grave, burned to ashes, and the ashes thrown into the river. The act was duly performed and as quaint old Fuller remarks: "Thus this brook hath conveyed his ashes into Avon, Avon into Severn, Severn into the narrow seas, they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wyclif are the emblems of his doctrine, which now is dispersed all the world over."

Whether we judge men by their personal strength and manliness, or by the results of their lives, Wyclif is unquestionably the greatest man of his time. There is but one other who can for a moment be compared with him, Edward the Black Prince, one of England's national heroes. The Black Prince deserves the place he holds in the affections of the people. He was a brave man, an able statesman and a true patriot. But if the picture of the gallant lad of sixteen years making a stand for St. George and Merry England on the field of Cressy, with but a handful of English yeomen, is a sight to send English blood pulsing through the veins, how sombre is its companion piece. If men of English blood may look with pride on the field where, in the golden twilight of that autumnal day, the flower of French chivalry went down before the cloth-yard shafts sped by English yew, how shall they regard the blazing homes of Limoges, where not a living soul, man, woman, or prattling child, but shared a common death in the indiscriminate massacre of that unhappy day. There are other pages, if not so dark yet dark enough, to warn us that the lights and shadows of this life are evenly balanced.

And if we turn from the question of personal character to results, the life of the prince, like that of his royal father, is singu-

larly barren. Ere he died, France had regained nearly all the territory which she had lost, and much which England had held for more than two hundred years. And in England their joint legacy to posterity was an hundred years of anarchy.

On the other hand, we have seen how calm was the courage of Wyclif; how great was his quiet strength; how noble his strenuous life. It has been well said of him by a German historian that "he held the mind and spirit of his countrymen in his hand, and seemed to be the hero in whom the nation had become incarnate." And Dean Hook says: "John Wyclif may be justly accounted one of the greatest men that our country has produced. He is one of the very few who have left the impress of their minds not only on their age, but on all time."

It would be well if more in this generation bore the impress of that serene and reverent mind. It would be well if the following utterances of his were stamped upon all current thought. They are a few of the well cut gems, which are skilfully set in the rich gold of his works.

"We believe the authors of the Old Testament to have spoken out of an inner inspiration, coming from God's mouth. Not simply out of an inspiration of faith or the sanctity of their life, nor as authorized by the church."

"No Christian man is to admit that Holy Scripture be in any way false, nor is he who understands Holy Scripture wrongly or badly to allow that it is false. For its falsity does not lie in the Holy Scripture, but in him who falsely interprets it."

"Then they say that no man can know what is the gospel but by the approving and confirming of the church; but true men say that to their understanding this is full of falsehood. For Christian men have certainty of belief by the gracious gift of Jesus Christ, that the truth taught by Christ and his apostles is the gospel, though all the clerks of Antichrist require men to believe the contrary."

"God's law is the foundation for every catholic opinion, the example and mirror for to examine, and to extinguish every error or heretical pravity. Therefore, even a slight error in this matter might bring about the death of the church."