

THE HISTORY  
OF  
PROTESTANTISM

BY THE  
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WITH FIVE HUNDRED AND FIFTY ILLUSTRATIONS  
*BY THE BEST ARTISTS*

“PROTESTANTISM, THE SACRED CAUSE OF GOD’S LIGHT AND TRUTH AGAINST THE  
DEVIL’S FALSITY AND DARKNESS.”—*Carlyle*

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE TRANSLATION OF THE SCRIPTURES, OR THE ENGLISH BIBLE.

Peril of Wicliffe—Death of Gregory XI.—Death of Edward III.—Consequent Safety of Wicliffe—Schism in the Papal Chair—Division in Christendom—Which is the True Pope?—A Papal Thunderstorm—Wicliffe Retires to Lutterworth—His Views still Enlarging—Supreme Authority of Scripture—Sickness, and Interview with the Friars—Resolves to Translate the Bible—Early Translations—Bede, &c.—Wicliffe's Translation—Its Beauty—The Day of the Reformation has fairly Broken—Transcription and Publication—Impression produced—Right to Read the Bible—Denounced by the Priests—Defended by Wicliffe—Transformation accomplished on England.

WHILE Wicliffe was struggling to break first of all his own fetters, and next the fetters of an enslaved nation, God was working in the high places of the earth for his preservation. Every day the number of his enemies increased. The shield of John of Gaunt no longer covered his head. Soon not a friend would there be by his side, and he would be left naked and defenceless to the rage of his foes. But He who said to the patriarch of old, "Fear not, I am thy shield," protected his own chosen champion. Wicliffe had offered inexpiable affront to Gregory; he had plucked England as a prey out of his very teeth; he had driven away his tax gatherers, who continually hovered like a flock of cormorants round the land. But not content with clipping the talons of the Papacy and checking her rapacity in time to come, he was even now meditating how he might make her reckon for the past, and disgorge the wealth which by so many and so questionable means she had already devoured, and send forth abbot and monk as poor as were the apostles and first preachers. This was not to be borne. For a hundredth part of this, how many men had ere this done expiation in the fire! No wonder that Wicliffe was marked out as the man to be struck down. Three bulls did Gregory dispatch with this object. The university, the hierarchy, the king: on all were the Pontifical commands laid to arrest and imprison the heretic—the short road to the stake. Wicliffe was as good as dead; so doubtless was it thought at Avignon.

Death was about to strike, but it was on Gregory XI. that the blow was destined to fall. Instead of a stake at Oxford, there was a bier at the Vatican. The Pope a little while before had returned to Rome, so terminating the "Babylonish captivity but he had returned only to die (1378). But death struck a second time: there was a bier at Westminster as well as at the Vatican. When Courtenay, Bishop of London, was about to summon Wicliffe to his bar, Edward III., whose senility the bishop was likely to take advantage of against the Reformer, died also, and John of Gaunt became regent of the kingdom. So now, when the Papal toils were closing around Wicliffe, death suddenly stiffened the hand that had woven them, and the commission of delegates which the now defunct Gregory had appointed to try, and which he had commanded

to condemn the Reformer, was dissolved.<sup>1</sup>

In another way did the death of the Pope give a breathing-time to the Reformer and the young Reformation of England. On the 7th of April, 1378, the cardinals assembled in the Quirinal to elect a successor to Gregory. The majority of the sacred college being Frenchmen, the Roman populace, fearing that they would place one of their own nation in the vacant chair, and that the Pontifical court would again retire to Avignon, gathered round the palace where the cardinals were met, and with loud tumult and terrible threats demanded a Roman for their Pope. Not a cardinal should leave the hall alive, so did the rioters threaten, unless their request was complied with. An Italian, the Archbishop of Bari, was chosen; the mob was soothed, and instead of stoning the cardinals it saluted them with "Vivas." But the new Pope was austere, penurious, tyrannical, and selfish; the cardinals soon became disgusted, and escaping from Rome they met and chose a Frenchman—Robert, Bishop of Geneva—for the tiara, declaring the former election null on the plea that the choice had been made under compulsion. Thus was created the famous schism in the Papal chair which for a full half-century divided and scandalised the Papal world.

Christendom now saw, with feelings bordering on affright, two Popes in the chair of Peter. Which was the true vicar, and which carried the key that alone could open and shut the gates of Paradise? This became the question of the age, and a most momentous question it was to men who believed that their eternal salvation hung upon its solution. Consciences were troubled; council was divided against council; bishop battled with bishop; and kings and governments were compelled to take part in the quarrel. Germany and England, and some of the smaller States in the centre of Europe, sided with the first-elected Pope, who took possession of the Vatican under the title of Urban VI. Spain, France, and Scotland espoused the cause of the second, who installed himself at Avignon under the name of Clement VII. Thus, as the first dawn of the Gospel day was breaking on Christendom, God clave the Papal head in twain, and divided the Papal world.<sup>2</sup>

But for this schism Wicliffe, to all human appearance, would have been struck down, and his work in England stamped out. But now the Popes found other work than to pursue heresy. Fast and furious from Rome to Avignon, and from Avignon back again to Rome, flew the Papal bolts. Far above the humble head of the Lutterworth rector flashed these lightnings and rolled these thunders. While this storm was raging Wicliffe retired to his country charge, glad doubtless to escape for a little while from the attacks of his enemies, and to solace himself in the bosom of his loving flock. He was not idle however.

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<sup>1</sup> Walsingham, *Hist. of Eng.*, p. 205.

<sup>2</sup> Mosheim, cent. 14, part ii., chap. 2, sec. 14. Hume, Rich. II., Miscell. Trans.

While the Popes were hurling curses at each other, and shedding torrents of blood—for by this time they had drawn the sword in support of their rival claims to be Christ’s vicar—while flagrant scandals and hideous corruptions were ravaging the Church, and frightful crimes and disorders were distracting the State (for it would take “another Iliad,”<sup>3</sup> as Fox says, to narrate all the miseries and woes that afflicted the world during this schism), Wicliffe was sowing by the peaceful waters of the Avon, and in the rural homesteads of Lutterworth, that Divine seed which yields righteousness and peace in this world, and eternal life in that which is to come.

It was now that the Reformer opened the second part of his great career. Hitherto his efforts had been mainly directed to breaking the political fetters in which the Papacy had bound his countrymen. But stronger fetters held fast their souls. These his countrymen needed more to have rent, though perhaps they galled them less, and to this higher object the Reformer now exclusively devoted what of life and strength remained to him. In this instance, too, his own fuller emancipation preceded that of his countrymen. The “schism,” with the scandals and crimes that flowed from it, helped to reveal to him yet more clearly the true character of the Papacy. He published a tract *On the Schism of the Popes*, in which he appealed to the nation whether those men who were denouncing each other as the Antichrist were not, in this case, speaking the truth, and whether the present was not an opportunity given them by Providence for grasping those political weapons which He had wrested from the hands of the hierarchy, and using them in the destruction of those oppressive and iniquitous laws and customs under which England had so long groaned. “The fiend,” he said, “no longer reigns in one but in two priests, that men may the more easily, in Christ’s name, overcome them both.”<sup>4</sup>

We trace from this time a rapid advance in the views of the Reformer. It was now that he published his work *On the Truth and Meaning of Scripture*. In this work he maintains “the supreme authority of Scripture,” “the right of private judgment,” and that “Christ’s law sufficeth by itself to rule Christ’s Church.” This was to discrown the Pope, and to raze the foundations of his kingdom. Here he drops the first hint of his purpose to translate the Bible into the English vernacular—a work which was to be the crown of his labours.<sup>5</sup>

Wicliffe was now getting old, but the Reformer was worn out rather by the harassing attacks of his foes, and his incessant and ever-growing labours, than with the weight of years, for he was not yet sixty. He fell sick. With unbound-

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<sup>3</sup> Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. ii., p. 567.

<sup>4</sup> MS. of *The Church and her Governance*, Bib. Reg. 18, B. ix.; *apud* Vaughan, *Life of Wicliffe*, vol. ii., p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> *De Sensu et Veritate Scripturas*. A copy of this work was in the possession of Fox the martyrologist. (Fox, vol. i.) Two copies of it are known to be still extant, one in the Bodleian Library and the other in the library of Trinity College, Dublin. (Vaughan, *Life*, vol. ii., p. 7 )

ed joy the friars heard that their great enemy was dying. Of course he was overwhelmed with horror and remorse for the evil he had done them, and they would hasten to his bedside and receive the expression of his penitence and sorrow. In a trice a little crowd of shaven crowns assembled round the couch of the sick man—delegates from the four orders of friars. “They began fair,” wishing him “health and restoration from his distemper;” but speedily changing their tone, they exhorted him, as one on the brink of the grave, to make full confession, and express his unfeigned grief for the injuries he had inflicted on their order. Wicliffe lay silent till they should have made an end, then, making his servant raise him a little on his pillow, and fixing his keen eyes upon them, he said with a loud voice, “I shall not die, but live and declare the evil deeds of the friars.” The monks rushed in astonishment and confusion from the chamber.<sup>6</sup>

As Wicliffe had foretold so it came to pass. His sickness left him, and he rose from his bed to do the most daring of his impieties as his enemies accounted it, the most glorious of his services as the friends of humanity will ever esteem it. The work of which so very different estimates have been formed, was that of giving the Bible to the people of England in their own tongue. True, there were already copies of the Word of God in England, but they were in a language the commonalty did not understand, and so the revelation of God to man was as completely hidden from the people as if God had never spoken.

To this ignorance of the will of God, Wicliffe traced the manifold evils that afflicted the kingdom. “I will fill England with light,” he might have said, “and the ghostly terrors inspired by the priests, and the bondage in which they keep the people through their superstitious fears, will flee away as do the phantoms of the night when the sun rises. I will re-open the appointed channel of holy influence between earth and the skies, and the face of the world will be renewed.” It was a sublime thought.

Till the seventh century we meet with no attempt to give the Bible to the people of England in their mother-tongue. Cædmon, an Anglo-Saxon monk, was the first to give the English people a taste of what the Bible contained. We cannot call his performance a translation. Caedmon appears to have possessed a poetic genius, and deeming the opening incidents of inspired history well fitted for the drama, he wove them into a poem, which, beginning with the Creation, ran on through the scenes of patriarchal times, the miracles of the Exodus, the journey through the desert, till it terminated at the gates of Palestine and the entrance of the tribes into the Promised Land. Such a book was not of much account as an instruction in the will of God and the way of Life. Others followed with attempts at paraphrasing rather than translating portions

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<sup>6</sup> Lewis, *Life of Wiclif* p. 82. Lewis places this occurrence in the beginning of the year 1379.

of the Word of God, among whom were Alfric and Alfred the Great. The former epitomised several of the books of the Old Testament; the latter in the ninth century summoned a body of learned men to translate the Scriptures, but scarcely was the task begun when the great prince died, and the work was stopped.

The attempt of Bede in the eighth century deserves our notice. He is said to have translated into the Anglo-Saxon tongue the Gospel of John. He was seized with a fatal illness after beginning, but he vehemently longed to finish before breathing forth his spirit. He toiled at his task day by day, although the malady continued, and his strength sank lower and lower. His life and his work were destined to end together. At length the morning of that day dawned which the venerable man felt would be his last on earth. There remained yet one chapter to be translated. He summoned the amanuensis to his bed-side. "Take your pen," said Bede, who felt that every minute was precious—"quick, take your pen and write." The amanuensis read verse by verse from the Vulgate, which, rendered into Anglo-Saxon by Bede, was taken down by the swift pen of the writer. As they pursued their joint labour, they were interrupted by the entrance of some officials, who came to make arrangements to which the assent of the dying man was required. This over, the loving scribe was again at his task. "Dear master," said he, "there is yet one verse." "Be quick," said Bede. It was read in Latin, repeated in Anglo-Saxon, and put down in writing. "It is finished," said the amanuensis in a tone of exultation. "Thou hast truly said it is finished," responded in soft and grateful accents the dying man. Then gently raising his hands he said, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost," and expired.<sup>7</sup>

From the reign of Alfred in the ninth century till the age of Wicliffe there was no attempt—if we except that of Richard Roll, Hermit of Hampole, in the same century with Wicliffe—to give a literal translation of any portion of the Bible.<sup>8</sup> And even if the versions of which we have spoken had been worthier and more complete, they did not serve the end their authors sought. They were rarely brought beyond the precincts of the cell, or they were locked up as curi-

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<sup>7</sup> Cuthbert, *Vita Ven. Bedæ*.

<sup>8</sup> Sir Thomas More believed that there existed in MS. an earlier translation of the Scriptures into English than Wicliffe's. Thomas James, first librarian of the Bodleian Library, thought that he had seen an older MS. Bible in English than the time of Wicliffe. Thomas Wharton, editor of the works of Archbishop Ussher, thought he was able to show who the writer of these supposed pre- Wicliffite translations was—viz., John von Trevisa, priest in Cornwall. Wharton afterwards saw cause to change his opinion, and was convinced that the MS. which Sir Thomas More and Thomas James had seen was nothing else than copies of the translation of Wicliffe made by his disciples. If an older translation of the Bible had existed there must have been some certain traces of it, and the Wicliffites would not have failed to bring it up in their own justification. They knew nothing of an older translation. (See Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif*, vol. i., p. 431.)

osities in the library of some nobleman at whose expense copies had been made. They did not come into the hands of the people.

Wicliffe's idea was to give the whole Bible in the vernacular to the people of England, so that every man in the realm might read in the tongue wherein he was born the wonderful works of God. No one in England had thought of such a thing before. As one who turns away from the sun to guide his steps by the light of a taper, so did the men of those days turn to tradition, to the scholastic philosophy, to Papal infallibility; but the more they followed these guides, the farther they strayed from the true path. God was in the world; the Divine Light was in the pavilion of the Word, but no one thought of drawing aside the curtain and letting that light shine upon the path of men. This was the achievement Wicliffe now set himself to do. If he could accomplish this he would do more to place the liberties of England on an immutable foundation, and to raise his country to greatness, than would a hundred brilliant victories.

He had not, however, many years in which to do his great work. There remained only the portion of a decade of broken health. But his intellectual vigour was unimpaired, his experience and graces were at their ripest. What had the whole of his past life been but a preparation for what was to be the glorious task of his evening? He was a good Latin scholar. He set himself down in his quiet Rectory of Lutterworth. He opened the Vulgate Scriptures, that book which all his life he had studied, and portions of which he had already translated. The world around him was shaken with convulsions; two Popes were hurling their anathemas at one another. Wicliffe pursued his sublime work undisturbed by the roar of the tempest. Day by day he did his self-appointed task. As verse after verse was rendered into the English tongue, the Reformer had the consolation of thinking that another ray had been shot into the darkness which brooded over his native land, that another bolt had been forged to rend the shackles which bound the souls of his countrymen. In four years from beginning his task, the Reformer had completed it. The message of Heaven was now in the speech of England. The dawn of the Reformation had fairly broken.

Wicliffe had assistance in his great work. The whole of the New Testament was translated by himself; but Dr. Nicholas de Hereford, of Oxford, is supposed to have been the translator of the Old Testament, which, however, was partly revised by Wicliffe. This version is remarkably truthful and spirited. The antique Saxon gives a dramatic air to some passages.<sup>9</sup> Wicliffe's version of the Bible rendered other services than the religious one, though that was pre-eminent and paramount. It powerfully contributed to form the English

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<sup>9</sup> "Thus, instead of 'Paul the servant of Jesus Christ,' Wicliffe's version gives, 'Paul, the knave of Jesus Christ.' 'For a mightier than I cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to loose,' his version reads, 'For a stalworthier than I cometh after me, the strings of whose chaucers I am not worthy to unlouse.'" (M'Crie, *Annals of English Presbytery*, p. 41.)

tongue, in the way of perfecting its structure and enlarging its vocabulary. The sublimity and purity of the doctrines reacted on the language into which they were rendered, communicating to it a simplicity, a beauty, a pathos, a precision, and a force unknown to it till then. Wicliffe has been called the Father of English Prose, as Chaucer is styled the Father of English Poetry. No man in his day wrote so much as Wicliffe. Writing for the common people, he studied to be simple and clear. He was in earnest, and the enthusiasm of his soul supplied him with direct and forcible terms. He wrote on the highest themes, and his style partook of the elevation of his subject; it is graphic and trenchant, and entirely free from those conceits and puerilities which disfigure the productions of all the other writers of his day. But his version of the Bible surpasses all his other compositions in tenderness, and grace, and dignity.<sup>10</sup> Lechler has well said on this point: "If we compare, however, Wicliffe's Bible, not with his own English writings, but with the other English literature before and after him, a still more important consideration suggests itself. Wicliffe's translation marks in its own way quite as great an epoch in the development of the English language, as Luther's translation does in the history of the German language. Luther's Bible opened the period of the new high German, Wicliffe's Bible stands at the top of the mediaeval English. It is true, Geoffrey Chaucer, the Father of English Poetry, and not Wicliffe, is generally considered as the pioneer of mediaeval English literature. But with much more reason have later philologists assigned that rank to the prose of Wicliffe's Bible. Chaucer has certainly some rare traits—liveliness of description, charming grace of expression, genuine English humour, and masterly power of language—but such qualities address themselves more to men of culture. They are not adapted to be a form of speech for the mass of the people. That which is to propagate a new language must be something on which the weal and woe of mankind depend, which therefore irresistibly seizes upon all, the highest as well as the lowest, and, as Luther says, 'fills the heart.' It must be a moral, religious truth, which, grasped with a new inspiration, finds acceptance and diffusion in a new form of speech. As Luther opened up in Germany a higher development of the Teutonic language, so Wicliffe and his school have become through his Bible the founders of the mediaeval English, in which last lie the fundamental fea-

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<sup>10</sup> "Luther translated the Bible out of the original Greek. Wicliffe, who did not know Greek, translated out of the Latin Vulgate. That the New Testament was translated by himself is tolerably certain. Lechler says that the translation of the Old Testament, in the original handwriting, with erasures and alterations, is in the Bodleian Library; and that there is also there a MS. copy of this translation, with a note saying that it was the work of Dr. Nicholas de Hereford. Both manuscripts break off in the middle of a verse of the Book Baruch, which strengthens the probability that the translation was by Dr. Nicholas, who was suddenly summoned before the Provincial Synod at London, and did not resume his work. The translation itself proves that the work from Baruch onward to the end was by some one else—not improbably Wicliffe himself. (See Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif*, vol. i., p. 448.)



tures of the new English since the sixteenth century.”<sup>11</sup>

The Reformer had done his great work (1382). What an epoch in the history of England! What mattered it when a dungeon or a grave might close over him? He had kindled a light which could never be put out. He had placed in the hands of his countrymen their true Magna Charta. That which the barons at Runnymede had wrested from King John would have been turned to but little account had not this mightier charter come after. Wicliffe could now see the Saxon people, guided by this pillar of fire, marching steadily onward to liberty. It might take one or it might take five centuries to consummate their emancipation; but, with the Bible in their mother-tongue, no power on earth could retain them in thralldom. The doors of the house of their bondage had been flung open.

When the work of *translating* was ended, the nearly as difficult work of *publishing* began. In those days there was no printing-press to multiply copies by the thousand as in our times, and no publishing firm to circulate these thousands over the kingdom. The author himself had to see to all this. The methods of publishing a book in that age were various. The more common way was to plane a copy in the hall of some convent or in the library of some college, where all might come and read, and, if the book pleased, order a copy to be made for their own use; much as, at this day, an artist displays his picture in a hall or gallery, where its merits find admirers and often purchasers. Others set up pulpits at cross-ways, and places of public resort, and read portions of their work in the hearing of the audiences that gathered round them, and those who liked what they heard bought copies for themselves. But Wicliffe did not need to have recourse to any of these expedients. The interest taken in the man and in his work enlisted a hundred expert hands, who, though they toiled to multiply copies, could scarcely supply the many who were eager to buy. Some ordered complete copies to be made for them; others were content with portions; the same copy served several families in many instances, and in a very short time Wicliffe’s English Bible had obtained a wide circulation,<sup>12</sup> and brought a new life into many an English home.

As when the day opens on some weary traveller who, all night long, has been groping his way amid thickets and quagmires, so was it with those of the English people who read the Word of Life now presented to them in their mother-tongue. As they were toiling amid the fatal pitfalls of superstition, or

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<sup>11</sup> Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif*, vol. i., pp. 453, 454. See also Friedrich Koch, *Historische Grammatik der Englischen Sprache*, i., p. 19; 1863.

<sup>12</sup> In 1850 an edition of Wicliffe’s Bible, the first ever printed, issued from the press of Oxford. It is in four octavo volumes, and contains two different texts. The editors, the Rev. Mr. Forshall and Sir Frederick Madden, in preparing it for the press, collated not fewer than 150 manuscript copies, the most of which were transcribed, they had reason to think, within forty years of the first appearance of the translation.

were held fast in the thorny thickets of a sceptical scholasticism, suddenly this great light broke upon them. They rejoiced with an exceeding great joy. They now saw the open path to the Divine Mercy-seat; and putting aside the many mediators whom Rome had commissioned to conduct them to it, but who in reality had hidden it from them, they entered boldly by the one Mediator, and stood in the presence of Him who sitteth upon the Throne.

The hierarchy, when they learned what Wicliffe had done, were struck with consternation. They had comforted themselves with the thought that the movement would die with Wicliffe, and that he had but a few years to live. They now saw that another instrumentality, mightier than even Wicliffe, had entered the field; that another preacher was destined to take his place, when the Reformer's voice should be silent. This preacher they could not bind to a stake and burn. With silent foot he was already traversing the length and breadth of England. When head of princely abbot and lordly prelate reposed on pillow, this preacher, who "did not know sleep with his eye day nor night," was executing his mission, entering the homes and winning the hearts of the people. They raised a great cry. Wicliffe had attacked the Church; he wished to destroy religion itself.

This raised the question of the right of the people to read the Bible. The question was new in England, for the plain reason that till now there had been no Bible to read. And for the same reason there was no law prohibiting the use of the Bible by the people, it being deemed both useless and imprudent to enact a law against an offence it was then impossible to commit. The *Romaunt* version, the vernacular of the south of Europe in the Middle Ages, had been in existence for two centuries, and the Church of Rome had forbidden its use. The English was the first of the modern tongues into which the Word of God was translated, and though this version was to fall under the ban of the Church,<sup>13</sup> as the *Romaunt* had done before it, the hierarchy, taken unawares, were not yet ready with their fulmination, and meanwhile the Word of God spread mightily. The Waters of Life were flowing through the land, and spots of verdure were beginning to beautify the desert of England.

But if not a *legal*, a *moral* interdict was instantly promulgated against the reading of the Bible by the people. Henry de Knighton, Canon of Leicester, uttered a mingled wail of sorrow and denunciation. "Christ," said he, "delivered His Gospel to the clergy and doctors of the Church, that they might ad-

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<sup>13</sup> In 1408, an English council, with Archbishop Arundel at its head, enacted and ordained "that no one henceforth do, by his own authority, translate any text of Holy Scripture into the English tongue, or any other, by way of book or treatise, nor let any such book or treatise now lately composed in the time of John Wicliffe aforesaid, or since, or hereafter to be composed, be read in whole or in part, in public or in private, under pain of the greater excommunication." So far as this council could secure it, not only was the translation of Wicliffe to be taken from them, but the people of England were never, in any coming age, to have a version of the Word of God in their own tongue, or in any living language. (Wilkins, *Concilia*, iii. 317.)

minister to the laity and to weaker persons, according to the state of the times and the wants of men. But this Master John Wicliffe translated it out of Latin into English, and thus laid it more open to the laity, and to women who could read, than it had formerly been to the most learned of the clergy, even to those of them who had the best understanding. And in this way the Gospel pearl is cast abroad, and trodden under foot of swine, and that which was before precious to both clergy and laity is rendered, as it were, common jest to both.”<sup>14</sup>

In short, a great clamour was raised against the Reformer by the priests and their followers, unhappily the bulk of the nation. He was a heretic, a sacrilegious man; he had committed a crime unknown to former ages; he had broken into the temple and stolen the sacred vessels; he had fired the House of God. Such were the terms in which the man was spoken of, who had given to his country the greatest boon England ever received.

Wicliffe had to fight the battle alone. No peer or great man stood by his side. It would seem as if there must come, in the career of all great reformers—and Wicliffe stands in the first rank—a moment when, forsaken of all, and painfully sensible of their isolation, they must display the perfection and sublimity of faith by leaning only on One, even God. Such a moment had come to the Reformer of the fourteenth century. Wicliffe stood alone in the storm. But he was tranquil; he looked his raging foes calmly in the face. He retorted on them the charges they had hurled against himself. You say, said he, that “it is heresy to speak of the Holy Scriptures in English.” You call me a heretic because I have translated the Bible into the common tongue of the people. Do you know whom you blaspheme? Did not the Holy Ghost give the Word of God at first in the mother-tongue of the nations to whom it was addressed? Why do you speak against the Holy Ghost? You say that the Church of God is in danger from this book. How can that be? Is it not from the Bible only that we learn that God has set up such a society as a Church on the earth? Is it not the Bible that gives all her authority to the Church? Is it not from the Bible that we learn who is the Builder and Sovereign of the Church, what are the laws by which she is to be governed, and the rights and privileges of her members? Without the Bible, what charter has the Church to show for all these? It is you who place the Church in jeopardy by hiding the Divine warrant, the missive royal of her King, for the authority she wields and the faith she enjoins.<sup>15</sup>

The circulation of the Scriptures had arrayed the Protestant movement in the panoply of light. Wielding the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, it was marching on, leaving behind it, as the monuments of its prowess,

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<sup>14</sup> Knighton, *De Event. Angliae*; apud X. *Scriptores*, col. 2644. Lewis, *Life of Wicliffe*, chap. 5, p. 83.

<sup>15</sup> See Lewis, *Life of Wicliffe* pp. 86–88.

in many an English homestead, eyes once blind now opened; hearts lately depraved now purified. Majestic as the morning when, descending from the skies, she walks in steps of silent glory over the earth, so was the progress of the Book of God. There was a track of light wherever it had passed in the crowded city, in the lofty baronial hall, in the peasant's humble cot. Though Wicliffe had lived a thousand years, and occupied himself during all of them in preaching, he could not have hoped for the good which he now saw in course of being accomplished by the silent action of the English Bible.