

PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

Vol. XVII.]

TORONTO, JULY 31, 1897.

No. 31.



WYCLIFFE AND LUTTERWORTH CHURCH.

Wycliffe, "The Morning Star of the Reformation."

Died December 31, 1384.

BY W. H. WITHROW, D.D.

Bright "morning star" upon the front of time,
Glad herald of the dawn of glorious day;
Gleams, after age-long waiting thy bright ray,
From mirkest gloom of midnight's deep abyme.
O lambent light of dawn, still higher climb!
Wrapped in that veit of deepest darkness lay
All the glad hopes and joys for which men pray,
Who wait the coming of day's golden prime.
Wycliffe's great gift all other gifts outshone—
The oracles of God in English speech,
The charter of a nation's liberty.
A gift beyond or gem or precious stone,
The book of God, each English child to teach,
And bless the far-off ages yet to be.

JOHN DE WYCLIFFE.

BY EVALENA I. FRYER.

The kind, patient woman who rocked a cradle in the little village of Wycliffe, in Yorkshire, England, about the year 1324, could not know that the sleeping occupant of the swinging cradle would grow up to become one of the foremost men of his times, and so she rocked and nursed and crooned lullabies, and the baby slept and ate and grew, just like all other babies.

The next time we see this baby he has grown to be a man, and is among the students in the scholastic Oxford. While there Wycliffe was a faithful pupil, for besides studying the writings of the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle and the writings of the Church Fathers, like Augustine and Basil and Jerome, he studied civil law and canon law, and he even went to the Bible for knowledge, which was a very unfashionable thing to do in those days, the biblical teachers being called "the bullocks of Abraham."

Wycliffe was nicknamed "The Gospel Doctor."

When our knight was about thirty-two years old he entered on a long struggle with the various orders of friars. These friars pretended to be very poor, and with wallets on their backs went about begging with piteous air, while at the same time they lived in palaces and dressed in costly garments. They used to kidnap children and shut them up in monasteries. When the orders were first organized their idea was to become a body of self-denying and consecrated men, who would go about arousing the people to a better life. At first their influence was very good, but when they became very popular and very powerful, they became also very degenerate.

But there was one man who was not afraid to tell them what he thought of them, and he did his duty so thoroughly and so fearlessly that Rome became alarmed, and at last summoned the Gospel Doctor to appear at St. Paul's Cathedral, London, on the 19th of February, 1377, and answer to the charge of heresy.

The cathedral was crowded, and yet a very little thing scattered the crowd. Lord Percy, who attended Wycliffe, desired him to be seated. But the Bishop of London declared that Wycliffe "should not sit, and that according to law an accused person should stand during the time of his answer." A controversy soon followed, and in the tumult the whole assembly was broken up and the next day was succeeded by a riot. As for Wycliffe, he was dismissed with the injunction to be more careful about his preaching in the future. But public opinion declared in his favour.

"If he is guilty," the people said, "why is he not punished? If he is innocent, why is he ordered to be silent?"

In 1379 Wycliffe was seriously ill. The mendicant friars thought that their opportunity had now come. They went in much state to see him and solemnly tried to make him recant. He ordered his servant to raise him on the pillows, and to the great astonishment of the friars, the apparently dying man, fixing his eyes on his enemies, said, "I shall not die, but live, and again declare the evil deeds of the friars."

His enemies left him and the great Reformer did live. He was yet to put the finishing touches to his greatest

work—the translating and scattering of the Word of God, that the people might read it in their own tongue. For ten or fifteen years he worked steadily at this task, and at last, in 1380, it was completed. This was a great event in the religious history of England. To us to-day it sounds like odd English. The first verse of the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians reads like this:

"If I speke with tungis of men and of angels, and I have no charite, I am maad as brass sownynge or a cymbal tynklynge."

The work met with a wonderful reception. Citizens, soldiers, the rich and the poor welcomed it with delight. Even Anne, the wife of Richard II., began to read the Gospels. John de Wycliffe had indeed become The Gospel Doctor. It cost a large sum to own a Testament estimated to equal one hundred and fifty dollars of our times.

To carry the Bible into the remotest hamlets was the sole idea of The Gospel Doctor, and for this purpose he sent forth preachers, bidding them,—

"Go and preach; it is the sublimest work, but imitate not the priests whom we see after the sermon sitting in ale-houses or at the gaming table. After your sermon is done, do you visit the sick, the aged, the poor, the blind, the lame."

These "poor priests," as they were called, went about barefoot, staff in hand, and dressed in coarse robes; they lived on alms and were satisfied with the plainest food. Their theme was Christ, and they preached with wonderful eloquence.

Wycliffe continued in his glorious work for many years, until one day, as he stood in the midst of his little flock in the Lutterworth church, administering the communion, he was stricken with paralysis and was carried home to die in two days at the ripe age of sixty years. He was buried beneath the chancel of

Lutterworth church, but thirty years after Rome directed that his body be disinterred and thrown far away from church walls. They took up the body, burned it, and cast the ashes into an adjacent brook.

"The brook," says Fuller, "did carry his ashes into Avon; Avon into Severn; Severn into the narrow seas, and they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wycliffe are the emblems of his doctrine, which now is dispersed all the world over." If Luther and Calvin are the fathers of the Reformation, Wycliffe is its grandfather.

"The Avon to the Severn runs,
The Severn to the sea;
So Wycliffe's ashes shall be borne,
Where'er these waters be."

Or, as the same has been amplified by Wordsworth:

"Wycliffe is disinhumed,
Yea, his dry bones to ashes are consumed,
And flung into the brook that travels near;
Forthwith that ancient voice which streams can hear,
Thus speaks (that voice which walks upon the wind,
Though seldom heard by busy human-kind):
'As thou those ashes, little brook, wilt bear
Into the Avon—Avon to the tide
Of Severn—Severn to the narrow seas—
Into main ocean they this deed accurat
An emblem yields to friends and enemies
How the bold teacher's doctrine, sanctified
By truth, shall spread, throughout the
world dispersed.'"

Playing the light guitar in moonlit gardens at night is pretty apt to bring on the heavy catarrh in the morning.



FIGURE OF WYCLIFFE ON LUTHER MONUMENT AT WORMS.