

## Our Contributors.

### FIELDS OF LABOUR.

BY KNOXIAN.

Some difficulties are common to all fields of labour. Sin is sin, whether you have to fight against it in the metropolitan city, in the prosperous town, in the worn-out, decaying village, in the quiet country district, among the rocks of Manitoba, or on the broad prairies of the North-West. It may take on different forms in different places but it is always sin. The great adversary is essentially the same in British Columbia as in Quebec, in Toronto as in Tamsui. The power by which we are enabled to work for Christ is always and everywhere the same. The same power that helps our missionaries in India to labour, that helps our labourers in China to wait, nerves the arm of the pioneer who works amidst the blizzards of the North-west and cheers the heart of the city missionary in Toronto or Montreal. The aid is always and everywhere equally potent, and comes from the same divine source. The conditions of success are essentially the same in all fields. There can be no permanent success in any field without earnest, persistent, consecrated work. An idler or trifler may make a splurge for a short time and while he is "starring" may seem to eclipse his plodding neighbours, but the result always shows that nothing but faithful earnest toil can tell in the end. Sin is common to all fields, grace helps in all and there is no permanent success to any without honest persevering work. And yet it goes without saying that some fields are much more difficult than others.

Spurgeon's brother—not a very complimentary title for a really able man—made this remark to the students of Knox College in an after-dinner address some years ago: "Gentlemen, you will soon enter upon the real work of the ministry, and I have no doubt each one of you will have the most difficult field of labour in the Church." There was something more than humour in that observation. There are blue days when every minister is liable to think his own field of labour the most difficult. Of the seven hundred ministers in the Presbyterian Church in Canada it is pretty hard to say who has the most difficult field. Perhaps the minister has the most difficult field who has no field at all. His field is the world, in a sense that neither Arnot nor Bruce nor any other commentator ever found in that part of the parable. The probationer's field is wide enough, but like the fields in the North-West it is somewhat cold, and blizzards are more plentiful than bonanzas. Any minister that drives ten or fifteen or probably twenty miles on Sabbath over all kinds of roads in all kinds of weather and preaches three times has a difficult field. To compare his evening service with that of a man who may have spent most of the Sabbath afternoon in resting himself is a piece of thoughtless injustice. Put a stylish city or town minister over that route every Sabbath for a year and by the end of the year his style would be gone—perhaps he would be pretty well gone himself. A dead village with half a dozen churches is always a difficult field unless one's congregation is mainly composed of solid people from the country. A rural district in which the people are taking Horace Greeley's advice and going west is a trying field. Long ago congregations in the eastern part of Ontario suffered by the loss of people who moved to the western part, and now congregations in the West suffer by removals to the still farther West. British Columbia is the only place safe from that kind of trouble. A locality that has been burnt over a dozen times by bogus revivals is one of the most difficult and hopeless of fields. Condensation is a good thing in sermons, but when people have learned to condense twelve months' praying into one month they do not make a good congregation. The most discouraging creature in human form is a man who has "got religion" half a dozen times and lost it every time. He knows his religion was a sham and he concludes that all religion is of the same kind. A community mainly composed of people of that character is not so hopeful a field of labour as Tamsui even with the French cannon thundering at its gates. Any field of labour in which a minister has little or no help is a hard one. It is utterly impossible to attain success without good men to aid in spiritual work, and good business men to attend to secular matters in a business way.

Speaking from a merely human standpoint the

easiest fields are those in which the population is constantly increasing. There is something stimulating to both minister and congregation in the influx of new people. Next to the grace of God, nothing heals old congregational sores so fast as new blood. A growing population makes an easy field; a declining population is always a hard one. Hence the man who barely holds a congregation together in a community that is constantly falling off in its numbers and correspondingly declining in spirit may be doing much better work than one who adds hundreds to his communion roll where the population is going up by thousands and the people are crowding in upon him. One lesson that Christian people need very much to learn—ministers perhaps more than others—is to judge every worker by his opportunities. The tendency to worship success of a statistical kind is just as strong in the Church as in the world. Few men have enough grace and common sense to believe that a ragged missionary plodding across the prairies in Manitoba may be doing quite as good work as a fashionable preacher in Montreal or New York.

### IMPRESSIONS FROM A STUDY OF WICLIF'S CAREER.

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR M'LAREN, D.D.

There are few men who have done such a work as John Wiclif, "Morning Star of the Reformation," of whose early career so little is certainly known. The date of his birth and the college in which he studied are still matters in dispute, and his family is almost a blank. All we can say is that he was born probably about the year 1320, and that he studied most likely at Balliol College, Oxford, of which he afterwards became Master. The fact that he seems to have sprung from a family which at no period of its history appears to have shown any leaning towards the views embraced by its most distinguished scion, may, in part account for the obscurity which rests upon his early life. His student career can only be guessed at from the fact that in due time he was recognized as the foremost man in his university for varied learning and mental power; and stood unsurpassed among the eminent men of the century which he adorned. And even at a later period when the position to which he had risen made him an object of keen interest to others, it is not easy to trace the steps which led him gradually to adopt his distinctive views, or even in some instances to determine definitely the precise shade of opinion which he embraced. It is certainly not creditable to the scholarship, or to the Protestantism of England that five centuries have passed since his death, and we are still without a complete edition of his works, large portions of which are still buried in manuscript form in the libraries of Europe. Until such an edition of his works is accessible, it will always be necessary to speak of certain points with a measure of reserve. But the labours of recent English writers, the publication of a portion of Wiclif's Latin works, and the painstaking researches of Lechler, have cast much light upon the life and sentiments of the Evangelical Doctor, and have made it possible to speak on many topics with greater confidence.

A cursory study of what is now known of Wiclif has made certain impressions upon me which may be suitably recalled on this occasion.

1. No one can familiarize himself with Wiclif without being impressed with the fact that he was a man of great power. As we examine his life and his works the conviction grows upon us that it is no ordinary personality with which we have been brought into contact. He stands out before us as a man of rare gifts, high character, and strong resolve. The imperial intellect, indomitable energy and lofty aims which characterize John Wiclif would have made him a man of power in any age. He had not the strong social and emotional nature which, a century and a-half later, gave to Martin Luther such a sway over the masses of his countrymen. But in clear, penetrating intellect, and ability to grasp successfully divine truth, we need not hesitate to rank him in every way the peer of the German Reformer. Dr. Hanna remarks, "That the whole circle of questions concerning the canon of Scripture, the authority of Scripture, and the right of private interpretation of Scripture, with which the later controversies of the Reformation have made us so familiar, received their first treatment in this country at Wiclif's hands. In conducting this fundamental controversy, Wiclif had to lay all the

foundations with his own unaided hand. And it is no small praise to render to his work to say, it was even as he laid them, line for line, and stone for stone, that they were relaid by the master builders of the Reformation." (Wiclif and the Huguenots, p. 116.) The Oxford doctor and the Wittemberg monk had each the gifts which fitted him for his predestined work. To Wiclif it was given to sow the seed and to Luther to reap the harvest. There are diversities of gifts but the same Lord. The high personal character of Wiclif was no small element in the power which he exerted. When we remember the manner in which Romish writers have sought to vilify nearly all the Reformers, it is something to discover that they have scarcely made a serious attempt to malign the character of Wiclif. Indeed, some of the most striking testimonies to his unblemished reputation and commanding powers, have come from his bitter enemies. (Ibid. Burrows, p. 31, 34.) It is evident, however, that his power was not due merely to intellectual ability and pure morality, his heart was manifestly touched by the power of divine grace. There are no records by which we can trace the stages of his spiritual life, but if a tree can be known by its fruit, we cannot fail to recognize John Wiclif as, in the highest sense, and in growing measure, a man of God. He was early led to study the Scriptures, and as he fed upon the truth, he gathered spiritual strength for his work. Such a life as he led could have been sustained only by a deep conviction of the truth, a firm trust in God, and an earnest love to Christ, and a burning desire for the salvation of men.

We find combined in him what is seen only in few great men, the keen intellect of the most acute schoolman, the practical sagacity of the modern Anglo-Saxon, and an unsurpassed power for work. It was a combination that would have made his influence felt in any age or country.

2. It is evident that Wiclif was also specially prepared for his work. He had not only natural endowments of a high order, but the training which he underwent did much to fit him for the niche which he was designed to fill. While we cannot profess an unqualified admiration for the scholastic philosophy, it was, in the hands of a man like Wiclif, very far from the empty thing it is sometimes represented. One thing is certain, no one in that age could expect to be a leader in the learned world who was not thoroughly master of it. In this department Wiclif was pre-eminent. As a scholastic and dialectician he was unsurpassed in the century. His thinking ran naturally in the same grooves as the best trained intellects of his age. His careful study of the foundations of all governments civil and ecclesiastical, and his intimate acquaintance with canon law gave him a special aptitude for dealing with the class of questions which then agitated the nation, and which first called him forth as an antagonist to the claims of the Papacy. Wiclif evidently drank in the patriotic spirit of the nation, and his hearty sympathy with the people in their aspirations, was itself an important preparation for his work. The brilliant military triumphs of Edward III. and the Black Prince, made Englishmen conscious of their strength, and kindled their patriotic feelings into a flame. It was under these influences that Wiclif grew up to manhood, and in after life he never allowed the patriot to be sunk in the mere ecclesiastic. And no one can fail to see in his early and intimate acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures and the solemn religious impressions made upon his heart by the ravages of the terrible pestilence which in his day desolated the world, vitally important elements in his training for his great work.

3. Another impression equally distinct which is made by a study of the Reformer's career is that the world was prepared for his work. Great men usually express as well as modify the sentiments of the age in which they live. A leader of men must consciously or unconsciously be largely a follower. He must drink in the spirit of the age he is to guide. If he is too far in advance of his generation, he lacks the points of contact with his fellows necessary to make his words understood and felt. It is evident that the nation and the age were prepared when Wiclif appeared on the stage.

The Crusades had shortly before run their course, but not without doing much to quicken the mental activity of Europe. In their original design they proved a failure. The holy places remained in the hands of the infidel. But the purpose of God in them proved no failure. They were a grand agency in