

uous. In the learning of his times, such as it was, he became a proficient. Twenty years he passed at Merton College, Oxford, first as a scholar and next as a fellow. In 1360 he was appointed to the mastership of Baliol College. He was now a Bachelor of Theology and lectured in the University on the Scriptures. While teaching others, he himself became instructed in divine things and was unconsciously preparing himself for the great work of reforming the Church. Although he knew neither Greek nor Hebrew, Wicliffe is said to have reached a knowledge of the Scriptures, through the Latin Vulgate, which had not been equalled for centuries. His first publication appeared in 1356. It was called "The last Ages of the Church," and prophesied the end of the world before the close of the century in which he lived. The plague, which had a few years before carried off some 25,000,000 of the inhabitants of Europe, and the corruptions of the Church had filled his pious mind with the most gloomy forebodings. A few years later, Wicliffe distinguished himself by his strenuous denunciation of the mendicant orders who then infested the whole of Europe. Professing poverty, they had acquired great wealth. Under the guise of sanctity they were notorious for depravity. Wicliffe had been presented to the living of Fillingham, in the diocese of Lincoln, and afterwards to that of Ludgarshall. In 1372 he was appointed professor of Theology in Oxford University, where he took frequent occasions to expose the abuses of the period in his lectures to crowds of students. Two years later he was appointed, along with others, on an embassy to Pope Gregory XI, with reference to the patronage of the Church being bestowed upon foreigners, unacquainted with the language of the country and otherwise unfitted to instruct the people. The conference was held at Bruges, where Wicliffe seems to have remained nearly two years. During this time he got such insight into the depravity of the head of the Church and his officials as confirmed him in his determination to denounce them with unsparing severity. On his return, he was installed rector of Lutterworth, and at the same time made a prebend in the Collegiate Church of Westbury. He had risen to high distinction, but only a few months elapsed when he was summoned

to appear before a convention, presided over by the bishop of London, to answer a charge of heretical doctrines. The meeting was held in St. Paul's, which was crowded by the populace. While high words were passing betwixt the bishop and some of the nobles who stood by Wicliffe, the mob burst into the chapel. The proceedings were summarily brought to a close, and Wicliffe returned to his parochial duties. But the resolution had been taken that this enemy of the Papacy must be "removed." In May, 1377, the Pope issued four bulls against him, enjoining the parties to whom they were addressed to commit John Wicliffe to prison. He was summoned to appear before a Papal delegation at Lambeth Palace. Again there was a popular demonstration, but this time it was in favour of Wicliffe, and no sentence was passed upon him. Wicliffe now inveighed more loudly than ever against the infallibility of the Pope. He denounced the insatiable greed of the prelates; he counselled the people to shake off the chains that had been forged about them, and pleaded with the King and Parliament to sweep away the abuses. While matters were converging to a focus, the Pope died, and in the confusion that followed, Wicliffe was left for a time undisturbed. It was then that he resolved upon his translation of the Bible into the English language. No one had ever thought of doing this before, although small portions had been translated by Caedmon, Bede, and others. Feeling that he had not much time left in which to do this great work, he set himself to the task with all the energies of a yet unclouded intellect. Aided by some of his learned disciples he commenced, and in four years a very excellent translation of the entire Bible, from the Latin Vulgate, was completed. A new era dawned in the history of England. Copies of the translation were multiplied as fast as could be done at a time when there were no printing presses. A hundred experts were employed in writing out copies that were distributed far and near. In a short time Wicliffe's Bible had a comparatively large circulation. The hierarchy were struck with consternation and raised the question as to the right of the people to read it. It continued to be a proscribed book until the time of the Reformation. But Wicliffe consoled himself with the thought that he