

of Wycliffe and Tyndale, and asserts that the "whole Bible was, long before Wycliffe's days, by virtuous and well-learned men, translated into the English tongue, and by good and godly people, with devotion and soberness, well and reverently read."

These assertions of Foxe and More have been eagerly laid hold of by men who, in general, never mention Foxe except to deny that his authority is entitled to credit. Thus, in a little work published some few years ago, and professing to give an account of the history of the English Bible, it is suggested, on the authority of Foxe and More, that "there are many old English manuscript Bibles in our public libraries, and some of these seem to be of an earlier date than those of Wycliffe." To scholars the absurdity of such assertions has long been familiarly known; but ordinary readers are sometimes misled by them. Fortunately the task of refuting these suggestions, which are meant to disparage the claims of Wycliffe, is extremely easy. The book which has been referred to, for example, contains a specimen of one of those manuscript translations of the Bible which are supposed to have preceded Wycliffe's; and on the first glance it is obvious that this vaunted manuscript is simply a copy of Wycliffe's. This may be taken as a specimen of the credit due to the charges occasionally made against the Reformers by men who will not take the trouble to examine facts impartially for themselves.

To Wycliffe, therefore, belongs the undisputed honour of being the first translator of the Scriptures into our English tongue. We need not enter minutely into the personal history of this distinguished precursor of the Reformation; we are concerned not with his life but with his great work. The reader will sufficiently remember that Wycliffe's career was one continued protest against the innumerable abuses which had crept into the church during long centuries of darkness. His indignation may sometimes have led him to employ violent language, and to advocate extreme reforms; but surely the character of the Roman Court, and the general condition of the church and of religion in the fourteenth century, were sufficient to justify almost any scheme of reform, however extreme. It is darkest just before the dawn, and the corruption of the church was deepest just when the first glimpses of light began to herald the approaching day. And to Wycliffe, grieved and angry at the sight which everywhere met his eyes, it seemed impossible to effect any amendment in the doctrines or practices of the church, unless the Word of God was made freely accessible to all the English people. "The faith of the church," he said, "is contained in the Scriptures, and the more these are known the better; believers should ascertain for themselves the points of their faith by having the Scriptures in a language which they perfectly understand." "For what purpose," he asked, "did the Holy Spirit endow the apostles with the knowledge of all tongues? Was it not that they might make the Scriptures known in the language of all people? Why, then, should not the disciples of Christ always act in the same way and make Scripture open and plain to all?"

Animated by such convictions as these, Wycliffe himself undertook the glorious work of translating the Word of God into the language of his countrymen. He commenced his labours with the Apocalypse, then proceeded to the Gospels, and finished the New Testament, it is believed, about 1380. The Old Testament was translated by his friend Nicholas de Hereford, whose original manuscript is still preserved in the Bodleian; and on his being excommunicated and compelled to leave England, the work was completed by Wycliffe. Thus the whole of the Holy Scripture was at length made accessible to the English people in their native tongue; and the dauntless Reformer had the pleasure of seeing his great task accomplished before he himself passed away. The Bible was finished in 1383; Wycliffe died the following year peaceably in his rectory at Lutterworth; and some forty years after, as the reader knows, his bones were dug from their resting-place, and thrown into the Swift; "and the Swift," says quaint Fuller, "conveyed them to the Avon, the Avon to the Severn, and the Severn into