

JOHN DE WYCLIFFE, D.D.

A

Monograph.

WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF THE WYCLIFFE MSS. IN OXFORD, CAMBRIDGE, THE BRITISH MUSEUM, LAMBETH PALACE, AND TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN.

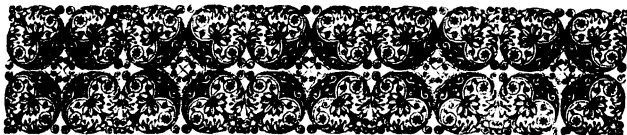
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Wycliffe Church.

Seeleys,
FLEET STREET AND HANOVER STREET.

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PREFACE.

NEARLY a quarter of a century has passed since the publication of my work intitled the 'Life and Opinions of John de Wycliffe.' Those volumes, I may venture to say, were the result of much research and labour. But they were the production of a young man, unknown to the world of letters, and without patronage from any of the gifted minds then flourishing in that world. The public were so far pleased with what I had done, that my publishers deemed it prudent to issue a second edition. The work, however, has long been out of print; and in looking back over the two thousand miles and more, which I travelled in those old stage-coach days, to acquaint myself with the contents of manuscripts, not a few of which had been all but utterly neglected since the time of the Wars of the Roses, I have often felt disposed to return to this subject. The materials thus brought together, and properly my own, were valuable, and are still so—and have sufficed to secure for the work in which they were published, the place assigned to it by some of our first continental scholars, as the most satis-

factory book upon its subject. But it will occasion no surprise if I say, that what I did with those materials many years ago, is not what I have since felt might be done with them. My wish in giving my thoughts again to this theme has been, to bring to it the fruit of further research, and by re-casting and re-writing the whole, to make a more adequate use of the material at my disposal, and to present the general subject in a form likely to make the character of Wycliffe, as it appears in these pages, better known among my countrymen.

This, good reader, I have done—or, at least, have aimed to do. I have returned to an old subject, as to a scene of my youth, and have endeavoured to renew some fellowships of thought there that were very pleasant to me in times long past.

The only publication in our language that could with any propriety be described as a life of Wycliffe, prior to the appearance of my former work, was the volume published by Mr. Lewis, which appeared early in the last century. Mr. Lewis printed some valuable documents, and extracts from documents, relating to certain points in the history of the Reformer, and for these any successor in the same path must have felt deeply indebted to him. But his acquaintance with the writings of Wycliffe was very limited. Of the date of the Wycliffe manuscripts, even of those from which he quotes, he was generally ignorant. From these causes, his account is not only meagre, but confused, and adapted, in many

respects, to convey a false and mischievous impression. The Opinions of Wycliffe have a history. His mind did not become at once all that it became ultimately. But Mr. Lewis often cites him as giving utterance at a comparatively early period of his career, to opinions which he did not avow until long afterwards. The enemies of the Reformer have not been slow in making their own uses of such oversights. On the authority of Mr. Lewis, they have represented Wycliffe as saying and unsaying, according to the exigencies of his career; while in truth—as the ensuing pages will I think demonstrate—nothing could be more foreign from his character, or more unlike the facts of his history. My predecessor did good service up to a certain point: I frankly confess my obligations to him; but no man of intelligence can have read his volume, without feeling that something very different is needed on the subject to which it relates.

Mr. Le Bas's well-written narrative, intitled 'The Life of Wiclif,' appeared subsequently to my former work, and owes nearly all its value, so far as material from manuscripts is concerned, to my own pages—a debt, I should add, which the author has very frankly acknowledged.

It will be seen, that in the extracts from the English writings of the Reformer, the old orthography has been discarded, but the reader may be assured that the substance of the author's language, both as to words and idioms, has been faithfully retained.

It should be added, that care has been taken, that the Index, as well as the general plan of the work, should be such as to facilitate reference to the more important matters included in the volume.

Unhappily, there is but too much reason for directing the attention of the men of our time to a topic of this nature. The corruptions unmasked and denounced so boldly by Wycliffe, are still rooted in the social state of Europe, and still find lodgment among ourselves. Our great Proto-Reformer attributes no mischief—social, moral, or religious—to the errors of Romanism, that we do not see presenting itself at this hour over the half of Europe as the fruit natural to those errors. All honour!—say I, to the man, who, amidst the turbulence and tyranny of the fourteenth century, could school students in Oxford after this wise.—‘*Christ wished his law to be observed WILLINGLY, FREELY, that in such obedience men might find happiness. Hence he appointed NO CIVIL PUNISHMENT to be inflicted on the transgressors of his commandments, but left the persons neglecting them to the suffering which shall come after the day of doom.*’—(Triologus, Lib. III. c. 3.)

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College—Moss-side,
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March 30, 1853.

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