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ART. I.—WICLIFFE.

The Life and Opinions of John de Wicliffe, Illustrated principally from his Unpublished Manuscripts. By ROBERT VAUGHAN. 2 vols. London: Holdsworth & Ball, 1831.

THE name of John de Wicliffe is familiar to all who have even a superficial knowledge of English ecclesiastical history. As a light shining in the darkness of a comparatively benighted age, he can not be wholly overlooked or disregarded. Still, there is about his name and history, as usually contemplated by even learned readers, a dimness or mythical indistinctness, that renders him in our imagination rather an ideal than a real person, as well as removes him beyond our sympathies and even the range of our intellectual investigations. This has doubtless arisen, at least in part, from the imperfect and unsatisfactory accounts of his life and character, that till recently were all that the public possessed in regard to him. His earlier biographers were generally friendly to his reputation; and to some extent admirers of his character; but their means of information were scanty and often fallacious. Among the earliest of these was Dr. James, the author of "An Apology for Wicliffe," who, however, had consulted only such of Wicliffe's manuscripts as were to be found in the Bodleian Library, and of course his information was exceedingly defective. A "Life of Wicliffe, drawn from original sources," was undertaken, about a century since, by Mr.

Lewis, who styles himself "Minister of Meregate;" but he also at last confessed his want of opportunity to consult the Wicliffe manuscripts found in the different libraries in remote parts of the kingdom. From these imperfect productions, together with the perverted statements of popish annalists and chroniclers, has been derived the history of Wicliffe, as found in cotemporaneous literature, and as hitherto generally entertained by such as without special attention to the matter, have some general notions on the subject.

But at length long delayed justice was rendered to the fame of that great reformer, by the publication of the work named at the head of this article. The author of that work is a well known dissenting minister of the British metropolis, who, by his scholarship and personal qualities, has attained and still occupies an elevated place among his peers and associates. As a writer he is also well known in literary circles; and of all his productions, his "Life and Opinions of Wicliffe," is the most considerable. Besides bringing to his task a well disciplined mind, and great facility in writing, he, with prodigious labor, examined all the Wicliffe manuscripts in the United Kingdom, as a preparation for the work he had taken in hand. As the result of this method of proceeding, his volumes form a complete magazine of verified facts, lucidly arranged, and discussed with a spirit of enlarged liberality; and altogether presenting a delineated character of their subject, that can not fail to elicit the admiration of every friend of noble and disinterested virtue. Hereafter this work will be *the* "Life of Wicliffe," and the subject of which it treats may be considered as exhausted; since all that can be desired is here fully and felicitously set forth; or if there is any thing further to be adduced on the subject, it can be expected only from the same author.

We have placed the title of these volumes at the head of this article, not however with the intention of writing a critical review of them; but rather to indicate its subject and the principal source of its matter. The present design is to present to our readers, as far as space will allow, a clear, correct and concise statement of the life and character of a man to whom even our remote times are greatly indebted.

In the northern district of Yorkshire, a few miles from the town of Richmond, is the ancient village of Wicliffe. The place is mentioned as far back as immediately after the Conquest; its origin is uncertain, nor is it determined whether its name was derived from an early lord, or whether itself gave name to its principal resident family. But however the name may have originated, it was from a very early period

common to the village and the most considerable family that occupied it. For more than five hundred years that place was the residence of the Wicliffe family, the heads of which were, during all that time, lords of the manor, and patrons of the rectory of Wicliffe. But in 1606, the male issue of the proprietor failing, the estate descended to a daughter, by whose marriage it was lost to the name. During the lifetime of the reformer, there were two rectors of Wicliffe, who bore the family name; and even after the estate had passed into another family, the Wicliffes continued to be a well-known and somewhat distinguished family.

Whether John de Wicliffe was a member of that family is not absolutely certain, though such is generally presumed to have been the case. True, he would have received the patronymic, "de Wicliffe," at the university, had he been only a resident of that place, and not a member of its chief family. His name also is not found in the existing records of the family; but this omission is but faint proof against the prevailing tradition, as it is known that the Wicliffes were generally active partisans against their distinguished namesake. The practice of destroying the evidence of disagreeable facts, has not unfrequently been resorted to in more enlightened times, and when the prospect of hiding the hated truth was much less flattering than in this case; and from the temper in which the name of the Reformer has been dealt with, we know that such an act would have been perfectly in character. It is not at all improbable therefore, that a family whose name was by him made imperishable, refused to recognize him as pertaining to themselves.

John de Wicliffe, called in his own times "the evangelical doctor," and since that great religious revolution occurred, "the Morning Star of the Reformation," is presumed to have been born in the year 1324. Of his history before he came to Oxford, we know absolutely nothing. The early life of distinguished men, like the first movements toward great revolutions, are often unnoticed by contemporaries, and consequently unknown to posterity. It is generally not till after the little every-day affairs of childhood are quite forgotten, that such interest attaches to the name of the individual, as to occasion a desire to trace him through all the steps of his progress to greatness. In 1340, he entered Queen's College, Oxford, but soon after removed to Merton College, which at that time numbered among its members some of the brightest luminaries of the age. Here the illustrious Bradwardine had till lately filled the chair of divinity, and here Ocam