

John Wickliff, Translator of the Bible into English.

from,

The Book of Martyrs

by John Foxe

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Although it be manifest that there were divers before Wickliff's time, who have wrestled and labored in the same cause and quarrel that our countryman Wickliff hath done, whom the Holy Ghost hath from time to time raised and stirred up in the Church of God, something to work against the bishop of Rome, to weaken the pernicious superstition of the friars, and to vanquish and overthrow the great errors which daily did grow and prevail in the world, yet notwithstanding, forso much as they are not many in number, neither very famous or notable, we will begin with the story of John Wickliff; at those time this furious fire of persecution seemed to take his first original and beginning. Through God's providence stepped forth into the arena the valiant champion of the truth, John Wickliff, our countryman, whom the Lord raised up here in England, to detect more fully and amply the poison of the Pope's doctrine and false religion. Wickliff, being the public reader of divinity in the University of Oxford, was, for the rude time wherein he lived, famously reputed for a great clerk, a deep schoolman, and no less expert in all kinds of philosophy; the which doth not only appear by his own most famous and learned writings, but also by the confession of Walden, his most cruel and bitter enemy, who in a certain epistle written unto Pope Martin V. saith, 'that he was wonderfully astonished at his most strong arguments, with the places of authority which he had gathered, with the vehemency and force of his arguments.'

It appeareth that this Wickliff flourished about A.D. 1371, Edward III. reigning in England. This is out of all doubt, that at what time all the world was in most desperate and vile estate, and the lamentable ignorance and darkness of God's truths had overshadowed the whole earth, this man stepped forth life a valiant champion, unto whom that may justly be applied which is spoken of one Simon, the son of Onias: 'Even as the morning star being in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon being full in her course, and as the bright beams of the sun; so doth he shine and glister in the temple and Church of God.'

In these days the whole state of religion was depraved and corrupted: the name only of Christ remained amongst Christians, but His true and lively doctrine was as far unknown to the most part as His name was common to all men. As touching faith, consolation, the end and use of the law, the office of Christ, our impotency and weakness, the Holy Ghost, the greatness and strength of sin, true works, grace and free justification by faith, the liberty of a Christian man, there was almost no mention.

The world, forsaking the lively power of God's spiritual Word, was altogether led and blinded with outward ceremonies and human traditions; in these was all the hope of obtaining salvation fully fixed; the temples or churches, taught or spoken of in sermons, or finally intended or gone about in their whole life, but only heaping up of certain shadowy ceremonies upon ceremonies; neither was there any end of this their heaping.

The Church did fall into all kind of extreme tyranny; whereas the poverty and simplicity of Christ were changed into cruelty and abomination of life. With how many bonds and snares of ceremonies were the consciences of men, redeemed by Christ to liberty, ensnared and snarled! The Christian people were wholly carried away as it were by the nose, with mere decrees and constitutions of men, even whither it pleased the bishops to lead them, and not as Christ's will

did direct them. The simple and unlearned people, being far from all knowledge of the holy Scripture, thought it quite enough for them to know only those things which were delivered them by their pastors; and they, on the other part, taught in a manner nothing else but such things as came forth of the court of Rome; whereof the most part tended to profit of their order, more than to the glory of Christ.

What time there seemed to be no spark of pure doctrine remaining, this aforesaid Wickliff, by God's providence, sprang up, through whom the Lord would first waken and raise up again the world, which was drowned and whelmed in the deep streams of human traditions.

This Wickliff, perceiving the true doctrine of Christ's Gospel to be adulterated and defiled with so many filthy inventions and dark errors of bishops and monks, after long debating and deliberating with himself (with many secret sighs, and bewailing in his mind the general ignorance of the whole world), could no longer abide and same, and at the last determined with himself to help and to remedy such things as he saw to be wide, and out of the way.

This holy man took great pains, protesting, as they said, openly in the schools, that it was his principal purpose to call back the Church from her idolatry, especially in the matter of the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ. But this ooil or sore could not be touched without the great grief and pain of the whole world: for, first of all, the whose glut of monks and begging friars was set in a rage and madness, who, even as hornets with their sharp stings, did assail this good man on every said; fighting, as is said, for their altars, paunches, and bellies. After them the priests and bishops, and then after them the archbishop, being then Simon Sudbury, took the matter in hand; who, for the same cause, deprived him of his benefice, which then he had in Oxford. At the last, when their power seemed not sufficient to withstand the truth which was then breaking out, they ran unto the lightnings and thunderbolts of the bishop of Rome, as it had been unto the last refuge of most force and strength. Notwithstanding, the said Wickliff, being somewhat friended and supported by the king, bore out the malice of the friars and of the archbishop; John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, the king's son, and Lord Henry Percy, being his special maintainers.

The opinions for which Wickliff was deprived, were these: That the Pope hath no more power to excommunicate any man, than hath another. That if it be given by any person to the Pope to excommunicate, yet to absolve the same is as much in the power of another priest, as in his. He affirmed, moreover, that neither the king, nor any temporal lord, could give any perpetuity to the Church, or to any ecclesiastical person; for that when such ecclesiastical persons do sin habitually, the temporal powers may meritoriously take away from them what before hath been bestowed upon them. And that he proved to have been practiced before here in England by William Rufus; 'which thing' (said he) 'if he did lawfully, why may not the same also be practiced now? If he did it unlawfully, then doth the Church err, and doth unlawfully in praying for him.'

Beside these opinions he began something nearly to touch the matter of the sacrament, proving that in the said sacrament the accidents of bread remained not without the subject, or substance, and that the simple and plain truth doth appear in the Scriptures, whereunto all human traditions, whatsoever they be, must be referred. The truth, as the poet speaketh very truly, had gotten John Wickliff great displeasure and hatred at many men's hands; especially of the monks and richest sort of priests.

Albeit, through the favour and supportation of the Duke of Lancaster and Lord Henry Percy, he persisted against their wolfish violence and cruelty: till at last, about A.D. 1377, the bishops, still urging and inciting their archbishop Simon Sudbury, who before had deprived him, and

afterward prohibited him not to stir any more in those sorts of matters, had obtained, by process and order of citation, to have him brought before them.

The Duke, having intelligence that Wickliff should come before the bishops, fearing that he, being but one, was too weak against such a multitude, calleth to him, out of the orders of friars, four bachelors of divinity, out of every order one, to join them with Wickliff also, for more surety. When the day was come, assigned to the said Wickliff to appear, which day was Thursday, the nineteenth of February, he went, accompanied with the four friars aforesaid, and with them also the Duke of Lancaster, and Lord Henry Percy, Lord Marshal of England; the said Lord Percy going before them to make room and way where Wickliff should come. Thus Wickliff, through the providence of God, being sufficiently guarded, was coming to the place where the bishops sat; whom, by the way, they animated and exhorted not to fear or shrink a whit at the company of the bishops there present, who were all unlearned, said they, in respect of him, neither that he should dread the concourse of the people, whom they would themselves assist and defend, in such sort as he should take no harm.

With these words, and with the assistance of the nobles, Wickliff, in heart encouraged, approached to the church of St. Paul in London, where a main press of people was gathered to hear what should be said and done. Such was there the frequency and throng of the multitude, that the lords, for all the puissance of the High Marshal, with great difficulty could get way through; insomuch that the Bishop of London, whose name was William Courtney, seeing the stir that the Lord Marshal kept in the church among the people, speaking to the Lord Percy, said that if he had known before what masteries he would have kept in the church, he would have stopped him out from coming there; at which words of the bishop the duke, disdaining not a little, answered that he would keep such mastery there, though he said 'nay.'

At last, after much wrestling, they pierced through and came to Our Lordy's Chapel, where the dukes and barons were sitting together with the archbishops and other bishops; before whom Wickliff, according to the manner, stood, to know what should be laid unto him. To whom first spake the Lord Percy, bidding him to sit down, saying that he had many things to answer to, and there had need of some softer seat. But the Bishop of London, cast eftsoons into a fumish chafe by those words, said he should not sit there. Neither was it, said he, according to law or reason, that he, who was cited there to appear to answer before his ordinary, should sit down during the time of his answer, but that he should stand. Upon these words a fire began to kindle between them; insomuch that they began so to rate and revile one the other, that the whole multitude, therewith disquieted, began to be set on a hurry.

Then the duke, taking the Lord Percy's part, with hasty words began also to take up the bishop. To whom the bishop again, nothing inferior in reproachful checks and rebukes, did render and requite not only to him as good as he brought, but also did so far excel in this railing art of scolding, that the duke blushed and was ashamed, because he could not over pass the bishop in brawling and railing, and, therefore, he fell to plain threatening; menacing the bishop, that he would bring down the pride, not only of him, but also of all the prelacy of England. 'Thou,' said he, 'bearest thyself so brag upon thy parents, who shall not be able to help thee; they shall have enough to do to help themselves'; for his parents were the Earl and Countess of Devonshire. To whom the bishop answered, that his confidence was not in his parents, nor in any man else, but only in God.

Then the duke softly whispering in the ear of him next by him, said that he would rather pluck the bishop by the hair of his head out of the church, than he would take this at his hand. This was not spoken so secretly, but that the Londoners overheard him. Whereupon, being set in a

rage, they cried out, saying that they would not suffer their bishop so contemptuously to be abused. But rather they would lose their lives, than that he should so be drawn out by the hair. Thus that council, being broken with scolding and brawling for that day, was dissolved before nine o'clock.

After King Edward III. succeeded his son's son, Richard II., who was no great disfavourer of the way and doctrine of Wickliff. But the bishops now seeing the aged king to be taken away, during the time of shoe old age all the government of the realm depended upon the Duke of Lancaster, and seeing the said duke, with the Lord Percy, the Lord Marshal, give over their offices, and remain in their private houses without intermeddling, thought now the time to serve them to have some vantage against John Wickliff; who hitherto, under the protection of the aforesaid duke and Lord Marshal, had some rest and quiet. Notwithstanding being by the bishops forbid to deal in doctrine any more, he continued yet with his fellows going barefoot and in long frieze gowns, preaching diligently unto the people. Out of whose sermons these articles were collected.

Articles collected out of Wickliff's sermons.

The holy eucharist, after the consecration, is not the very body of Christ.

The Church of Rome is not the head of all churches more than any other church is; nor that Peter had any more power given of Christ than any other apostle had.

The Pope of Rome hath no more in the keys of the Church than hath any other within the order of priesthood.

The Gospel is a rule sufficient of itself to rule the life of every Christian man here, without any other rule.

All other rules, under whose observances divers religious persons be governed, do add no more perfection to the Gospel, than doth the white colour to the wall.

Neither the Pope, nor any other prelate of the church, ought to have prisons wherein to punish transgressors.

Wickliff, albeit he was commanded by the bishops and prelates to keep silence, yet could not so be suppressed, but that through the vehemency of the truth he burst out afterwards much more fiercely. For he, having obtained the goodwill and favour of certain noblemen, attempted again to stir up his doctrine amongst the common people. Than began the Pharisees to swarm together striving against the light of the Gospel, which began to shine abroad; neither was the Pope himself behind with his part, for he never ceased with his bulls and letters to stir up them who otherwise, of their own accord, were but too furious and mad.

Accordingly, in the year of our Lord, 1377, being the first year of King Richard II., Pope Gregory sendeth his bull directed unto the University of Oxford, rebuking them sharply, imperiously, and like a Pope, for suffering so long the doctrine of John Wickliff to take root, and not plucking it up with the crooked sickle of their catholic doctrine. Which bull, the proctors and

masters of the University, joining together in consultation, stood long in doubt, deliberating with themselves whether to receive it with honour, or to refuse the reject it with shame.

The copy of this wild bull, sent to them from the Pope, was this: -

‘It hath been intimated to us by many trustworthy persons that one John Wickliff, rector of Lutterworth, in the diocese of Lincoln, professor of divinity, hath gone to such a pitch of detestable folly, that he feareth not to teach, and publicly preach, or rather to vomit out of the filthy dungeon of his breast, certain erroneous and false propositions and conclusions, savouring even of heretical pravity, tending to weaken and overthrow the status of the whole Church, and even the secular government. These opinions he is circulating in the realm of England, so glorious for power and abundance of wealth, but still more so for the shining purity of its faith, and wont to produce men illustrious for their clear and sound knowledge of the Scriptures, ripe in gravity of manners, conspicuous for devotion, and bold defenders of the catholic faith; and some of Christ’s flock he hath been defiling therewith, and misleading from the straight path of the sincere faith into the pit of perdition. Wherefore, being unwilling to connive at so deadly a pest, we strictly charge that by our authority you seize or cause to be seized the said John, and send him under trusty keeping to our venerable brethren the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London, or either of them.’

I find, moreover, two other letters of the Pope concerning the same matter, the one directing that in case Wickliff could not be found, he should be warned by public citation to appear before the Pope at Rome within three months; the other exhorting the bishops that the King and the nobles of England should be admonished not to give any credit to the said John Wickliff, or to his doctrine.

The letters, being received from the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury and other bishops took no little heart; for, being encouraged by them, and pricked forward by their own fierceness and cruelty, it is to be marveled at, with what boldness and stomach they did openly profess, before their provincial council, that all fear or favour set apart, no person, neither high nor low, should let them, neither would they be seduced by the entreaty of any man, neither by any threatenings or rewards, but that they would follow straight and upright justice and equity, yea, albeit that danger of life should follow thereupon. But these so fierce brags and stout promise, with the subtle practices of these bishops, who thought themselves so sure before, the Lord, against Whom no determination of man’s counsel can prevail, by a small occasion did lightly confound and overthrow. For the day of the examination being come, a certain personage of the prince’s court, and yet of no great noble birth, named Lewis Clifford, entering in among the bishops, commanded them that they should not proceed with any definite sentence against John Wickliff. With which words all they were so amazed, and their combs so cut, that they became mute and speechless. And thus, by the wondrous work of God’s providence, John Wickliff escaped the second time out of the bishops’ hands.

This good man ceased not to proceed in his godly purpose, laboring as he had begun; unto whom also, as it happened by the providence of God, this was a great help and stay, for that in the same year the aforesaid Pope Gregory XI. Who was the stirrer up of all this trouble against him, turned up his heels and died. Whose death was not a little happy to Wickliff; for immediately after his decease there fell a great dissension between the Romish and the French Popes, and others succeeding them, one striving against another, that the schism thereof endured the space of thirty-nine years, until the time of the Council of Constance (A.D. 1417).

About the same time also, about three years after, there fell a cruel dissension in England, between the common people and the nobility, the which did not a little disturb and trouble the commonwealth. In this tumult Simon of Sudbury, Archbishop of Canterbury, was taken by the rustical and rude people, and was beheaded; in whose place succeeded William Courtney, who was no less diligent in rooting out heretics. Notwithstanding, Wickliff's sect daily grew to greater force, until the time that William Berton, Chancellor of Oxford, about A.D. 1381, had the whose rule of that University; who, calling together eight monastical doctors and four others, and putting the common seal of the University unto certain writings, set forth an edict, declaring that no man, under a grievous penalty, should be so hardy hereafter to associate themselves with any of Wickliff's abettors or favourers; and unto Wickliff himself he threatened the greater excommunication and farther imprisonment, and to all his fautors, unless that they after three-days' admonition or warning, canonical and peremptory (as they call it), did repent and amend. The which thing when Wickliff understood, forsaking the Pope and all the clergy, he thought to appeal unto the King's majesty; but the Duke of Lancaster coming between forbade him, saying that he ought rather to submit himself unto the censure and judgment of his ordinary. Whereby Wickliff being beset with troubles and vexations, as it were in the midst of the waves, was forced once again to make confession of his doctrine.

Here is not to be passed over the great miracle of God's divine admonition or warning; for when the archbishop and suffragans, with the other doctors of divinity and lawyers, with a great company of babbling friars and religious persons, were gathered together to consult touching John Wickliff's books, when they were gathered together at the Black-Friars in London to begin their business upon St. Dunstan's day, after dinner, about two of the clock, the very hour and instant that they should go forward, a wonderful and terrible earthquake fell throughout all England: whereupon divers of the suffragans, being affrighted by the strange and wonderful demonstration, doubting what it should mean, thought it good to leave off from their determinate purpose. But the archbishop (as chief captain of that army, more rash and bold than wise) interpreting the chance which had happened clean contrary to another meaning or purpose, did confirm and strengthen their hearts and minds, which were almost daunted with fear, stoutly to go forward in their attempted enterprise; who then discoursing Wickliff's articles, not according unto the sacred canons of the holy Scripture, but unto their own private affections and men's traditions, gave sentence that some of them were simply and plainly heretical, others were erroneous, others irreligious, some seditious and not consonant to the Church of Rome. Besides the earthquake aforesaid, there happened another strange and wonderful chance, sent by God, and no less to be marked than the other, if it be true, that was reported by John Huss's enemies. These enemies of his, amongst other principal points of his accusation, laid this to his charge at the Council of Constance; that he should say openly unto the people as touching Wickliff, that at what time a great number of religious men and doctors were gathered together in a certain church to dispute against Wickliff, suddenly, the door of the church was broken open with lightning, in such sort, that his enemies hardly escaped without hurt. This thing, albeit that it were objected against Huss by his adversaries, yet, forsomuch as he did not deny the same, neither, if he so said, it seemeth that he would speak it without some ground or reason, I have not thought it good to leave clean out of memory.

Of like credit is this also, which is reported of Wickliff, that when he was lying very sick at London, certain friars came unto him to counsel him; and when they had babbled much unto him touching the catholic church, the acknowledging of his errors, and the bishop of Rome, Wickliff, being moved with the foolishness and absurdity of their talk, with a stout stomach, setting

himself upright in his bed, repeated this saying out of the Psalms (118: 17), "I shall not die, but I shall live, and declare the works of the Lord."

The Mandate of the Archbishop of Canterbury directed to the Bishop of London, against John Wickliff and his Adherents.

It is come to our hearing, that although, by the canonical sanctions, no man, being forbidden or not sent, ought to usurp to himself the office of preaching, publicly or privily, without the authority of the apostolic see or of the bishop of the place; yet notwithstanding, certain, being sons of perdition under the veil of great sanctity, are brought into such a doating mind, that they take upon them authority to preach, and are not afraid to affirm, and teach, and generally, commonly, and publicly to preach, as well in the churches as in the streets, and also in many other profane places of our said province, certain propositions and conclusions, heretical, erroneous, and false, condemned by the Church of God, and repugnant to the determinations of holy church; who also infect therewith very many good Christians, causing them lamentably to err from the catholic faith, without which there is no salvation.

We therefore admonish and warn that no man henceforth, of what estate or condition soever, do hold, teach, preach, or defend the aforesaid heresies and errors, or any of them; nor that he hear or hearken to any one preaching the said heresies or errors, or any of them; nor that he favour or adhere to him, either publicly or privily; but that immediately he shun and avoid him, as he would avoid a serpent putting forth pestiferous poison; under pain of the greater curse.

The chancellor the same time in Oxford was Master Robert Rygge; who, as it seemeth, favouring Wickliff's part, as much as he could or durst, many times dissembled and cloaked certain matters, and oftentimes (as opportunity would serve) helped forward the cause of the Gospel, which was then in great danger. When the time was come, that there must needs be sermons made unto the people, he committed the whole doings thereof to such as he knew to be greatest favourers of John Wickliff. The two proctors were John Huntman and Walter Dish; who then, as far as they durset, favoured the cause of John Wickliff. Insomuch that the same time and year, which was A.D. 1382, when certain public sermons should be appointed customably at the feast of the Ascension and of Corpus Christi to be preached in the cloister of St. Frideswide (now called Christ's Church), before the people, by the chancellor aforesaid and the proctors, the doings hereof the chancellor and proctors had committed to Philip Reppyngdon and Nicholas Hereford.

Hereford, beginning, was noted to defend John Wickliff openly, to be a faithful, good, and innocent man; for the which no small ado with outcries was among the friars. This Hereford, after he had long favoured and maintained Wickliff's part, grew in suspicion amongst the enemies of the truth; for as soon as he began somewhat liberally and freely to utter anything which tended to the defence of Wickliff, by-and-by the Carmelites and all the orders of religion were on his top, and laid not a few heresies unto his charge, the which they had strained here and there out of his sermons, through the industry of one Peter Stokes, a Carmelite, a kind of people prone to mischief, uproars, debate, and dissension, as though they were born for that purpose. Much like thing do divers writers write of the nature of certain spiders; that whatsoever pleasant juice is in herbs, they suck it out, and convert it into poison. But these cowled merchants in this behalf do pass all the spiders, for whatsoever is worst and most pestilent in a man, that do they

hunt out for, and with their teeth even, as it were, gnaw it out; and of the opinions which be good, and agreeable with verity, they do make schisms and heresies.

After this, the feast of Corpus Christi drew near, upon which day it was looked for that Reppyngdon should preach, who in the schools had shown forth and uttered that which he had long hidden and dissembled, protesting openly that in all moral matters he would defend Wickliff; but as touching the sacrament, he would as yet hold his peace, until such time as the Lord should illuminate the hearts and minds of the clergy. When the friars understood that this man should preach shortly, these Babylonians, fearing lest that he would scarce civilly or gently rub the galls of their religion, convented with the Archbishop of Canterbury, that the same day, a little before Philip should preach, Wickliff's conclusions, which were privately condemned, should be openly defamed in the presence of the whole University; the doing of which matter was committed to Peter Stokes, friar, standard-bearer and chief champion against Wickliff. The chancellor having received the archbishop's letters and perceived the malicious enterprise of the Carmelite, was wonderfully moved against him, and falling out with him and his like (not without cause) for troubling the state of the University, said that neither the bishop nor the archbishop had any power over that University, nor should not have, in the determination of any heresies. And afterward taking deliberation, calling together the proctors, with other regents and non-regents, he did openly affirm tht he would by no means help the Carmelite in his doings. These things thus done, Reppyngdon at the hour appointed proceeded to his sermon; in the which, he was reported to have uttered 'that in all moral matters he would defend Master Wickliff as a true catholic doctor. Moreover, that the Duke of Lancaster was very earnestly affected and minded in this matter, and would that all such should be received under his protection; besides many things more, which touched the praise and defence of Wickliff. When the sermon was done, Reppyngdon entered into St. Frideswide's Church, accompanied with many of his friends, who, as the enemies surmised, were privily weaponed under their garments. Friar Stokes, the Carmelite, suspecting all this to be against him, and being afraid of hurt, kept himself within the sanctuary of the church, not daring to put out his head. The chancellor and Reppyngdon, friendly saluting one another in the church-porch, sent away the people, and so departed every man home to his own house. There was not a little joy throughout the whole University for that sermon.

John Wickliff returning again within short space, either from his banishment, or from some other place where he was secretly kept, repaired to his parish of Lutterworth, where he was parson; and there, quietly departing this mortal life, slept in peace in the Lord, in the end of the year 1384, upon Silvester's day. It appeareth that he was well aged before he departed, 'and that the same thing pleased him in his old age, which did please him being young. This Wickliff, albeit in his life-time he had many grievous enemies, yet was there none so cruel to him, as the clergy itself. Yet, notwithstanding, he had many good friends, men not only of the meaner sort, but also of the nobility, amongst whom these men were to be numbered, John Clenbon, Lewes Clifford, Richard Stury, Thomas Latimer, William Nevil, and John Montague, who plucked down all the images in his church. Besides all these, there was the Earl of Salisbury, who, for contempt in him noted towards the sacrament, in carrying it home to his house, was enjoined by Ralph Ergom, Bishop of Salisbury, to make in Salisbury a cross of stone, in which all the story of the matter should be written: and he, every Friday during his life, to come to the cross barefoot, and bareheaded in his shirt, and there kneeling upon his knees do penance for his deed.

And for the residue, we will declare what cruelty they used not only against the books and articles of John Wickliff, but also in burning his body and bones, commanding them to be taken up many years after he was buried; as appeareth by the decree of the synod of Constance, A.D. 1415, 'This holy synod declareth, determineth, and giveth sentence, that John Wickliff was a notorious heretic, and that he died obstinate in his heresy; cursing alike him and condemning his memory. This synod also decreeth and ordaineth that his body and bones, if they might be discerned from the bodies of other faithful people, should be taken out of the ground, and thrown away far from the burial of any church, according as the canons and laws enjoin.' This wicked and malicious sentence of the synod would require here a diligent apology, but that it is so foolish and vain, and no less barbarous, that it seemeth more worthy of derision and disdain, than by any argument to be confuted.

What Heraclitus would not laugh, or what Democritus would not weep, to see these so sage and reverend Catos occupying their heads to take up a poor man's body, so long dead and buried; and yet, peradventure, they were not able to find his right bones, but took up some other body, and so of a catholic made a heretic! Albeit, herein Wickliff had some cause to give them thanks, that they would at least spare him till he was dead, and also give him so long respite after his death, forty-one years¹ to rest in his sepulchre before they ungraved him, and turned him from earth to ashes; which ashes they also took and threw into the river. And so was he resolved into three elements, earth, fire, and water, thinking thereby utterly to extinguish and abolish both the name and doctrine of Wickliff forever. Not much unlike the example of the old Pharisees and sepulchre-knights, who, when they had brought the Lord unto the grave, thought to make him sure never to rise again. But these and all others must know that, as there is no counsel against the Lord, so there is no keeping down of verity, but it will spring up and come out of dust and ashes, as appeared right well in this man; for though they digged up his body, burnt his bones, and drowned his ashes, yet the Word of God and the truth of his doctrine, with the fruit and success thereof, they could not burn.

¹The decree of the synod of Constance, A.D. 1415, was not carried out until after the lapse of several years from its meeting.

Source: Library of Congress, Rare Book Collection.
