

William Tindale

A Biography

Being a Contribution to the Early History of the
English Bible

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WILLIAM TINDALE

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE

A. D. 1484-1521.

‘THE history of Tindale,’ remarks a great English writer, ‘has almost been lost in his work.’ His work remains, and is likely long to remain, loved and revered by all English-speaking people throughout the world, as their noblest inheritance; but the man, to whose patient labour and heroic self-sacrifice we are mainly indebted for the English Bible, has been allowed to almost drop out of memory. Tindale, indeed, with his characteristic unselfishness and noble disregard of fame, would have been well content that he himself should be forgotten, if only ‘the Word of God might be permitted to go abroad in the English tongue’; but it would ill become his countrymen, who have benefited so largely by his labours, patiently to allow oblivion to settle down upon a life so worthy to be held in perpetual admiration. Much that we should gladly have known of the details of his personal history is now, in all probability, lost beyond recovery; yet, on the other hand, modern research, prosecuted with greater zeal and more copious facilities than at any previous period, has brought to light valuable materials for the elucidation of parts of his career, which have hitherto been involved in obscurity.

The whole story of the birth and early life of Tindale is involved in uncertainty, which the energy of many painstaking inquirers has not yet succeeded in dissipating. The illustrious translator himself, probably from motives of caution, seldom makes any allusion to his early years; and Foxe, his first biographer, who was intimately acquainted with several of Tindale’s associates, has unfortunately contented himself with the vague and unsatisfactory declaration, ‘Touching the birth and parentage of this blessed martyr of Christ, *he was born about the borders of Wales.*’ Tradition has, of course, largely supplemented this scanty information; and for nearly three centuries it has been generally believed, that Tindale was born in Gloucestershire, which, as Monmouth was then reckoned to belong to Wales, is in perfect accordance with the statement of Foxe. A later tradition has even ventured to indicate the village and the very house in which the martyr first saw the light; and this tradition likewise has passed into general currency, and has been embodied not only in books but in materials much more

enduring.

The traveller, who speeds along the railway between Bristol and Gloucester, cannot fail to observe a noble monument conspicuously perched on the bold extremity of one of the most beautiful of the Cotswolds. This is the column erected to the honour of Tindale on Nibley Knoll. The little village of North Nibley, which straggles in picturesque confusion at the foot of the hill, claims to be the unquestionable birthplace of the great translator; and the villagers assure the inquiring traveller that the dilapidated manor house of Hunt's Court was the residence of Tindale's parents, and sheltered the birth and boyhood of the future martyr. Sweeter birth-place there is none in England. 'Nybley, anciently written Nubbelei,' says its enthusiastic historian, 'Nubbeleigh, and Nubeleg and Nibeleigh, *quasi* (if descant upon the name may be allowed), cloudwater, or obscure place, an etymology agreeable to the springs and water here, and their covert situation, is not more pleasantly seated on a comely hill than healthful; than which none in the county, or scarce in the kingdom, standeth in a sweeter air¹.'

Unfortunately for the pleasing tradition, which thus links the memory of the Reformer with one of the loveliest spots in England, it cannot be traced farther back than the commencement of last century, and when closely examined, it is found to rest upon an insufficient foundation². Beyond all question there were Tindales residing at Hunt's Court towards the end of the reign of Henry VIII, but it was not till long after the Reformer's birth that Hunt's Court came into their possession; and though there is every reason to believe that these Tindales of North Nibley were kinsmen of the Reformer, there is not the slightest evidence that he was a son of that house. It is, certainly, not a little curious that Thomas Tindale and Alice Hunt, the possessors of Hunt's Court in the reign of Henry, had a son named William; and the mention of this coincidence in the county histories has induced some biographers to assert as an indubitable truth, established by documentary evidence, that this William was no other than the translator³; but, in fact, it can be demonstrated on the unquestionable authority

¹ Smythe's *MS. History of the Hundred of Berkeley*. I beg to acknowledge my obligations to J. H. Cook, Esq., of Berkeley Castle, for the courtesy with which he allowed me to consult Mr. Smythe's invaluable collections.

² The tradition is no older, I think, than Atkins in his *History of Gloucestershire*. In recent times it has been circulated mainly on the authority of Oade Roberts, who was a collateral descendant of the Tindales of Hunt's Court; but any one who examines the letters of Oade Roberts, which are preserved in the British Museum (Additional MSS. 9,458), will perceive at a glance that what he records is mere unauthenticated gossip, baseless as the prophecies of Zadkiel.

³ It is mentioned by Rudder, *Gloucestershire*, p. 696; and Anderson, in his *Annals of the English Bible*, at once assumes that this William Tindale was the martyr.

of the will of Alice Tindale, that the William Tindale who was born at Hunt's Court, was alive in 1542, and could not, therefore, have been the martyr who perished at Vilvorde in 1536.

Years, however, before the intermarriage with the heiress of the Hunts brought Hunt's Court into the Tindale family, there had been Tindales established as farmers at Melksham Court, in the neighbouring parish of Stinchcombe; and as far back as the reign of Richard III, Tindales had possessed some parts of the Manor of Hurst in the adjoining parish of Slymbridge. With reference to this, Mr. Francis Fry, of Cotham, Bristol, in a note extracted from a paper by J. H. Cook, Esq., on The Tindales of Gloucester, states, 'It seems therefore fair to conclude with Mr. Greenfield that Edward Tindale and William the Martyr were in all probability brothers of the first Richard Tindale of Melksham Court, to whom we may add a fourth brother, viz. John Tindale, a Merchant of London, who was fined by the Star Chamber in 1530 for assisting William in the circulation of the New Testament.'

Hence, so far as our present knowledge extends, it seems by no means improbable that it was not amid the breezy and beautiful Cotswolds, but in this parish of low-lying meadow land amongst fields of sedgy swamps reclaimed from the Severn, that the translator first saw the light.

The chief difficulty in ascertaining the parentage of Tindale has arisen from the absence of any authoritative statement on the point by any of his contemporaries. Hitherto, nothing has been discovered concerning the family to which the Reformer belonged, beyond the fact that he had the brother John referred to above, who was subsequently punished for aiding in the circulation of the New Testament. Quite unexpectedly, however, the present biographer unearthed a document which seems to bring the solution of the long-agitated question within our grasp. In the State Paper Office there is preserved a letter from Stokesley, Bishop of London, soliciting the grant of a farm in Gloucestershire for one of his servants. But another suppliant was in the field, and concerning him Stokesley notes (January 26, 1533), 'He that sueth unto you hath a kinsman called Edward Tyndale, brother to Tyndale the arch-heretic, and under-receiver of the lordship of Berkeley, which may and daily doth promote his kinsfolks there by [to] the King's farms⁴.'

Now Stokesley, it must be remembered, was not only from his official position likely to be well informed on this point, but he had actually been rector of Slymbridge in 1509, and, therefore, was almost certainly personally acquainted with the Tindales of Gloucestershire; his information may accordingly be

⁴ State Paper Office. Chapter House Pacers, second series, vol. 23.

received as of the very highest value. Moreover, Edward Tindale, the ‘receiver⁵ of the lordship of Berkeley,’ is a person perfectly well known to us, so that if ‘the arch-heretic’ was indeed his brother, the whole family history down to the present day can be traced with perfect certainty⁶. A little explanation must, however, be premised, in order that the reader may sufficiently understand the circumstances of the case. William, Marquis of Berkeley, who had died in 1492, from some pique against his brother, bequeathed his estates to Henry VII and his heirs male; and they remained in the royal family till the accession of Mary. A local receiver of the rents and other payments due to the Crown from the Berkeley lands was, of course, appointed; and in 1519 Edward Tindale was nominated to this office by letters patent. This receiver was a man of energy, and rose high in the royal favour; in 1529 he received a grant of the lease of the manor of Hurst, in Slymbridge, the very ground on which we have supposed that he and his more illustrious brother were born; and at subsequent periods he held, by grant from the Abbot of Tewkesbury, the Manor of the Pull, or Pull Court, in the parish of Bushley in Worcester, and that of Burnet juxta Keynsham, in the county of Somerset⁷. His will, which was proved in London in 1546⁸, shows him to have been a man of substance; and, what is more important as confirming Stokesley’s account of him, he possessed some of those books whose circulation had been prohibited on account of their supposed heretical teaching⁹. Everything that appears in his will is, in fact, in perfect accordance with what Stokesley asserts in his letter; the names and alliances of his numerous children are all known; and if this evidence be accepted, then a very considerable amount of obscurity will have been removed from the family history of the illustrious martyr.

The other family legend, set afloat in the reign of Charles II, that the Tindales

⁵ *Receiver* and *under-receiver* I take to mean the same thing. Edward Tindale was the *local* receiver of the rents, the receiver-in-chief being of course the great minister of the Crown, to whom all local rents were transmitted.

⁶ It has been traced by B. W. Greenfield in his *Pedigree of the Tyndale Family*, which begins from this very Edward Tindale.

⁷ Greenfield, *Pedigree of the Family of Tyndale*, to which excellent compilation I am indebted for several useful hints.

⁸ *Alen.* 21; dated August 17, proved October 1, 1546.

⁹ He had e.g. *Pellicanus on the Old Testament*, which was forbidden by royal proclamation in July, 1546. This book, *along with his best bow and the bow-case*, he bequeathed to Robert Green, parish priest of Tewkesbury, near which town Pull Court is situated.

‘came out of the North in the times of the wars between the houses of York and Lancaster’; and that for a time they sought to elude observation by changing their name to Hutchins, is probably not without foundation, though it cannot be said to be established by any documentary evidence.

But enough of a matter which is still confessedly involved in considerable obscurity, and where modest conjecture is more appropriate than confident assertion. No reason has as yet been given for discrediting Foxe’s statement that Tindale was born on the borders of Wales’; and whatever may have been the exact locality of his birth, whether amongst the breezy beauties of the Cotswolds, or, as seems more probable, ‘by the rushy-fringed bank,’ within which ‘Sabrina,’ still fair and unpolluted, rolled ‘her glassy, cool, translucent wave¹⁰’ to the Bristol Channel, it, at all events, lies within the ken of the traveller who mounts the bold vantage-ground of Tindale’s monument.’

The *date* of the Reformer’s birth is involved in equal uncertainty, and can only be approximated to by inference. Some biographers have assigned it to about the year 1470; making Tindale die a martyr at nearly seventy years of age. All that we know of him, however, seems to indicate that he perished while still in middle life, and that he must, by consequence, have been born between 1490 and 1495. Thus, in defending his translation of the New Testament against Sir Thomas More’s attack, he incidentally remarks, ‘These things to be even so, M. More knoweth well enough, for he understandeth the Greek, *and he knew them long ere I*¹¹.’ As Tindale’s early education was not neglected, and he was sent to Oxford at a very early age (‘from a child,’ according to Foxe), it seems a legitimate inference from these words that he was somewhat younger than Sir Thomas More. Sir Thomas, it is now known, was born in 1478. If the facts discovered by Mr. Boase, as given on pp. 38-40, are accepted as referring to Tindale, his birth can hardly be placed before 1490 or even 1495. And with this conjectural date every allusion to Tindale’s age sufficiently corresponds. Sir Thomas More seems to rank him, in point of age, with Luther, who was born in 1483; and Foxe seems to speak of his martyrdom as occurring while he was in middle life, which would hardly allow the date of his birth to be carried farther back than 1495. On the whole, therefore, it may be assumed as highly probable that Tindale was born somewhere about the year 1495 any more precise determination of the date must be the result of further investigation.

In the uncertainty which rests upon the place of Tindale’s birth and the social

¹⁰ Milton’s *Comus*.

¹¹ Tindale’s *Answer to More*. Tindale’s *Works*, vol. iii. p. 23.

position of his parents, any picture of his early life must be, of course, wholly drawn from imagination. Slymbridge, if we assume this to have been his birthplace, was then, as now, wholly engrossed in the production of cheese and butter; a quiet agricultural parish, where life would flow on calmly as the great river that formed its boundary. The dairymaid was the true annalist of Slymbridge; and the only occurrence, beyond drought, which would distress the peaceful population, would be occasional predatory incursions by their lawless neighbours from the Forest of Dean, which waved in hills of verdure towards the West, as a picturesque counterbalance to the Cotswolds in the East. Such a place one naturally associates with stagnant thought and immemorial traditions. Like the rest of the Manor of Berkeley, it had passed into the hands of the Crown; and this led to the institution of one of the most charming customs that still subsist in England. Annually, on the first day of May, the choristers of Magdalen College, Oxford, ascend the tower of that princely establishment, and at five in the morning join in singing a hymn, which floats down in the sweet calm like the music of the spheres. Originally, it is said, the hymn was a requiem for the repose of the soul of Henry VII; and to the present day, the money which rewards the labours of the choristers, is paid from the Rectory of Slymbridge. The patronage of the Rectory is likewise vested in Magdalen College; and this connexion was, doubtless, not without its influence when Tindale was ready to be sent to the University.

The education of the young Tindale was, we know, not neglected. He had a peculiar aptitude for the acquisition of languages; and no doubt exhibited in his childhood that sharpness of comprehension for which he was afterwards distinguished. Of the nature of his early studies he has not left any record; the experience of later life probably led him to look upon them with contempt as a grievous waste of time. One allusion only has been preserved in his works to what occupied the first energies of his mind, but it is a highly curious one, well deserving a place in this biography. In the course of his *Obedience of a Christian Man*, while advocating the propriety of translating Holy Scripture into the English language, he asserts, 'Except my memory fail me, and that I have forgotten what I read when I was a child, thou shalt find in the English chronicle, how that King Athelstane caused the Holy Scripture to be translated into the tongue that then was in England, and how the prelates exhorted him thereto.' 'The child is father of the man;' surely, in this picture of the boy Tindale studying the chronicles, and carefully noting in the past history of England the manner in which the free circulation of the vernacular Bible had at different times been dealt with, we may see a significant and almost prophetic forecast of the future life of the man.

All the historical interest of the Vale of Berkeley centred in the grim old

Castle of Berkeley, and in the traditions of the noble family which for ages had been lords of almost all that could be seen from its towers. With these local traditions, doubtless, Tindale was imbued almost from infancy; but they do not concern us here, and they seem not to have exercised any perceptible influence over his character and opinions.

There is one tradition, however, of which Tindale could not have been ignorant, which is too interesting and appropriate to be omitted. About a century before the birth of Tindale, John de Trevisa had been vicar of Berkeley and chaplain to Thomas, fifth Baron Berkeley. This baron is said to have been a pupil of Wycliffe, and to have imbibed the opinions of that Reformer; and his chaplain, a man of accomplished literary tastes, known to scholars as the author of a translation of Higden's *Polychronicon*, which was one of the earliest books printed by Caxton, is also said to have been a zealous propagator of the doctrines of Wycliffe. According to Caxton, Trevisa, like his illustrious contemporary, undertook to translate the Holy Scriptures from the Vulgate into the English tongue, for the instruction of his countrymen; and it has even been surmised that his work may still be in existence amongst the ill-digested treasures of the Vatican. One abiding memorial of Trevisa has not wholly perished, even in our day¹², and in Tindale's time it must have been fresh and legible, and not improbably was often seen by him, not without results. Round the walls and roof of the interesting private chapel in the castle, he caused to be inscribed passages from the Apocalypse in Latin and Norman-French, for the edification of such as were able to read. It may surely be surmised that the memory of the courageous vicar had not perished in Tindale's day; for the appearance of such a man was a sign of the times, an indication of an approaching reawakening of the human intellect from the torpor of centuries. For, as Fuller quaintly puts it, 'Midnight being now past, some early risers were beginning to strike fire and enlighten themselves from the Scriptures.' And if everything else that Trevisa had ever uttered had been forgotten, surely in the county of Gloucester, swarming with monks, and thick-studded with wealthy religious establishments, men would not easily forget the keen sarcasm of his remark, 'Christ sent apostles and priests into the world, but never any monks or begging friars.'

Whether the opinions of the followers of Wycliffe had made any impression upon the Tindales of Gloucestershire, so as to exercise some influence upon the religious education of the future Reformer, is a question that must be left entirely

¹² As this matter has been a good deal disputed, I may at once say that I have *seen* what I here describe. Many persons seem to have confused the parish church of Berkeley with the private chapel in the castle.

to conjecture. Lollardry had certainly met with some favour in various parts of the county. Wycliffe himself is said to have held a living in the neighbourhood of Bristol and to have frequently preached in that enterprising metropolis of the West of England; and there is no doubt that John Purvey, the distinguished reviser of Wycliffe's translation, preached in that city, denouncing, with all his powerful eloquence, the abounding corruptions of religion, and especially the scandalous lives of the mendicant friars. But this premature reformation soon passed away; leaving behind, however, as the germinating seeds of future changes, its vernacular version of the Vulgate, and a reawakened spirit of free inquiry, which were sure, under more favourable circumstances, to produce momentous results.

At the era of Tindale's birth the Church had apparently recovered from the wounds which Wycliffe and the Lollards had inflicted. The persecuting laws which the usurping family of Lancaster had enacted in order to propitiate the favour of the clergy, seemed to have effectually accomplished their purpose. The voice of heretical teaching was silenced. The doctrines of the Gospellers still continued, indeed, to be propagated, mainly through the clandestine circulation of Wycliffe's writings, and especially his translation of Scripture; yet the clergy considered all danger as over; they resumed their wonted arrogance; they returned to their evil ways; and the scandals which had been so severely denounced burst forth afresh with new luxuriance. The ignorance of the clergy, and particularly of the religious orders, seemed to become more profound than ever; or perhaps the faint streaks of the dawning of learning made the darkness more conspicuous by contrast. They were ignorant in many cases even of that Latin language which alone was employed in the services of the Church; and, so late even as 1530, Tindale ventured to assert that there were twenty thousand priests in England who could not have translated into plain English the clause in the Lord's Prayer, 'Fiat voluntas tua sicut in coelo et in terra'¹³. We are ready to admit, indeed, that the vehemence of argument here betrayed Tindale into exaggeration; but we know that in the reign of Edward VI, Bishop Hooper found scores of clergy in this very county of Gloucester unable to tell who was the author of the Lord's Prayer, or where it was to be read. The modern reader, in short, can hardly imagine the gross ignorance that prevailed amongst those who were supposed to be the instructors of the people, and can, therefore, scarcely appreciate the urgent necessity that existed for a Reformation.

The Bible, it need hardly be added, was practically unknown, either to clergy or to people. The Convocation of the province of Canterbury had expressly

¹³ Tindale's *Answer to Sir Thomas More*, p. 75, and note.

forbidden any man to translate any part of Scripture into the English tongue, or to read such translation without the authority of the bishop, an authority not very likely to be granted¹⁴. The study of Holy Scripture did not even form a part of the preparatory education of those who were destined to be the religious teachers of the people; theological summaries, compiled by scholastic doctors, took the place of the Word of God; and St. Paul was cast into the shade by the ‘doctor sanctus,’ the ‘angel of the schools,’ ‘divus Thomas de Aquino.’ As an inevitable result, religion had degenerated into an unprofitable round of superstitious customs and ceremonial observances. The service of the Church was so intricate that the study of years was necessary to enable either priest or people to perform it aright. The use and moral teaching of these ceremonies, moreover, had become entirely obsolete; their original function in the Church was completely gone; they had altogether ceased to be in any sense aids to devotion, and were impediments to all true religion. The relics, the pilgrimages, the pictures and images, the commemorations of saints, all these had been entirely emptied of that meaning which had originally led to their institution, and which is still alleged in their defence; they had ceased to be ‘laymen’s books,’ in which the unlearned might read their duty in plain symbols; they had been abused for purposes of imposture and debauchery, and were, in fact, substitutes for all the real duties of religious life.

And to these evils of superstition were also beginning to be added those of hypocrisy. The human mind was awakening to freedom and action; the words of Wickliffe had not been water spilt on the ground; men were on all sides asking some proofs of the doctrines, some reason for the ceremonies, which were styled religion, and which were proclaimed to be of Divine obligation, necessary to be received by all under peril of eternal damnation. To such inquiries the clergy vouchsafed no answer: they replied by demanding implicit obedience, and by reiterating with more vehement assertion their claims to Divine reverence; and they put into operation the sanguinary power of persecution with which the laws had armed them. Fear of the penalties of the law deterred many, no doubt, from publicly avowing their dissent from the teaching of the Church; but such means could not arrest the progress of free inquiry. Men continued as before to join in public in the services of the Church; they offered candles, they went on pilgrimages, they kissed St. Thomas’s shoe and knelt at the image of Our Lady of Walsingham, they fasted and paid all the dues of Mother Church; but all this was done no longer in a spirit of faith and reverence; smiles of incredulous derision might have been seen on the face of many a worshipper, and sharp expressions

¹⁴ Wilkins’s *Concilia*, vol. iii. p. 317.

of shrewd scepticism might have been overheard at many a shrine. For the life had departed from the old religion; the outward form still remained, and there was a certain mechanical semblance of activity and vitality; but the spirit that should have animated it with true life had disappeared. The dry bones were there, they waited for the breathing of the Spirit from on high that they might again live.

Nowhere did these religious abuses flourish in greater vigour than in that county of Gloucester, where Tindale was born, and spent his early years. That county was the very stronghold of the Church: it boasted of no fewer than six mitred abbeys: it possessed the most famous relic in the kingdom, the blood of Hailes, the sight of which was supposed to ensure eternal salvation; and so predominant was the influence of the clergy throughout the county that ‘as sure as God is in Gloucester’ had come to be a familiar proverb all over England. Nowhere, probably, was religion more entirely a thing of form and ceremony; and of these ceremonies, in almost all cases, unmeaning, and in not a few, grotesque and ridiculous, the young Tindale, shrewd and thoughtful from his childhood, was no inattentive observer. When at a subsequent period he directed all the energy of his pen against the superstitious practices sanctioned by the Church, his recollection of what he had witnessed around him in his youth, furnished him with endless illustrations to point his arguments. The kissing of the thumb-nails previous to engaging in prayer, the flinging holy water at the devil, the offering of a big cheese every year to St. White¹⁵, the strange performances at Baptism, at Confirmation, and at Mass, all formed part of the ‘dumb ceremonies’ which Tindale had witnessed from his youth; and in which we can scarcely imagine one with so acute and logical a mind ever joining with any feelings of reverence.

Of the members of the household among whom Tindale grew up to maturity we have almost nothing to record. His father and mother are personages unknown as yet to history; of his brother Edward we have already heard, and he had besides a brother John, who was subsequently established as a merchant in London, and who, in 1530, was brought before Sir Thomas More, charged with receiving and distributing copies of the English New Testament, and was fined

¹⁵ Gloucester being an agricultural county, in which the interests of the dairies were supreme, it was deemed necessary to invoke the assistance of a special saint to protect the cream and the cheese against the accidents of the weather, and the depredation of the fairies and the Welshmen. The saint selected for this purpose was Saint White, a personage by no means familiar even to persons deeply read in hagiology. Tindale (*Works*, vol. ii. p. 126) speaks of the saint as a female, assuming, no doubt, that she was a canonized dairymaid; but more learned doctors affirm that St. White, or St. Wittia, was in reality a German bishop of the eighth century, one of the Saxon companions of the famous Winfrid, or Boniface, the ‘Apostle of Germany.’

and subjected to an ignominious punishment for this heinous offence. Stokesley, too, then Bishop of London, formerly Rector of Slymbridge, summoned John Tindale before him for sending money over the sea to his brother William, and for receiving and retaining letters from his brother, so that we may believe Tindale was, from his earliest years, blessed with the sympathy of relatives like-minded with himself.

The statement of Foxe that ‘Tyndale was brought up from a child in the University of Oxford,’ if somewhat vague, seems, at all events, sufficient authority for believing that Tindale was sent at an early age to the University, the natural result, we suppose, of the rapid progress in his studies, made by one who unquestionably exhibited unusual facility in the acquisition of languages. At Oxford he was, according to unvarying tradition, entered in Magdalen Hall, better known in those days as ‘Grammar Hall,’ from its having been originally designed by its munificent founder, William of Waynflete, to serve as a sort of preparatory school of grammatical drill for his larger and more magnificent foundation in the same University, Magdalen College. Magdalen Hall is a small building now included in Magdalen College; and it was in Tindale’s time of still more limited dimensions, consisting simply of the school and the refectory with the chambers over. From its connexion, however, with the other magnificent foundation of Waynflete, its importance was much greater than its size would indicate; and many illustrious men were associated with it. Wolsey is said to have been master of the school; and Stokesley and Longland, subsequently bishops of London and Lincoln, were successive Principals of the Hall from 1502 to 1507, probably during the very time of Tindale’s residence. The memory of the great Reformer has not been forgotten at his *alma mater*: a portrait of him hangs in the hall of Hertford College, with a laudatory inscription, freely recognizing his great ability and the services which he rendered to the interests of true religion¹⁶.

¹⁶ The inscription is in Latin, and has been translated as follows:

This canvas represents (which is all that Art can do)
The likeness of William Tyndale, formerly student and pride of this Hall;
Who after reaping here the happy first-fruits of a purer faith,
Devoted his energy at Antwerp to the translation
Of the New Testament and Pentateuch into the native language:
A work so beneficial to his English countrymen, that he is
Not undeservedly called the Apostle of England.
He received the crown of martyrdom at Vilvorde, near Brussels, 1536.
A man (if we may believe his opponent, the Procurator-General
Of the Emperor) very learned, pious, and good.

Of his University career there are but few authentic records; the registers of the University of Oxford give only the technical details of degrees taken at the period when Tindale was in residence; and we have no alternative, therefore, but to adopt the summary of this part of Tindale's life which Foxe has given. 'At Oxford,' says Foxe, 'he, by long continuance, grew and increased as well in the knowledge of tongues and other liberal arts, as specially in the knowledge of the Scriptures, whereunto his mind was singularly addicted, insomuch that he, lying there in Magdalen Hall, read privily to certain students and fellows of Magdalen College, some parcel of divinity, instructing them in the knowledge and truth of the Scriptures. Whose manners also and conversation, being correspondent to the same, were such, that all they that knew him, respected and esteemed him to be a man of most virtuous disposition, and of life unspotted.

'Thus he, in the University of Oxford, increasing more and more in learning, and proceeding in degrees of the schools, spying his time, removed from thence to the University of Cambridge, where after he had likewise made his abode a certain space; being now further ripened in the knowledge of God's Word, leaving that University also, he resorted to one Master Walsh, a knight of Gloucestershire, and was there schoolmaster to his children, and in good favour with his master.'

This, the whole record of Tindale's University life, is not only extremely meagre, but, what is worse, extremely vague, not affording any means of fixing the date to which the events ought to be assigned. There can be no doubt, however, of the truth of Foxe's assertion, that Tindale 'proceeded in degrees of the schools'; for this can be substantiated by the admission of Tindale's bitter antagonist, Sir Thomas More. 'In Universities,' Tindale had said, by way of illustrating the various meanings of the word *grace*, 'many ungracious graces there be gotten'; on which Sir Thomas More retorts, 'he should have made it more plain and better perceived if he had said, as for example, "When his own *grace* was there granted to be made Master of Arts."' Sir Thomas More was not likely to use words thoughtlessly, and his retort places beyond dispute the fact that Tindale had received the degree of Master of Arts at the University.

One form in which the perennial interest felt in all relating to the Bible in England manifests itself is the constant search after fresh details connected with the history of its translation into English, and after new facts in the lives of the men who did the work. It is doubtful whether we shall ever get to know much more of the personal history of Tindale than we do at present. Yet from time to time scraps of information are added to the accumulated stock. One such was given to the world in the valuable *Register of the University of Oxford*, edited for the Oxford Historical Society by the Rev. C. W. Boase, M.A. Mr. Boase

kindly furnished for this volume his own translations of the entries in the *Register* which he believed to refer to Tindale. The entries are:—

(1) ‘13 May, 1512, William Hychyns, scholar in arts, supplicates that a study of two years and a term within the University, together with a *responsion* to one bachelor in Lent, and the creation of one *general*¹⁷ and with two *variations*¹⁸ in the Parvise¹⁹, and an *opposition* and *responsion* under a Collector in the Parvise, may *suffice* him to be admitted to the degree of bachelor. This grace is granted on condition of his determining next Lent, and disputing twice out of the usual course.’

(2) ‘4 July, 1512, there was admitted to the reading of some book of the Decretals [a mistake for “of the faculty of arts “] Sir [dominus]²⁰ John Knygley ... Sir William Hychyns ...’

(3) ‘Feb. 151J names of determiners.. . Sir William Hychyns [53 names].’

(4) ‘26 June, 1515, there were licensed in arts Sir William Hychyns...’

(5) ‘2 July, 1515, there were created Masters of Arts those whose names follow . . . Mr. William Hochyns (22 names).’

The reader unacquainted with the formalities accompanying the granting of degrees at Oxford in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries will find these entries more than a trifle obscure. Yet their discovery fixes in all probability some of the most important dates in Tindale’s life. For the benefit of the general reader it may be expedient to add a brief description of a sixteenth-century University career. It will not only help to render the extracts from the *Register* intelligible, but it will throw light upon certain passages in Tindale’s writings.

But before doing this it should be stated that, although no satisfactory reason can be given for it, the fact remains that Tindale described himself and was known to his contemporaries as William Hychyns or Hutchens, and this may possibly have been his family name. Granting that the entry quoted *from* the Oxford *Register* refers to Tindale—and the probability that it does comes very near certainty—the discovery is a proof of the general accuracy of Demaus’s reasoning, for he shows on page 50 that Tindale could not have graduated B.A.

¹⁷ On these formalities see Wordsworth’s *Scholae Academicae*, pp. 213-34. ‘Generals’ were exercises in easy *logic*, *Parva Logicalia*, which had to be done by the juniors. See Gutch’s edition of Wood’s *History and Antiquities of the University*, vol. ii. p. 728.

¹⁸ ‘Variations,’ &c. are technical names for different kinds of disputations. Everything was done by Opponents and Respondents. The Collectors arranged the disputations, who was to dispute with whom, and where, &c.

¹⁹ The ‘Parvise’ was the porch of St. Mary’s Church, in the High Street, Oxford.

²⁰ A man was called *dominus* before his M.A., *magister* afterwards. Hence ‘Dan’ or ‘Sir’ prefixed to clerical names in sixteenth-century writings.

before j 5o8, and the *Register* fixes the year as 1512.

Notwithstanding the researches of such writers as Anstey in his Introduction to the *Munimenta Academica Oxon.* and Mullinger in his book *The University of Cambridge*—to both of which works the Editor would here acknowledge his great indebtedness—there is still considerable uncertainty as to the exact details of a University course in the time of Tindale. Becoming a Bachelor of Arts did not imply, as now, the conferrence of a degree; it seems rather to have indicated the conclusion of a term of study. The successful candidate ceased to be a schoolboy, but he was not yet considered fully fit to undertake the instruction of others.

In the Arts course the first subject studied was grammar, that is, Latin, and the books used were the writings of Priscian, Terence, and Boethius; in Tindale's day readings from Virgil or Ovid were probably added, together with some study of Latin versification. By far the most important subject of study was logic. The textbook was the *Summulae* of Petrus Hispanus, the lecturer also making free use of such commentaries as that of Duns Scotus. Attention was also paid to rhetoric and arithmetic. In these labours four years were spent, and during this time, probably in the course of the second year, the student passed 'responsions.' Until this time, according to Mr. Anstey's account, he was known as *a Sophista generalis*, afterwards as a *question id.* Early in his logical course the student would be encouraged to attend the disputations in the Schools, and Mr. Mullinger thinks that it was only after he had completed his course of logic and was entitled to take part in the disputations that he became *a Sophista generalis*. After this he was allowed to appear as a public disputant, and it seems to have been compulsory for him to take at least two 'responsions' and 'opponencies,' that is, the defensive and offensive parts respectively in two public disputations.

At the end of his fourth year of study he proceeded to the important work of 'determination.' He had first to get six Masters of Arts to testify to his fitness in attainments, character, and age, and they had sometimes, it would seem, to affirm that the appearance and stature of the candidate were satisfactory. Four other Masters of Arts were appointed, whose duty it was to judge this testimony. The six Masters appeared in Congregation before these four, and if their testimony was found satisfactory, the candidate then took an oath that he had finished the needful studies and had passed 'responsions.' It was at this point that the risk of rejection appeared. The ancient practice differed very considerably from the modern. Failure to 'determine' the knotty logical problems propounded did not involve the rejection of the candidate. It may have brought ridicule and disgrace upon him, but it did not prevent him from proceeding to the degree of Master of Arts. The 'plucked' scholar was the one who could not take the oath in the

Congregation of the masters, or whose character was such that he could find no six masters who would bear testimony to his fitness.

Mr. Boase in his Preface to the *Register*, p. viii, thus describes the latter part of a sixteenth-century University course:—

‘In the Lent after a man was admitted to his Bachelor of Arts degree he ‘determined,’ i. e. instead of disputing himself he presided over disputations, and gave out his determination or decision on the questions discussed. The proctors chose two *Collectors*, who distributed the determining bachelors into equal classes and allotted to each of them the School in which he was to determine, on a fixed day, from one o’clock till five o’clock in the afternoon. Each year, after determining, the bachelor had further to dispute as opponent or respondent at Austin disputations (so called because formerly held in the Augustinian monastery), as arranged by similar Collectors, and the questions to be discussed were fixed up on the Schools’ gates. He had also to *read*, i. e. lecture on, certain books in a *cursory* manner (subsidiary to the main lectures) before he could become a licentiate in arts. We have a list (in Anstey’s *Munimenta*, 413) of the books read, which runs thus:—

‘Metaphysics, for one year.

‘Ethics, for four months.

‘Geometry, for five weeks.

‘Algorismus, Sphaera, Computus, eight days apiece.

‘Boethius’ *Arithmetica*, for three weeks.

‘Priscian in the large volume, or Politics, or the Ten Books on Animals (including the books on the movements of Animals), for six weeks.

‘Priscian on the construction of the parts of speech, for one term.

‘The book *Caeli et Mundi*, one term.

‘The book *Meteororum* (Metheororum), one term.

‘The fourth book of the Topics of Boethius, etc.

‘The candidate for the degree of M.A. had further to go round (*circuit*) the Schools and beg the masters to attend his exercises, called Vesperies, the Saturday evening before the final ceremony. When the bachelor, after having been licensed, was finally created master, the Chancellor handed him the *insignia of the degree* (book, hood, and cap), admitted him to teach in the name of the Trinity, and gave him a kiss on his left cheek. He was thus said to *incept* or commence as a master, and the term *Commencement* is still used at Cambridge for what at Oxford is called the *Act*. There were two, and sometimes three, Acts in a year. Different forms were used for the admission to each in different subjects. Thus a Bachelor of Divinity was admitted to read the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, a Bachelor of Music to read the mathematical verses of Boethius, a

Bachelor of Physic the aphorisms *of* Hippocrates, a Bachelor of Civil Law the institutes of Justinian. Thenceforth the master could give the *ordinary* lectures. But for fifteen days he had to walk through the streets in a round cap, not a plaited cap (*capa rotunda* not *vugata*). The new masters had to make presents to the Regents, i.e. the masters of less than two years' standing; and, if they were rich, a feast was expected.'

Through a course of this kind, crowned by a series of formalities like those just described, 'William Tindale, otherwise called Hychins,' had to pass. Of real education, in the modern sense, there was little. A high development of the logical faculty with a dearth of scholarship was all that the Oxford of those days could give. Tindale's opinions upon the value and results of such a course of training are given in his own vigorous style in his *Practice of Prelates*, and are quoted in this volume on pages 294-305.

Of the character of the studies in which these years were in all probability spent, Tindale has left no *very* flattering account. It was an age of change, when a few daring voices were beginning to protest against the ignorance and barbarism that had so long prevailed. A few bold English scholars had ventured to Italy to drink of the pure fountains of revived taste and learning. Greek had been taught within the walls of Oxford before the conclusion of the fifteenth century; and the pure Latinity of the great classical writers of Rome had been held up as a model for imitation instead of the barbarous and corrupt productions of the mediaeval schoolmen. Such daring innovations were not, of course, approved by the great authorities of the University, but were loudly condemned as immoral and heretical. It was of Oxford doubtless, and the teaching which it afforded in his early years, that Tindale subsequently asked in contemptuous scorn, 'Remember ye not how within this thirty years²¹ and far less, and yet dureth to this day, the old barking curs, Duns' Disciples [followers of Duns Scotus], and like draff called Scotists, the children of darkness, raged in every pulpit against Greek, Latin, and Hebrew; and what sorrow the schoolmasters, that taught the true Latin tongue, had with them; some beating the pulpit with their fists for madness, and roaring out with open and foaming mouth, that if there were but one Terence or Virgil in the world, and that same in their sleeves, and a fire before them, they would burn them therein, though it should cost them their lives; affirming that all good learning decayed and was utterly lost, since men gave them unto the Latin tongue²²?'

²¹ This was written in 1530.

²² *Answer to Sir Thomas More: Works*, vol. iii. p. 75.

With such apostles of ignorance controlling the studies of the University, or even exercising any considerable influence upon them, the course of study would have very little of the liberal and humanizing tendency usually ascribed to a University training. Holy Scripture fared as badly at their hands as Virgil and Terence. How men were trained for the Church in the Oxford of the commencement of the sixteenth century Tindale has recorded in a few brief indignant sentences. 'In the Universities they have ordained that no man shall look at the Scripture until he be noselled [nursed or trained] in heathen learning eight or nine years, and armed with false principles, with which he is clean shut out of the understanding of the Scripture. And at his first coming unto University, he is sworn that he shall not defame the University, whatsoever he seeth. And when he taketh first degree, he is sworn that he shall hold none opinions condemned by the Church; but what such opinions be, that he shall not know. And then, when they be admitted to study divinity, because the Scripture is locked up with such false expositions, *and with false principles of natural philosophy*, that they cannot enter in, they go about the outside, and dispute all their lives about words and vain opinions, pertaining as much unto the healing of a man's heel, as health of his soul: provided yet alway, lest God give His singular grace unto any person, that none may preach except he be admitted of the bishops²³.'

Tindale writes in a vein of vehement indignation; but Sir Thomas More in his younger days would scarcely have ventured to deny the charge, and Erasmus abundantly confirms it. In such hands theology was no longer a divine and ennobling study, but a wretched battle-field of the most useless and most contemptible wrangling. 'Theology,' in the words of Erasmus, 'once venerable and full of majesty, had become almost dumb, poor, and in rags.' The true purpose of Holy Scripture had been almost entirely lost sight of; and the Sacred Books had been persistently employed for purposes for which they were not designed. The Bible makes known to men the way of salvation, it reveals the character and will of God, the duty and destiny of man; but the schoolmen accepted it as a complete revelation of the whole range of possible human knowledge. They overlooked in it 'the Way, the Truth, the Life'; their search was directed rather to discovering expressions which might be adduced to decide perplexing questions in science and philosophy. It was an inevitable result of this total misapprehension that the Bible itself soon ceased to be the supreme subject of study; it was of less importance than the theories of the great speculative divines of the schools, Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas. Theology ceased to be practical; and theologians spent their energies in endless discussions, sometimes marvellously subtle, often

²³ *Practice of Prelates; Works*, vol. ii. p. 291.

extremely frivolous, occasionally grossly indecent and blasphemous, such,' says Erasmus, 'as pious ears can hardly bear to hear,' but in scarcely a single instance of any avail for the guidance of life. The whole system, in fact, with all its merits and demerits, has been admirably described by Lord Bacon. 'The schoolmen,' says the great critic, 'having subtle and strong capacities, abundance of leisure, and but small variety of reading, their minds being shut up in a few authors as their bodies were in the cells of their monasteries; they, with infinite agitation of wit, spun out of a small quantity of matter, those laborious webs of learning which are extant in their books. For the human mind, if it acts upon matter and contemplates the nature of things and the works of God, operates according to the stuff and is limited thereby; but if it works upon itself as the spider does, then it has no end, but produces cobwebs of learning, admirable indeed for the fineness of the thread, but of no substance or profit²⁴.'

In this unprofitable scholastic treadmill, Tindale, like the other students, his contemporaries, was compelled to employ the strength of his clear intellect, grinding at the subtle syllogisms and cunningly contrived dilemmas and logical snares by which the Scotists and the Thomists defended their own opinions, or attacked those of their antagonists.

There were signs, however, that this 'reign of Chaos and old Night' was verging to its close. Not long before Tindale had entered the University, that great movement for the revival of learning, which had awakened Italy to intellectual life, had begun to make itself felt in Oxford. Grocyn, Linacre, and William Latimer had returned from Italy with sufficient knowledge of the Greek tongue to be able to instruct their fellow countrymen, and even to attract the famous Erasmus as to a pure fountain of classical learning. A better voice also than that of pagan Greece or Rome was beginning to be heard in the University. Grocyn and Linacre seemed, with the love of classical literature, to have imbibed the spirit of the old heathen philosophy, and had no spiritual wants beyond what Cicero and Plato could abundantly supply; but a new scholar had appeared on the scene, whose voice invited men not to the Castalian spring, but to the pure river of the Water of Life which had been so long neglected.

In 1496, John Colet commenced to lecture on the Epistles of St. Paul; not after the traditional scholastic method, which consisted mainly in repeating the conjectural comments of former interpreters, but using St. Paul's own words as his text; and rejecting all spiritualizing and allegorizing systems of interpretation he endeavoured to ascertain the plain meaning of the Apostle's language. Under his exposition the words of the Epistles again became full of life, were again felt

²⁴ Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, Book I.

to be at once the word of God, and the word of a living man: oracles of Divine wisdom, yet instinct with all the warmth of the great Apostle of the Gentiles. Colet had travelled into Italy, like Grocyn and Linacre, and like them had studied Greek there; but his was no cold pagan spirit, he devoted himself above all to the study of Holy Scripture; his chief aim in all his studies was to qualify himself for the glorious work of proclaiming the Gospel, and he returned to his native land animated with all the enthusiasm of a young evangelist. It has been conjectured that the impassioned eloquence of the famous Dominican preacher, Jerome Savonarola, had touched the heart of Colet when at Florence, and that he determined to imitate in his own country the example of that bold Reformer, whom Florence still reverences as an apostolical man, though he perished as a heretic at the stake. However this may be, it is certain that from the return of Colet to Oxford we may date the commencement of the movement in the English Universities towards the reformation of religion. Colet himself was, not without very good reason, suspected of teaching what was esteemed heresy, and even his elevation to the high position of Dean of St. Paul's did not entirely save him from the customary risk to which all suspected heretics were then exposed.

The lectures of Colet on St. Paul excited a great sensation in the University. The lecturer had, according to Erasmus, 'a happy art of expressing with ease what others could hardly express with the greatest labour'; to listen to him was like listening to Plato; and his lectures were thronged by all classes in the University, from heads of houses down to the freshest undergraduate. His words were eagerly canvassed, and opinions were widely divided upon them; the old shaking their heads at the youthful lecturer who spoke disrespectfully of Scotus and Thomas Aquinas, whilst the younger members were inclined to sympathize with the boldness and novelty of the interpretations advanced. Among the earliest of Colet's auditors were two whose fame was destined to eclipse that of their master Thomas More, and Erasmus of Rotterdam. Congenial tastes, similar temperaments, and enthusiastic love of learning speedily drew the master and his illustrious scholars closely together in an intimate friendship which death alone dissolved. The letters of Erasmus show to what a large extent his religious opinions were influenced by his intercourse with Colet; and as Erasmus became subsequently the great literary autocrat of Europe, whose writings moulded the thought and belief of half Christendom, the influence of Colet was thus propagated on a most extensive scale, and, indirectly, contributed very largely to that movement in favour of a reformation of religion in life and doctrine which is the great starting-point of modern history.

Neither Colet nor Erasmus ever very heartily sympathized with the popular desire for a reformation, and both were constitutionally weak, and unequal to

the labours which the reformation of a nation required. When the movement had spread beyond the Universities and the learned to the common people, a stronger mind and a more robust frame were demanded, and Colet and Erasmus gave place to the more masculine energy of Luther. But it would be ungrateful to overlook or to undervalue the essential service which they rendered to the cause of religion, especially in England; and if the proverb, 'Erasmus laid the egg and Luther hatched it,' may be accepted as no inappropriate description of the history of the Reformation on the Continent of Europe, it may with even more truth be asserted that Colet and Erasmus gave the first impulses in England to that mighty movement which Tindale and Latimer and Cranmer carried forward to its accomplishment.

Tindale entered the University of Oxford in the course of the year 1510, and as Colet continued to lecture till 1505, when he was made Dean of St. Paul's, it is not improbable that Tindale's early days there were spent under the influence of that awakened spirit which Colet's lectures had excited. If he had come to Oxford, predisposed from the teaching of his parents, or from his own reflection, to receive with suspicion the traditional theology of the schools, we may imagine how cordially he would welcome the new system of exposition which Colet had inaugurated.

Tindale himself is silent on this interesting period of his spiritual life. There can be little doubt that it was during his stay at the University that he abandoned the ancient orthodoxy of the Church, and began to adopt those opinions of which he was through life so able and so persevering an advocate; but we cannot in his case trace the progress of his conversion. The lectures of Colet may have been instrumental in pouring true light into his awakened soul; or he may have found it in the careful perusal of those living words of St. Paul, which Colet had so industriously disinterred from beneath the rubbish of five centuries of scholastic commentators.

One thing is certain from his life, the seed, however or whenever sown, took deep root in his mind. More than most of the early English Reformers, Tindale seems to have subjected all his religious beliefs to a searching examination, and to have applied to them with rigorous logic the standard of judgement which he found in Holy Scripture. His progress was more rapid and definite than that of his great contemporaries, Latimer and Cranmer; and he never exhibited the same reluctance to abandon opinions or practices which had nothing to plead in their favour but custom and the practice of ages. The great English Reformers were as cautious and conservative as was compatible with a real desire for a reformation; in Tindale, however, almost from the outset of his career as a public teacher, there is to be noted a clearness, a boldness, and withal a freedom from

the trammels of ecclesiastical tradition, which produce in his reader's mind a profound admiration of the vigour and originality of his intellect.

What reason induced Tindale to leave Oxford for Cambridge must be left entirely to conjecture. Foxe's words are almost whimsically vague, and suggest nothing; 'spying his time,' says the Martyrologist, 'he removed from thence to the University of Cambridge.' It has been conjectured that his removal from Oxford may have been a necessary piece of prudence on his part, in order to escape the suspicion of the authorities of the University. The heads of houses may have learned, not at all to their gratification, that Tindale was 'privily reading to certain students and fellows in Magdalen College some parcel of divinity, instructing them in the knowledge and truth of the Scriptures.' The lectures of Colet had been a grievous offence to the champions of the traditional scholastic orthodoxy; suspicions were loudly expressed of the dangerous tendency of the 'new learning'; and Tindale may have found that he could no longer carry on in safety his privy lectures on the Scriptures. On all sides the ecclesiastical authorities were beginning to be alarmed with the heretical opinions that were abroad. Colet himself, notwithstanding his high position and his powerful connexion, had been in no small danger. He had not only founded and endowed St. Paul's School for the study of pure Latinity—a suspicious circumstance in itself—but he had also ventured to translate the Lord's Prayer into the English language, with comments for the benefit of the unlearned; and the Bishop of London, Fitz James, an ignorant bigot, was anxious to have the dean punished as a heretic.

Both Tindale and Latimer concur in representing Colet's danger as imminent; and but for the esteem of the king, and the friendship of Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury, who, as a great admirer of Erasmus, would naturally befriend him, Colet might have met the usual fate of a heretic.

Nor was this the whole of Colet's offending. As Dean of St. Paul's, he had introduced the habit of preaching regularly in the cathedral church, not selecting his texts at random or from the lessons for the day, but choosing some continuous subject, such as one of the Gospels, the Creed, or the Lord's Prayer; his audience was enormous, many persons travelling miles to hear him; and his language was extremely bold. He disapproved of images, auricular confession and purgatory, and censured the vices and ignorance of the clergy. And to crown all his offences, he was appointed to preach before Convocation at its assembly in 1512, and he pronounced on that occasion an address which, for the plainness with which he exposed the greed and carelessness of the clergy, and especially of the bishops and dignitaries in whose hearing he was speaking, is excelled only by the famous sermon of Latimer before the Convocation of 1535. Rumours of heresy began to be whispered in several dioceses. The Bishops of London and

Lincoln especially found their dioceses seriously infested with heretics; and their inquiries disclosed to them that the sermons of Colet had largely contributed to produce dissatisfaction with the teaching of the Church. Oxford was then in the diocese of Lincoln; and it may not unreasonably be conjectured that the increased diligence in the search for heretical tendencies extended itself to that University where Colet had taught with such distinguished ability, and that this may have induced Tindale to leave Oxford and repair to Cambridge.

At Cambridge Tindale would still be surrounded by some of the same influences that the lectures of Colet had diffused at Oxford; for Erasmus had largely imbibed the spirit of Colet, and the lectures delivered by him some years before at Cambridge not only introduced into that University a fresh enthusiasm in the study of Greek, but also inaugurated a still more important reform in the current theology of the place, asserting the supremacy of Holy Scripture, and ridiculing the theories of the schoolmen and their fantastic systems of interpretation. Tindale was a diligent reader of the works of the great Dutch scholar. It may have been the teaching of Erasmus that first suggested to him his noble design of translating the Word of God into the native language of his countrymen. It is certainly a singular coincidence that Tindale first intimated his great purpose almost in the very words of his former instructor. 'I totally dissent,' Erasmus said in his Exhortation, 'from those who are unwilling that the Sacred Scriptures, translated into the vulgar tongue, should be read by private individuals, as if Christ had taught such subtle doctrines that they can with difficulty be understood by a very few theologians, or as if the strength of the Christian religion lay in men's ignorance of it. The mysteries of kings it were perhaps better to conceal, but Christ wishes His mysteries to be published as widely as possible. I would wish even all women to read the Gospel and the Epistles of St. Paul. *And I wish they were translated into all languages of all people, that they might be read and known, not merely by the Scotch and the Irish, but even by the Turks and the Saracens. I wish that the husbandman 'nay sing parts of them at his plough, that the weaver may warble then at his shuttle, that the traveller may with their narratives beguile the weariness of the way.*' When Tindale avowed his intention of translating the Word of God into English, it was, as we shall see, in terms which were in truth the echo of these noble words of Erasmus.

Tindale's residence at Cambridge served some other purpose than merely to mature his knowledge of Greek and polite Latinity. He was there, according to Foxe, further ripened in the knowledge of God's Word.' This was in all probability the result of his own careful study and reflection, aided by that Divine Teacher whose continual help he doubtless implored. Something also may have been due to intercourse with a pious fellow student. Bilney, we know, was

contemporary with Tindale at Cambridge, to whatever period Tindale's residence in the University may be assigned; and from the allusions which he makes to Bilney it seems probable that Tindale knew that gentle Reformer. The date and the story of Bilney's conversion are well known from his own beautiful letters to Tunstal. For years he had been anxiously seeking some remedy for the uneasiness that filled his soul with dismay; he had tried pardons and penances; and at length he 'had heard speak of Jesus,' and forthwith he knew in himself that he was healed. This was, as he has told us, immediately after the first appearance of the New Testament of Erasmus, that is, in 1516; and it seems exceedingly probable that between the year of his own conversion and the time when Tindale left Cambridge, Bilney, who was an active though an unobtrusive proselytizer, may have come into contact with Tindale, and that their mutual intercourse may have contributed in both to a deeper love for the Word of God and a riper knowledge of it.

Of the many illustrious contemporaries prosecuting their studies around him, and who were destined in another generation to play so conspicuous a part in the history of England, Tindale makes no mention; and he could not, of course, have divined their future career.

Cranmer he knew only as a quiet, hard-working student; Gardiner was a clever college-tutor; Latimer was a grave and upright man, a great admirer of the schoolmen, and a determined opponent of Greek and of the study of Holy Scripture. It may be doubted, also, whether Tindale was in any way associated with that group of younger disciples whom Bilney afterwards drew around him, and who were subsequently selected by Wolsey to be transferred to his new college at Oxford. Tindale himself is said to have been chosen by the cardinal's agents; but long before the magnificent foundation was ready for the reception of its inmates, he had not only left the University, but had bid farewell to his native country. John Frith, the future companion of Tindale in his exile, is commonly said to have been his contemporary at Cambridge, and is believed there 'to have received the seed of the Gospel' from him; but it is scarcely probable that they could have met at the University. Frith had just completed his terms for Bachelor of Arts in December, 1525, and could not, therefore, have entered the University earlier than the commencement of 1522; and if Tindale had not then left Cambridge, his stay afterwards must have been so short as to render the traditionary intimacy with Frith highly improbable.

Long before the period at which we have now arrived, Tindale had made his choice of the profession to which his life was to be consecrated. As usual, however, no record of the time or place of his ordination has yet been discovered. It is not very likely that he was ordained in the diocese of his native place, that

much neglected diocese of Worcester, which Cardinal Wolsey professed to be administering under the authority of its non-resident Italian prelate. It is more probable that he was admitted into orders at Lincoln, for the University of Oxford was within the limits of that huge Mercian bishopric. One biographer, indeed, supposes that he has discovered both the time and place of Tindale's ordination. The Register of Warham, then Bishop of London, records that at a general ordination, held in St. Bartholomew's, Smithfield, by his suffragan Thomas, Bishop of Pavada, *William Tindale* of the diocese of Carlisle was, by letters dimissory, ordained priest to the nunnery of Lambley. This took place on Saturday, March 11, 1503, and it has been maintained that here we have the official record of the ordination of the future martyr. But according to ecclesiastical precedent, the person who was ordained priest in March, 1503, could not have been born later than 1478; but this was two years *before* the birth of Sir Thomas More, and is, therefore, incompatible with what we know of Tindale's age.

The same biographer (George Offor, in the preface to his reprint of Tindale's octavo New Testament) has also imagined that Tindale, subsequently to his appointment as priest in Lambley, entered the monastery of the Observants at Greenwich. This suggestion is founded upon an inscription in a book preserved in the library of St. Paul's Cathedral; which declares that the book belonged to John Tindale, and was given by him to the monastery in Greenwich on the day that his son *William* took the vows in 1508. There is no doubt that Tindale makes very frequent allusions to the Observants of Greenwich, and shows himself curiously well informed in their affairs; and there is also an expression in one of Tindale's works which, to a hasty reader, seems to admit that he was 'a brother of Greenwich'²⁵. These circumstances, however, which seem to countenance the theory, can be most satisfactorily explained; and, in truth, it is inconceivable that any one who has read Sir Thomas More's works with reasonable care should for a moment believe that Tindale had ever taken the vows of a monk. On the subject of the perpetual obligation of monastic vows Sir Thomas More entertained very strong opinions, which he never loses any opportunity of expressing; and as in all his abuse of Tindale he never once calls him *friar or apostate*, but carefully distinguishes him from the friars, it may be accepted as indisputable that the William Tindale who joined the Observants was not the William Tindale who translated the New Testament.

²⁵ In the Preface to *The Wicked Mammon* he speaks of 'Jerome a brother of Greenwich also,' which *seems to* imply that Tindale was a brother of Greenwich, though the context makes it clear that the meaning is, a brother of Greenwich as well as Roye, previously mentioned, not as well as the writer.

The same uncertainty that we have so often had occasion to regret, rests upon the reasons which induced Tindale to leave Cambridge. A scholar, superior to most of his contemporaries, and conscious of more than ordinary abilities, he might have found in the University a congenial residence, or might, not unreasonably, have hoped for some sphere of labour proportioned to his capacities. He left Cambridge, however, in the very humble capacity of tutor to the children of 'Master Walsh, a knight of Gloucestershire.' The precise date of his thus leaving Cambridge cannot be assigned; but as his eldest pupil was not born till 1516, the latest date that is compatible with other ascertained facts is evidently the most probable. The tradition of Tindale's preaching in Bristol in 1520 will be subsequently shown to be a mere baseless conjecture; and, on the whole, we are inclined to assign the close of 1521 as the date of his leaving the University.

Here, therefore, ends Tindale's preparatory training. His academic career, with its learned leisure and its mimic warfare of tongues, was finished; henceforth he had to bear his share in the real conflict of life. It was, perhaps, an eager desire to mingle in the real duties of life that induced him to turn his back upon the leisure of the University; it was certainly neither any flaw in his character, nor any want of appreciation of the studies of the place; for Sir Thomas More, his great antagonist, allows that before he left England, 'Tyndale was well known for a man of right good living, studious, and well learned in Scripture.' Of such a man the University had much need; and for his work, the calm seclusion of a seat of learning might seem to be specially adapted; but the stern discipline of life was wanted to qualify him for his task. Not surrounded by books and friends in the learned retirement of the ancient halls of Oxford or Cambridge, but an exile in a foreign land, hunted by the untiring animosity of his enemies, was Tindale to accomplish that glorious work for which England owes him an eternal debt of gratitude²⁶.

²⁶ Of his personal history at the Universities, Tindale mentions only one trifling fact, that he had a pupil, *John Tisen*, who subsequently entered the service of Tunstal, and whose 'red beard and black-reddish head' Tindale subsequently saw in Antwerp, not without suspicion that he was a secret emissary sent to apprehend him. See Tindale's letter to Frith under the year 1532, Mr. Boase suggests that the entry in the Oxford Register, 1524, 'Tyson or Tison, John, supplicated for B.C.L. 18 July 1524, admitted 1 August, supplicated for B.CAN.L. December 1530,' may refer to this man.