

William Tindale

A Biography

Being a Contribution to the Early History
of the English Bible

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Popular Edition, Revised

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4 Bouverie Street; 65 St. Paul's Churchyard, E.C.

1904

CHAPTER XI

ATTEMPTS TO SEIZE TINDALE: HIS RENEWED WANDERINGS: CONTINUED
LITERARY LABOURS: FRITH ARRESTED AND MARTYRED IN ENGLAND:
TINDALE'S LETTERS TO FRITH: HIS FINAL REMOVAL TO ANTWERP.

A.D. 1532-1533.

THE position of Tindale in those days of ill-defined international law was at once anomalous and dangerous. An exile from England, he was still a subject of Henry; and, had there been any good understanding between the English King and the Emperor, Tindale might have been seized and delivered into the hands of his own monarch to be dealt with according to law. Fortunately for Tindale, the friendly feeling, which had for many years subsisted between two sovereigns allied by marriage and a common policy, had been converted into mutual jealousy, by the agitation of Henry's divorce. In these circumstances Charles was not likely to lend any aid towards the apprehension of Tindale; but might rather be expected to protect one who was an annoyance to his rival. At the same time it was perfectly competent for Henry, by force or by fraud, to gain possession of this exiled subject, whose writings made him so formidable a power in England. In spite, therefore, of the growing dissensions between Henry and the Emperor, which threatened every day to break out into open warfare, Tindale knew that it was necessary to use every precaution in order to secure his personal safety. We have seen the care which he exercised in concealing his residence even from an envoy so friendly as Vaughan; and as he was probably not uninformed of the change which had come over Henry's intentions towards him, he had no resource left but to defeat all further violence by eluding observation. This was not on the whole very difficult to do; and that Tindale was perfectly successful, will be apparent from the dispatch of the agent, to whom the odious task of apprehending him had been entrusted. Sir Thomas Elyot, for whom Vaughan had entreated Cromwell's sympathy, had at length received instructions from Henry, and cheered by this recognition into an outburst of grateful loyalty, he thus writes from Ratisbon, where he had gone, in the company of Cranmer, not yet archbishop, to be present at the assembly of the German Diet¹:—

'My duty remembered, with most humble thanks unto your Grace [that it] pleased you so benevolently to remember me unto the King's High[ness], concerning my return into England. Albeit the King willeth me by [his] Grace's

¹ *Vitellius*, B. xxi. fol. 58 of the new notation. The dispatch is addressed to the Duke of Norfolk: he had previously written to the King, but that dispatch, like most of those so addressed, has not yet been recovered. The words in brackets are, as usual, supplied from conjecture, the MS. being burnt in those places.

letters, to remain at Brussels some space of time *for the apprehension of Tyn-dale*, which somewhat minisheth my hope of soon return: *considering that like as he is in wit movable, semblably so is his person uncertain to come by: and as far as I can perceive, hearing of the King's diligence in the apprehension of him, he withdraweth him into such places where he thinketh to be farthest out of danger.* In me there shall lack none endeavour. Finally, as I am all the King's except my soul, so shall I endure all that shall be his pleasure, employing my poor life gladly, in that which may be to his honour or wealth of his realm.

'Pleaseth it your Grace, according as I have written to the King's Highness, the Emperor being yet sore grieved with a fall from his horse, keepeth himself so close that Mr. Cranmer and I can have none access to his majesty, which almost grieveth me as much as the Emperor's fall grieveth him. I have promised to the King to write to your Grace the order of things in the town of Nurenburg specially concerning the faith [i.e. an account of the religious practices observed by the Reformed]. But first I will rehearse some other towns, as they lay in our way. The city of Worms [Tindale's former residence] for the more part and almost the whole, is possessed with Lutherans and Jews; the residue is indifferent to be shortly the one or the other. Truth it is that the bishop keepeth well his name of *Episcopus*, which is in English an *overseer*; and is in the case that overseers of testaments be in England; for he shall have leave to *look* so that he meddle not. Yet sometime men calleth him *overseen*, that is, *drunk*, when he neither knoweth what he doeth, nor what he ought to do. The city of Spire, as I hear say, keepeth yet their faith well, except some say, there be many do err in taking so largely this article, *sanctorum communionem* [i.e. the communion of saints], which hath induced more charity than may stand with honesty [in fact, as he goes on to describe, the inhabitants were rather free and easy in their conduct; or, as the marginal note expresses it, 'the city was full of wantonness']. All towns ensuing be rather worse than better; but I pass them over at this time. Touching Nurenburg, it is the most proper town, and best-ordered public weal that ever I beheld. . . . Although I had a chaplain, yet could not I be suffered to have him to sing mass, but was constrained to hear theirs, which is but one in a church, and that is celebrated in form following. The priest, in vestments after our manner, singeth every thing in Latin as we use, omitting suffrage; the Epistle he readeth in Latin. In the meantime the subdeacon goeth into the pulpit, and readeth to the people the Epistle *in their vulgar*. After, they peruse other things as our priests do. Then the priest readeth *softly* the Gospel in Latin; in the mean space the deacon goeth into the pulpit and readeth *aloud* the Gospel in the Almayne [i.e. German] tongue. Mr. Cranmer said it was showed to him that in the Epistles and Gospels they kept not the order that we do, but do peruse every day one chapter of the New Testament: afterwards the priest and the choir do sing the *Credo* as we do.'

The rest of Elyot's letter does not concern us, and need not be quoted; the

description of Nuremburg has been given mainly because it is believed that Tindale himself visited that quaint old-fashioned city not very long after the envoy had left it. Elyot's attempts to apprehend Tindale were perfectly futile; he tried, by bribery, to ascertain the Reformer's lurking-place, but in vain; and the only other dispatch in which he makes any allusion to this part of his commission is written in a tone of mortified disappointment, which the reader will probably not peruse without a smile of malicious satisfaction. Writing to Cromwell in the month of November of this same year, 1532, he bursts out into a vein of extravagant flattery eminently characteristic of the man.

'When I first heard that his Grace intended to pass the seas,' says he, 'fear of the great adventure of his most royal person so attacked my heart [it was of a voyage across the Channel from Dover to Boulogne that the envoy speaks in these exaggerated words], that since, unto this day, it hath bereft me the more part of my sleep.' He had been comforted, however, and his sleep had been restored to him by the joyful intelligence of Henry's safe return from the prodigious voyage of thirty miles, 'of which,' says he, with incredible fawning, 'I was more glad than of anything that ever happened unto myself.' Having thus attempted to propitiate the favour of Cromwell, he proceeded to what was the real purpose of his letter, to complain that in his embassy abroad he had spent far more money than he had received, and had seriously run into debt. 'I gave many rewards,' he adds, enumerating the various sources of his losses, 'partly to the emperor's servants to get knowledge, partly to such as by whose means *I trusted to apprehend Tyndale, according to the King's commandment*².'

Tindale was still earnestly bent on the prosecution of his great design of providing his countrymen with an exposition of Holy Scripture, free from the allegorical fancies and the traditional interpretations which had so long obscured the true meaning. His Exposition of the Epistles of St. John had already appeared in 1531; and this year he issued a further and far more important instalment, an *Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*; a sermon which he truly declares [to be 'the key and the door of the Scripture, and the restoring again of Moses' law corrupt by Scribes and Pharisees,' as the Exposition was 'the restoring again of Christ's law corrupt by the papists'³]. These words, which formed the title prefixed to the Exposition, sufficiently indicate the polemical tone which was likely to predominate in the book. It was in those days unhappily inevitable, that every exposition of Scripture must be more or less controversial. It is so at every period of Reformation, at every epoch when the human mind, long bound down by tradition and authority, dares to assert its own freedom and independence. In Tindale's own phraseology, 'the Scribes and Pharisees, those wicked and spiteful Philistines, had stopped and filled up the wells of Abraham

² *Chapter House Papers*, vol. x.

³ Such is the title on what I believe to be a copy of the original edition.

with the earth of their false expositions . . . with the thorns and bushes of their Pharisaical glosses they had stopped up the narrow way and strait gate [so] that few could find them.’ Christ had in His ministry ‘digged again the wells of Abraham,’ and ‘weeded out the thorns and bushes,’ amidst manifold opposition and condemnation from the great dignities in Church and State of His day; and now once more the same function fell to be performed by Tindale and others who had penetrated through all obstacles to the living wells of Scripture.

This consideration has been too much overlooked by those who take umbrage at the strong polemical tone which pervades the writings of the Reformers. In an age of unfettered liberty of speech, an expositor may perhaps appropriately develop his own views of Scriptural interpretation without attacking those of others; but at a time when no liberty of speech was tolerated, when by Imperial edict any man in the Low Countries who wrote or printed any book on any subject whatever without licence from the authorities, that is to say, from the bishop, was exposed to the penalty of a public whipping, and was, besides, to be branded or to lose an eye at the discretion of the judge⁴; when in England any one who dared to impugn the teaching of the Church in any particular, in public or in private, or who presumed to read any so-called heretical book or even the Holy Scriptures in English, did so at the peril of his goods, his freedom, or his life: at such a time every exposition which was not merely the repetition of the old traditional *shibboleths* was of necessity polemical.

Tindale’s *Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* is the ablest of all his expository works, distinguished by all his customary clearness, and by a breadth and liberality of view which some writers seem not to have recognized as existing amongst the early Reformers. But of these characteristics Tindale’s own words are better proofs than any assertions of a biographer.

As in some of his previous works, we can discover in the Exposition traces of the influence of his great German contemporary. In this same year, 1532, Luther had published in German expository sermons on the same theme, and it is quite clear that Tindale was acquainted with Luther’s work, and used it in the composition of his own Exposition. George Joye, indeed, in his spiteful *Apology*, declares that Tindale was wont to praise his own Exposition in such extravagant language that his ‘ears glowed for shame to hear him,’ whilst it was in reality ‘Luther that made it, Tyndale only but translating and powdering it here and there with his own fantasies⁵’; but on this point we are able to judge for ourselves by comparing the two treatises; and a careful examination shows that while occasional verbal coincidences occur, sufficient to demonstrate that Tindale had Luther’s German work before him as he wrote, there is no real foundation for Joye’s ill-natured insinuation.

⁴ Brandt’s *History of the Reformation in the Low Countries*.

⁵ Joye’s *Apology*: Arber’s reprint, p. 42.

The tone of the work is sufficiently indicated in the following paragraphs from the Prologue:—

‘The Church of Christ is the multitude of all them that believe in Christ for the remission of sin; and of a thankfulness for that mercy, love the law of God purely and without glosses; and, of hate they have to the sin of this world, long for the life to come. This is the Church that cannot err damnably; nor any long time; nor all of them: but as soon as any question ariseth, the truth of God’s promise stirreth up one or other to teach them the truth of everything needful to salvation out of God’s Word; and lighteneth the hearts of the other true members to see the same, and to consent thereto. . . . To believe in Christ’s blood for the remission of sin, and purchasing of all the good promises that help to the life to come; and to love the law; and to long for the life to come; is the inward baptism of the soul, the baptism that only [i.e. alone] availeth in the sight of God; the new generation [i.e. new birth] and image of Christ; the only key also to bind and loose sinners; the touchstone to try all doctrines; the lantern and light that scattereth and expelleth the mist and darkness of all hypocrisy, and a preservative against all error and heresy; the mother of all good works; the earnest of everlasting life, and title whereby we challenge our inheritance. . . . If thou wilt be sure that thy faith be perfect, then examine thyself whether thou love the law. And in like manner, if thou wilt know whether thou love the law aright, then examine thyself whether thou believe in Christ only for the remission of sin, and obtaining the promises made in the Scripture. And even so, compare thy hope of the life to come unto faith and love, and to hating the sin of this life; which hate the love to the law engendereth in thee. And if they accompany not one another, all three together, then be sure that all is but hypocrisy⁶.’

Many isolated passages might be selected from the Exposition which would admirably illustrate the various features exhibited in the work; the reader will, however, prefer to see a continuous extract, as a more genuine representation of its general character and execution. The following is, therefore, selected as a fair specimen of Tindale’s style as an expositor:—

ST. MATTHEW V. 13.

“Ye be the salt of the earth: but if the salt be waxen unsavoury, what can be salted therewith? It is henceforth nothing worth, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”

‘The office of an apostle and true preacher is to salt, not only the corrupt manners and conversation of earthly people, but also the rotten heart within, and all that springeth out thereof: their natural reason, their will, their understanding

⁶ Tindale’s *Exposition*, pp. 12-14.

and wisdom; yea, and their faith and belief, and all that they have imagined without God's Word concerning righteousness, justifying, satisfaction and serving of God. And the nature of salt is to bite, fret, and make smart. And the sick patients of the world are marvellous impatient, so that, though with great pain they can suffer their gross sins to be rebuked under a fashion, as in a parable afar off; yet, to have their righteousness, their holiness, and serving of God and His saints, disallowed, improved [i. e. disproved], and condemned for damnable and devilish, that may they not abide: insomuch that thou must leave thy salting or else be prepared to suffer again; even to be called a railer, seditious, a maker of discord, and a troubler of the common peace; yea, a schismatic, and an heretic also; and to be lied upon, that thou hast done and said that thou never thoughtest, and then to be called *coram nobis* [before us, i. e. to be summoned for trial], and to sing a new song [recant], and forswear salting, or else to be sent after thy fellows that are gone before, and the way thy Master went.

'True preaching is a salting that stirreth up persecution; and an office that no man is meet for, save he that is seasoned himself before with poverty in spirit, softness, meekness, patience, mercifulness, pureness of heart, and hunger of righteousness, and looking for persecution also; and hath all his hope, comfort, and solace in the blessing only, and in no worldly thing.

'Nay, will some say, a man might preach long enough without persecution, yea, and get favour too, if he would not meddle with the pope, bishops, prelates, and holy ghostly people [i.e. monks] that live in contemplation and solitariness, nor with great men of the world. I answer, true preaching is salting; and all that is corrupt must be salted: and those persons are of all other most corrupt, and therefore may not be left untouched.

'The pope's pardons must be rebuked; the abuse of the mass, of the sacraments, and of all the ceremonies, must be rebuked and salted. And selling of merits, and of prayers, must be salted. The abuse of fasting and of pilgrimage must be salted. All idolatry and false faith must be rebuked. And those friars that teach men to believe in St. Francis' coat, how that they shall never come in hell or purgatory, if they be buried therein, may not be passed over with silence.

'The pain and grief of salting made monks flee to their cloister. Nay (say they), we went thither of pure devotion to pray for the people. Yea, but for all that, the more ye increase, and the more ye multiply your prayers, the worse the world is. That is not our fault (say they), but theirs; that they dispose not themselves, but continue in sin, and so are unapt to receive the influence of our prayers. O hypocrites! if ye were true salt and had good hearts and loved your neighbours (if dead men be neighbours to them that are alive), and would come out of your dens, and take pain to salt and season them, ye should make a great many of them so apt that your prayers might take effect. But now seeing, as ye say, they be so unsavoury that your prayers be to them unprofitable, though their goods be to you profitable, and yet ye have no compassion to come out and salt

them, it is manifest that ye love not them, but theirs; and that ye pray not for them, but, under the colour of praying, mock them and rob them.

‘Finally, salt, which is the true understanding of the law, of faith, and of the intent of all works, hath in you lost her virtue; neither be there any so unsavoury in the world as ye are, nor any that so sore kick against true salting as ye: and therefore are ye to be cast out, and trodden under foot, and despised of all men, by the righteous judgement of God.

“If salt have lost its saltness, it is good for nothing but to be trodden under foot of men.” That is, if the preacher, which for his doctrine is called salt, have lost the nature of salt, that is to say, his sharpness in rebuking all unrighteousness, all natural reason, natural wit and understanding, and all trust and confidence in whatsoever it be, save in the blood of Christ; he is condemned of God, and disallowed of all them that cleave to the truth. In what case stand they then that have benefices and preach not? Verily, though they stand at the altar, yet they are excommunicate and cast out of the living Church of Almighty God.

‘And what if the doctrine be not true salt? Verily then is it to be trodden under foot; as must all wearish [i.e. tasteless] and unsavoury ceremonies which have lost their significations, and not only teach not, and are become unprofitable and do no more service to man; but also have obtained authority as God in the heart of man, that man serveth them, and putteth in them the trust and confidence that he should put in God his Maker through Jesus Christ his redeemer. Are the institutions of man better than God’s? Yea, are God’s ordinances better now than in the old time? The prophets trod under foot, and defied the temple of God, and the sacrifices of God, and all ceremonies that God had ordained, with fastings and prayings, and all that the people perverted and committed idolatry with. We have as strait a commandment, to salt and rebuke all ungodliness, as had the prophets. Will they then have their ceremonies honourably spoken of? Then let them restore them to the right use, and put the salt of the true meaning and significations of them to them again. But as they be now used, none that loveth Christ can speak honourably of them. What true Christian man can give honour to that that taketh all honour from Christ? Who can give honour to that that slayeth the soul of his brother, and robbeth his heart of that trust and confidence, which he should give to his Lord that hath bought him with His blood?’

VERSES 14-16.

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and so giveth it light to all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and praise your Father that is in heaven.”

‘Christ goeth forth and describeth the office of an apostle and true preacher by another likeness; as he called them before the salt of the earth, even so here

the light of the world: signifying thereby that all the doctrine, all the wisdom, and high knowledge of the world,—whether it were philosophy of natural conclusions, of manners and virtue, or of laws of righteousness,—whether it were of the Holy Scripture and of God Himself,—was yet but a darkness, until the doctrine of His apostles came; that is to say, until the knowledge of Christ came, how that He is the sacrifice for our sins, our satisfaction, our peace, atonement and redemption, our life thereto, and resurrection. Whatsoever holiness, wisdom, virtue, perfectness, or righteousness, is in the world among men, howsoever perfect and holy they appear; yet is all damnable darkness, except the right knowledge of Christ's blood be there first, to justify the heart, before all other holiness.

'Another conclusion: As "a city built on a hill cannot be hid," no more can the light of Christ's Gospel. Let the world rage as much as it will, yet it will shine on their sore eyes, whether they be content or no.

'Another conclusion: As "men light not a candle to whelm it under a bushel, but to put it on a candlestick, to light all that are in the house "; even so the light of Christ's Gospel may not be hid, nor made a several [i.e. isolated] thing, as though it pertained to some certain holy persons only. Nay, it is the light of the whole world, and pertaineth to all men; and therefore may not be made several. It is a madness that divers men say, "The lay people may not know it ": except they can prove that the lay people be not of the world. Moreover it will not be hid; but as the lightning, that breaketh out of the clouds, shineth over all, even so doth the Gospel of Christ. For where it is truly received, there it purifieth the heart, and maketh the person to consent to the laws of God, and to begin a new and godly living, fashioned after God's laws, and without all dissimulation: and then it will kindle so great love in him toward his neighbour, that he shall not only have compassion on him in his bodily adversity, but much more pity him over the blindness of his soul, and minister to him Christ's Gospel. Wherefore if they say, "It is here or there, in St. Francis' coat, or Dominick's and such like, and if thou wilt put on that coat, thou shalt find it there," it is false. For if it were there, thou shouldest see it shine abroad, though thou creepest not into a cell or a monk's cowl, as thou seest the lightning without creeping into the clouds: yea, their light would so shine that men should not only see the light of the Gospel, but also their "good works," which would as fast come out as they now run in; insomuch that thou shouldest see them make themselves poor, to help other, as they now make other poor, to make themselves rich.

'This light and salt pertaineth not then to the apostles, and now to our bishops and spirituality, only. No; it pertaineth to the temporal men also. For all kings and all rulers are bound to be salt and light; not only in example of living, but also in teaching of doctrine unto their subjects, as well as they be bound to punish evil doers. Doth not the Scripture testify that King David was chosen to be a shepherd, and to feed his people with God's Word? It is an evil schoolmaster

that cannot but beat only: but it is a good schoolmaster that so teacheth that few need to be beaten. This salt and light therefore pertain to the temporality also, and that to every member of Christ's Church: so that every man ought to be salt and light to other.

'Every man then may be a common preacher, thou wilt say, and preach every where by his own authority. Nay, verily; no man may yet be a common preacher, save he that is called and chosen thereto by the common ordinance of the congregation, as long as the preacher teacheth the true word of God. But every private man ought to be, in virtuous living, both light and salt to his neighbour: insomuch that the poorest ought to strive to overrun [i.e. excel] the bishop, and preach to him in ensample of living. Moreover, every man ought to preach in word and deed unto his household, and to them that are under his governance, &c. And though no man may preach openly, save he that hath the office committed unto him, yet ought every man to endeavour himself to be as well learned as the preacher, as nigh as it is possible. And every man may privately inform his neighbour; yea, and the preacher and bishop too, if need be. For if the preacher preach wrong, then may any man, whatsoever he be, rebuke him; first privately, and then, if that help not, to complain farther. And when all is proved [i.e. tried], according to the order of charity, and yet none amendment had, then ought every man that can resist him [i.e. passively], and to stand by Christ's doctrine, and to jeopard life and all for it. Look on the old ensamples and they shall teach thee.

'The Gospel hath another freedom with her than the temporal regiment [i.e. government]. Though every man's body and goods be under the king, do he right or wrong, yet is the authority of God's Word free, and above the king: so that the worst in the realm may tell the king, if he do him wrong, that he doth nought, and otherwise than God hath commanded him; and so warn him to avoid the wrath of God, which is the patient avenger of all unrighteousness. May I then, and ought also, to resist father and mother and all temporal power with God's Word, when they wrongfully do or command that [i.e. what] hurteth or killeth the body; and have I no power to resist the bishop or preacher, that with false doctrine slayeth the souls, for which my master and Lord Christ hath shed His blood? Be we otherwise under our bishops than Christ and His apostles and all the prophets were under the bishops of the old law? Nay, verily: and therefore may we, and also ought to do as they did, and to answer as the apostles did, *Oportet magis obedire Deo quam hominibus*; "We must rather obey God than man." In the Gospel every man is Christ's disciple, and a person [i.e. parson, Tindale here playing on the word] for himself, to defend Christ's doctrine in his own person. The faith of the bishop will not help me, nor the bishop's keeping the law is sufficient for me. But I must believe in Christ for the remission of all sin, for mine own self, and in mine own person. No more is the bishop's or preacher's defending God's Word enough for me; but I must defend it in mine

own person, and jeopard life and all thereon when I see need and occasion.

‘I am bound to get worldly substance for myself and for mine household with my just labour; and somewhat more for them that cannot, to save my neighbour’s body: and am I not more bound to labour for God’s Word, to have thereof in store, to save my neighbour’s soul? And when is it so much time to resist with God’s Word and to help, as when they which are believed to minister the true word do slay the souls with false doctrine for covetousness’ sake? He that is not ready to give his life for the maintenance of Christ’s doctrine against hypocrites, with whatsoever name or title they be disguised, the same is not worthy of Christ, nor can be Christ’s disciple, by the very words and testimony of Christ. Nevertheless we must use wisdom, patience, meekness, and a discreet process, after the due order of charity, in our defending the Word of God; lest, while we go about to amend our prelates, we make them worse. But when we have proved [i.e. tried] all that charity bindeth us, and yet in vain; then we must come forth openly, and rebuke their wickedness in the face of the world, and jeopard life and all thereon.’

Tindale did not conclude his Exposition without once again animadverting severely upon the supposed covetousness of the man who had been so terribly conspicuous in the cruelties perpetrated upon the unhappy Reformers in England. ‘*Covetousness,*’ he says, ‘maketh many whom the truth pleaseth at the beginning to cast it up again, and to be afterward the most cruel enemies thereof, after the ensample of Simon Magus; yea, and after the ensample of *Sir Thomas More*, Knight, which knew the truth, and for covetousness forsook it again, and conspired first with the cardinal to deceive the king, and to lead him in darkness; and afterward, when the light was sprung upon them, and had driven them clean out of the Scripture, and had delivered it out of their tyranny, and had expelled the dark stinking mist of their devilish glosses, and had wiped away the cobwebs, which those poisoned spiders had spread upon the clear text, so that the spirituality, as they call themselves, were ashamed of their part, as shameless as they be; yet for all that, *covetousness blinded the eyes of that gleering fox* more and more, and hardened his heart against the truth, with the confidence of his painted poetry, babbling eloquence, and juggling arguments of subtle sophistry, grounded on his *unwritten verities*, as true and authentic as his story of Utopia⁷.’

We have already admitted that Tindale was misinformed in alleging this charge against Sir Thomas More; but Sir Thomas’s severity had been such as to predispose the friends of the Reformation to believe anything of him, however atrocious. The career of persecution still continued in England with unabated violence. Latimer, whom Tindale had doubtless known at Cambridge, and of whose bold and spirited appeal to Henry to allow the free circulation of the

⁷ *Exposition*, p. 100.

Scriptures in England he had of course heard, had been dragged before Convocation, and forced into an ignominious submission⁸; and James Bainham, a learned lawyer, sprung from an old Gloucestershire family, and, therefore, in all probability, not unknown to Tindale, had died a martyr's death in Smithfield on the last day of April. Stokesley and More had, in the last few months, made grievous inroads upon the circle of Tindale's former friends and acquaintances; but the worst blow of all was yet to come.

At the end of July, 1532⁹, John Frith, his bosom friend and dearest brother in the faith, set out once more on what proved his last journey to England. What induced him to undertake a journey so likely to be fraught with peril it is now impossible to ascertain. Whether he hoped that More's resignation of the Great Seal (May 16) would diminish the rigour exhibited towards the Reformers; whether he fondly anticipated that the power of the clergy to punish would be seriously curtailed by the legislation, which had just deprived them of any right to promulgate enactments without the royal licence; or whether he had been deceived by the false assurances of some emissaries of Henry or the bishops, it is, in the absence of any authentic evidence, vain to inquire. Foxe seems at one time to suggest that he had come over at the request of some friends in England, at another, that his visit was necessary, in order to provide himself with money. At all events, he was not long in discovering the dangers in which his journey involved him. At Reading, whither he seems to have gone on some errand of importance, he was arrested as a vagabond; and being unable to give a satisfactory account of himself, he was set in the stocks, and kept there till he was half-starved. In his distress he asked that the schoolmaster of the place might be sent for, and to him he communicated the story of his misfortunes, and so charmed him with his learning, and, above all, with his rehearsing some lines of the Iliad in the original Greek, that he used his influence with the magistrates, and the unhappy prisoner was restored to liberty.

From Reading he directed his steps to London, intending, probably, to avail himself of the first opportunity to rejoin Tindale on the Continent; but his presence in England soon became known to Sir Thomas More and the bishops, and every effort was made to seize him. 'All the ways and havens were beset;' and great rewards were offered for his apprehension. Finding himself dogged at every turn, he endeavoured to screen himself by changing his abode, and by adopting a disguise. All, however, was in vain. It was possible to defeat the machinations of his enemies; but he could not escape the treachery of those who pretended to be his friends. At the request of an 'old familiar friend,' one of whom he says, 'for his commendable conversation, and sober behaviour, he

⁸ See Demaus's *Latimer*. Vaughan, I am happy to say, had written strongly in Latimer's favour. His letter is in the State Paper Office.

⁹ The date is given in Stokesley's *Register*: 'Venit ultimo a partibus transmarinis circiter festum sancti Jacobi ultimo præteritum.' St. James's Day is July 25.

might better be a bishop than many that wear mitres, if the rule of St. Paul were regarded in their election,' he had written a short treatise on the *Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ*. He had expressed himself with great caution on this fiercely controverted subject; yet his opinions were sure to be stigmatized as grossly heretical if they came to the notice of the ecclesiastical authorities; and the treatise was incautiously permitted to come into the hands of a traitor, who immediately carried it to Sir Thomas More. So numerous, indeed, were the spies who had wormed themselves into the confidence of the unsuspecting Reformers, that More had two other surreptitious copies of the same treatise offered at the same time, by men who were thus ready to betray those whom they professed to revere.

Thus surrounded by treachery, Frith soon fell into the hands of his enemies; he was taken at Milton-shore (near Southend), in Essex, on his way to embark for the Continent, and was conveyed to London and brought before More and the bishops. All this had apparently occurred in the autumn of 1532; for before the close of the year Sir Thomas More, who seems to have assumed the responsible position of Advocate-General for the Church—or 'Proctor for Purgatory,' as Tindale wittily styles him, had printed a reply to that treatise on the Sacrament which had led to Frith's apprehension¹⁰. Sir Thomas's reply is written in a very different spirit from his fierce invectives against Tindale; Frith is treated as a young and inexperienced scholar, who had been seduced into erroneous opinions by older and more determined heretics, and who might perhaps be gained back to the true faith by argument and kindness.

Frith had been, indeed, committed to the Tower; but it almost appeared as if the danger which threatened him might be dissipated. For rapid changes were taking place in England. A month after Frith's arrival, Archbishop Warham had died, and Henry had selected, as his successor in the primacy, Thomas Cranmer, a man who could not, indeed, be at that time claimed as a pronounced adherent of the cause of the Reformation, but whose sympathies inclined him strongly towards the Reformers, and who was certainly not disposed to adopt any harsh measures in dealing with men accused of heresy. In the commencement of 1533, moreover, Henry had brought the long-agitated divorce question to a termination by marrying Anne Boleyn; and Sir Thomas More, who had been holding a species of indefinite deputed authority since his resignation of the Chancellorship, was in January formally divested of his office, and retired into private life. Everything seemed to prognosticate the downfall of that regime which had rekindled the fires of Smithfield; and but for the tyranny of previous legislation, the reign of Henry would probably not have been stained by the martyrdom of Frith.

¹⁰ Frith saw it in the Bishop of Winchester's palace on St. Stephen's Day, i.e. December 26.

Before intelligence of Frith's apprehension had reached the Continent, Tindale, who may have heard in Antwerp the dangers by which his friend was threatened, wrote him a letter of affectionate caution; warning him especially of the necessity of guarding against committing himself by rash and dogmatic assertions on doctrinal questions that were not of fundamental importance. Tindale's letters, unfortunately, have almost all perished, and the reader will, therefore, value the more highly the few that have been preserved to us. To Frith, the dearest and most like-minded of all his friends, he, as might have been expected, unbosoms himself without reserve; and the letter is, accordingly, an invaluable piece of autobiography:—

'The grace of our Saviour Jesus, His patience, meekness, humbleness, circumspection, and wisdom, be with your heart. Amen.

'Dearly beloved brother Jacob, mine heart's desire in our Saviour Jesus is, that you arm yourself with patience, and be cold, sober, wise, and circumspect: and that you keep you a-low by the ground, avoiding high questions that pass the common capacity. But expound the law truly, and open the vail of Moses, to condemn all flesh, and prove all men sinners, and all deeds under the law, before mercy have taken away the condemnation thereof, to be sin and damnable: and then, as a faithful minister, set abroad the mercy of our Lord Jesus, and let the wounded consciences drink of the water of Him. And then shall your preaching be with power, and not as the doctrine of the hypocrites; and the Spirit of God shall work with you, and all consciences shall bear record unto you, and feel that it is so. And all doctrine that casteth a mist on those two, to shadow and hide them (I mean the law of God and mercy of Christ), that resist you with all your power. Sacraments without signification refuse. If they put significations to them receive them, if you see it may help [i.e. may be of any spiritual advantage], though it be not necessary.

'Of the Presence of Christ's body in the Sacrament, meddle as little as you can, that there appear no division among us. Barnes [a Lutheran, and always hot-tempered] will be hot against you. The Saxons be sore on the affirmative; whether constant or obstinate, I remit it to God. Philip Melanchthon is said to be with the French king [a mistaken rumour]. There be in Antwerp that say they saw him come into Paris with a hundred and fifty horses; and that they spoke with him. If the Frenchmen receive the Word of God, he will plant the affirmative [i.e. the Presence of Christ's body, as held by the Lutherans] in them. George Joye would have put forth a treatise of the matter, but I have stopped him as yet: what he will do if he get money, I wot not. I believe he would make many reasons, little serving the purpose. My mind is that nothing be put forth, till we hear how you shall have sped. I would have the right use [of the Sacrament] preached, and the Presence to be an indifferent thing, till the matter might be reasoned in peace at leisure of both parties. If you be required, show the phrases of the Scripture [i.e. use simply the words of Scripture], and let them

talk what they will. For to believe that God is everywhere, hurteth no man that worshippeth Him nowhere but within in the heart, in the spirit and verity: even so to believe that the body of Christ is everywhere, though it cannot be proved, hurteth no man that worshippeth Him nowhere save in the faith of His Gospel. You perceive my mind: howbeit, if God show you otherwise, it is free for you to do as He moveth you.

‘I guessed long ago, that God would send a dazing into the head of the spirituality, to be caught themselves in their own subtlety; and I trust it is come to pass. And now methinketh I smell a Council to be taken, little for their profits in time to come. But you must understand that it is not of a pure heart, and for love of the truth; but to avenge themselves, and to eat the whore’s flesh, and to suck the marrow of her bones. Wherefore cleave fast to the rock of the help of God, and commit the end of all things to Him: and if God shall call you, that you may then use the wisdom of the worldly, as far as you perceive the glory of God may come thereof, refuse it not: and ever among thrust in, *that the Scripture may be in the mother tongue*, and learning set up in the Universities. But and if aught be required contrary to the glory of God and His Christ, then stand fast, and commit yourself to God; *and be not overcome of men’s persuasions*, which haply shall say, we see no other way [i.e. but yielding and abjuring], to bring in the truth.

‘Brother Jacob, beloved in my heart, there liveth not in whom I have so good hope and trust, and in whom mine heart rejoiceth, and my soul comforteth herself, as in you, not the thousand part so much of [i.e. for] your learning and what other gifts else you have, as that you will creep a-low by the ground, and walk in those things that the conscience may feel, and not in the imaginations of the brain; in fear, and not in boldness; in open necessary things, and not to pronounce or define of hid secrets, or things that neither help or hinder, whether they be so or no; in unity, and not in seditious opinions; insomuch that if [i.e. although] you be sure you know, yet in things that may abide leisure, you will defer, or say (till other agree with you), “Methink the text requireth this sense or understanding”: yea, and that if [i.e. although] you be sure that your part be good, and another hold the contrary, yet if it be a thing that maketh no matter, you will laugh and let it pass, and refer the thing to other men, and stick you stiffly and stubbornly in earnest and necessary things. And I trust you be persuaded even so of me. *For I call God to record against the day we shall appear before our Lord Jesus, to give a reckoning of our doings, that I never altered one syllable of God’s Word against my conscience, nor would this day, if all that is in the earth, whether it be pleasure, honour, or riches, might be given me.* Moreover, I take God to record to my conscience, that I desire of God to myself, in this world, no more than that without which I cannot keep His laws.

‘Finally, if there were in me any gift that could help at hand, and aid you if need required, I promise you I would not be far off, and commit the end to God:

soul is not faint though my body be weary. But God hath made me evil-favoured in this world, and without grace in the sight of men, speechless and rude, dull and slow-witted. Your part shall be to supply that lacketh in me; remembering that as lowliness of heart shall make you high with God, even so meekness of words shall make you sink into the hearts of men. Nature giveth age authority; but meekness is the glory of youth, and giveth them honour. Abundance of love maketh me exceed in babbling.

‘Sir, as concerning purgatory, and many other things, if you be demanded, you may say, if you err, the spirituality hath so led you; and that they have taught you to believe as you do. For they preached you all such things out of God’s Word, and alleged a thousand texts; by reason of which texts you believed as they taught you. But now you find them liars, and that the texts mean no such things, and, therefore, you can believe them no longer; but are as ye were before they taught you, and believe no such thing; howbeit you [may say you] are ready to believe, if they have any other way to prove it; for without proof you cannot believe them, when you have found them with so many lies, &c. If you perceive wherein we may help, either in being still, or doing somewhat, let us have word, and I will do mine uttermost.

‘My Lord of London hath a servant called John Tisen, with a red beard, and a black reddish head, and was once my scholar; he was seen in Antwerp, but came not among the Englishmen: whether he is gone, an ambassador secret, I wot not.

‘The mighty God of Jacob be with you to supplant His enemies, and give you the favour of Joseph; and the wisdom and the spirit of Stephen be with your heart and with your mouth, and teach your lips what they shall say, and how to answer to all things. He is our God, if we despair in ourselves, and trust in Him; and His is the glory. Amen.

‘WILLIAM TYNDALE.

‘I hope our redemption is nigh.’

Tindale’s warning came too late. Before his letter reached England, Frith had already been entrapped into the very snare against which his more prudent friend had so earnestly cautioned him. He had already committed himself on that very subject of the Presence of Christ in the Supper on which the whole zeal of the Church, shaken on other points, had concentrated itself, as their stronghold against heresy; and though he had expressed himself with caution and moderation, he had unquestionably laid himself open to be accused as a heretic. As Sir Thomas More affirmed, he had taught ‘all the poison that Wycliffe, Huskyn [i.e. Oecolampadius], Tyndale, and Zwinglius had taught concerning the blessed Sacrament of the altar, not only affirming it to be very bread still, as Luther doth, but also, as *these other beasts do*, saith it is nothing else.’

In these circumstances nothing remained for Frith but, if possible, to defend his opinion, and to show that what he had taught was in accordance with the plain sense of Scripture and the writings of the early fathers. For some time he could not succeed in procuring a copy of More's letter, which was studiously restricted in its circulation; at length he obtained 'one written copy,' and immediately undertook to refute the arguments of his antagonist. He laboured, of course, under serious disadvantage, not only as a youthful champion against one of the most subtle and learned of controversialists; but also, as he himself with touching simplicity says, 'I am, in a manner, as a man bound to a post, and cannot so well bestow me in my play, as if I were at liberty; for I may not have such books as are necessary for me; neither get pen, ink, nor paper, but only secretly; so that I am in continual fear both of the Lieutenant [of the Tower] and of my keeper, lest they should espy any such thing by me. . . . Whensoever I hear the keys ring at the doors, straight all must be conveyed out of the way; and then if any notable thing had been in my mind, it was clean lost¹¹.' The change of affairs at the commencement of 1533 somewhat relaxed the rigour of his imprisonment; his keeper, 'upon condition of his own word and promise, let him go at liberty during the night to consult with good men'; and thus assisted with possible access to books, he produced a *Reply* that must have satisfied More that he had been somewhat over-sanguine in anticipating an easy victory over the stripling who had attacked the dogmas of the Church.

To us the interest of Frith's *Answer to Sir Thomas More* centres in its allusions to the man whom Frith knew better than any other. Sir Thomas More had spoken of Tindale as *a beast*, Frith thus nobly defends his friend:—'Tyndale, I trust, liveth, well content with such a poor Apostle's life as God gave His Son Christ, and His faithful ministers in this world, which *is not sure of so many mites as ye be yearly of pounds*; although I am sure that for his learning and judgement in Scripture, he were more worthy to be promoted than all the Bishops in England. I received a letter from him which was written since Christmas [of 1532], wherein among other matters he writeth thus: "I call God to record" [&c., as in Tindale's letter already given, which is hereby identified as sent to Frith], Judge, Christian reader, whether these words be not spoken of a faithful, clear, innocent heart. And as for his behaviour, [it] is such that *I am sure no man can reprove him of any sin*; howbeit, no man is innocent before God, which beholdeth the heart¹².' And in a noble outburst of Christian enthusiasm he thus replies to More's wish that the Reformers would keep their opinions secret:—'Until we see some means found by the which a reasonable Reformation may be had, *and sufficient instruction for the poor commoners*, I assure you I neither will nor can cease to speak; *for the Word of God boileth in my body like a fervent*

¹¹ Frith's *Answer to Rastell*.

¹² Frith's *Answer to More*, fol. 196.

fire, and will needs have issue, and breaketh out when occasion is given. But this hath been offered you, is offered, and shall be offered:—Grant that the Word of God, I mean the text of Scripture, may go abroad in our English tongue, as other nations have it in their tongues, and my brother William Tyndale and I have done, and will promise you to write no more. If you will not grant this condition, then will we be doing while we have breath, and show in few words that [what] the Scripture doth in many, and so at the least save some¹³.

With the increased amount of liberty enjoyed by Frith in the new state of affairs, there was no serious difficulty in having his answer to More printed and circulated. Some of the good men with whom he was permitted to take counsel might easily contrive to transmit a copy of the work in manuscript to the Continent; and it has been conjectured that Tindale himself superintended the passing of Frith's book through the press. It is also believed that Tindale still further aided his friend by himself issuing a defence of Frith against the attack of Sir Thomas More.

On April 5, 1533, there appeared from the press of 'Nicolas Twonson of Nuremberg,' a treatise entitled, '*The Supper of the Lord*. . . . wherein incidentally M. More's letter against John Fryth is confuted¹⁴.' The work, indeed, was published anonymously, and was by some supposed to be that very treatise by George Joye of which Tindale, in his letter to Frith, had spoken in such disparaging terms. Others, however, ascribed the book to Tindale; and Sir Thomas More, who immediately published a refutation of it, though admitting that the work was not characterized by the customary learning of Tindale, and branding it as 'blasphemous and bedlam-rife,' yet proceeds to argue upon the assumption that Tindale was really its author. Foxe has not printed it with the rest of Tindale's writings, but speaks doubtfully of it as 'a short and pithy treatise touching the Lord's Supper, compiled, as some do gather, by Tindale, because the method and phrase agree with his, and the time of writing is concurrent.' On the whole, however, it seems now agreed that the work was Tindale's, this conviction being strengthened by the fact that Joye, whose self-conceit was boundless, does not claim the authorship of it, as he certainly would have done had the work been his¹⁵.

The treatise is, in reality, an exposition of the sixth chapter of St. John, and is not unworthy of Tindale's acuteness as a controversialist; it retorts upon More with very great logical skill; and it exposes with very considerable force the absurdities and contradictions involved in the doctrine of transubstantiation. To

¹³ *Ibid.*, fol. 156.

¹⁴ Title and colophon of the original edition in the Bodleian.

¹⁵ On the point, which is not devoid of interest, the reader is referred to the excellent prefatory remarks of Professor Walter in Tindale's *Works*, vol. iii. pp. 218, &c., and three letters in *Notes and Queries*, First Series.

the ordinary modern reader, however, much the most interesting and characteristic part of the treatise is that in which Tindale sketches his ideal of the proper manner of celebrating the holy ordinance of the Supper. We present it without note or comment to the judgement of the reader:—

‘This holy sacrament therefore, would God it were restored unto the pure use, as the apostles used it in their time! Would God the secular princes, which should be the very pastors and head rulers of their congregations committed unto their cure, would first command or suffer the true preachers of God’s Word to preach the Gospel purely and plainly, with discreet liberty, and constitute over each particular parish such curates as can and would preach the word, and that once or twice in the week, appointing unto their flock certain days, after their discretion and zeal to God-ward, to come together to celebrate the Lord’s Supper! At the which assembly the curate would propone and declare them, first, this text of Paul, 1 Cor. xi: “So oft as ye shall eat this bread, and drink of this cup, see that ye be joyous, praise, and give thanks, preaching the death of the Lord,” &c.: which declared, and every one exhorted to prayer, he would preach them purely Christ to have died and been offered upon the altar of the cross for their redemption; which only oblation to be sufficient sacrifice, to peace the Father’s wrath, and to purge all the sins of the world. Then to excite them with all humble diligence, every man unto the knowledge of himself and his sins, and to believe and trust to the forgiveness in Christ’s blood; and for this so incomparable benefit of our redemption (which were sold bondmen to sin), to give thanks unto God the Father for so merciful a deliverance through the death of Jesus Christ, every one, some singing, and some saying devoutly, some or other psalm, or prayer of thanksgiving, in the mother tongue. Then, the bread and wine set before them, in the face of the Church, upon the table of the Lord, purely and honestly laid, let him declare to the people the significations of those sensible signs; what the action and deed moveth, teacheth, and exhorteth them unto; and that the bread and wine be no profane common signs, but holy sacraments, reverently to be considered, and received with a deep faith and remembrance of Christ’s death, and of the shedding of His blood for our sins; those sensible things to represent us the very body and blood of Christ, so that while every man beholdeth with his corporal eye those sensible sacraments, the inward eye of his faith may see, and believe steadfastly, Christ offered and dying upon the cross for his sins, how His body was broken and His blood shed for us, and hath given Himself whole for us, Himself to be all ours, and whatsoever He did to serve us, as to be made for us, of His Father, our righteousness, our wisdom, holiness, redemption, satisfaction, &c.

‘Then let this preacher exhort them lovingly to draw near unto this table of the Lord, and that not only bodily, but also, their hearts purged by faith, garnished with love and innocency, every man to forgive each other unfeignedly, and to express, or at leastwise to endeavour them to follow, that love which

Christ did set before our eyes at His last supper, when He offered Himself willingly to die for us His enemies; which incomparable love to commend, bring in Paul's arguments, so that thus this flock may come together, and be joined into one body, one spirit, and one people. This done, let him come down, and, accompanied honestly with other ministers, come forth reverently unto the Lord's table, the congregation now set round about it, and also in their other convenient seats, the pastor exhorting them all to pray for grace, faith, and love, which all this sacrament signifieth and putteth them in mind of. Then let there be read aptly and distinctly the sixth chapter of John, in their mother tongue; whereby they may clearly understand, what it is to eat Christ's flesh and to drink His blood. This done, and some brief prayer and praise sung or read, let one or other minister read the eleventh chapter of the first [Epistle] to the Corinthians, that the people might perceive clearly, of those words, the mystery of this Christ's supper, and wherefore He did institute it.

'These with such like preparations and exhortations had, I would every man present should profess the articles of our faith openly in our mother tongue, and confess his sins secretly unto God; praying entirely that He would now vouchsafe to have mercy upon him, receive his prayers, glue his heart unto Him by faith and love, increase his faith, give him grace to forgive and to love his neighbour as himself, to garnish his life with pureness and innocency, and to confirm him in all goodness and virtue. Then again it behoveth the curate to warn and exhort every man deeply to consider, and expend [i.e. weigh] with himself, the signification and substance of this sacrament, so that he sit not down an hypocrite and a dissembler, since God is searcher of heart and reins, thoughts and affects, and see that he come not to the holy table of the Lord without that faith which he professed at his baptism, and also that love which the sacrament preacheth and testifieth unto his heart, lest he, now found guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (that is to wit, a dissembler with Christ's death, and slanderous to the congregation, the body and blood of Christ), receive his own damnation. And here let every man fall down upon his knees, saying secretly with all devotion their *Paternoster* in English; their curate, as example, kneeling down before them: which done, let him take the bread and eft [i. e. after] the wine in the sight of the people, hearing him with a loud voice, with godly gravity, and after a Christian religious reverence, rehearsing distinctly the words of the Lord's Supper in their mother tongue; and then distribute it to the ministers, which, taking the bread with great reverence, will divide it to the congregation, every man breaking and reaching it forth to his next neighbour and member of the mystic body of Christ, other ministers following with the cups, pouring forth and dealing them the wine, all together thus being now partakers of one bread and one cup, the thing thereby signified and preached printed fast in their hearts. But in this meanwhile must the minister or pastor be reading the communication that Christ had with His disciples after His supper, beginning at the washing of their

feet; so reading till the bread and wine be eaten and drunken, and all the action done: and then let them fall down on their knees, giving thanks highly unto God the Father for this benefit and death of His Son, whereby now by faith every man is assured of remission of his sins; as this blessed sacrament had put them in mind, and preached it them in this outward action and supper. This done, let every man commend and give themselves whole to God, and depart¹⁶.’

Before this treatise could have been conveyed to England for clandestine circulation, steps had been taken to bring Frith to punishment. Dr. Curwin, one of the royal chaplains, availed himself of the opportunity of his officiating before Henry to inveigh against the leniency shown towards heretics who denied the teaching of the Church on the Sacraments, especially complaining that there was a prisoner in the Tower at that very moment ‘so bold as to write in defence of that heresy, and yet no man goeth about his reformation.’ The process of ‘reformation,’ as it was facetiously styled by the courtly preacher, was not long delayed. Cranmer, Stokesley, Gardiner, with some others, were appointed to examine Frith; who was, therefore, taken from the Tower to the Archbishop’s Palace at Croydon. Two of Cranmer’s household, a gentleman and a porter, accompanied him; and as they rowed from the Tower up the river to Lambeth, the gentleman entered into conversation with Frith, and, doubtless at Cranmer’s suggestion, advised him to yield a little in his opinions, and so escape the fate that threatened him. ‘This I am sure of,’ he urged, ‘that my Lord Cromwell, and my Lord of Canterbury, much favouring you, and knowing you to be an eloquent learned young man, and now towards the felicity of your life [i.e. coming to the prime of life], young in years, old in knowledge, and of great forwardness, and likelihood to be a most profitable member of this realm, will never permit you to sustain any open shame, *if you will somewhat be advised by their counsel*: on the other side, if you stand stiff to your opinion, it is not possible to save your life, for like as you have good friends, so have you mortal foes and enemies.’ Frith was not insensible to the kindness thus exhibited, but he replied that he could not honestly conceal his opinions on the subject of the Lord’s Supper, and that even if it should expose him to death, he must openly profess his belief in what he felt convinced was the true teaching of Scripture on that matter.

After a slight repast at Lambeth, Frith and his two companions set out on foot for Croydon. Their route lay up Brixton Causeway, thick woods environing them on either hand; and the gentleman who had already shown himself so friendly proposed to the porter an extraordinary project for the escape of the prisoner. Frith was to be permitted *per incuriam*, as it were, to wander into the woods which lay to the *left* of the road, and so escape into his native county, Kent, where he might find refuge till he could leave England; whilst they, after lingering, so as to allow him time to get free, were to spread the alarm that he

¹⁶ Tindale’s *Works*, vol. iii. pp. 265, &c.

had broken from them into the woods on the *right* of the road towards Wandsworth. Such a proposal, it may be assumed, would never have been made, but on the previous suggestion of Cranmer, who had been unwillingly dragged into the matter, and who, though by no means sharing in Frith's opinions on the sacrament, was extremely reluctant to adopt any harsh measures against him. The plan was communicated to Frith, but he refused to avail himself of it. In vain they reminded him of his danger, and urged him to use the opportunity which he would so gladly have welcomed some months before. 'Before,' he replied, 'I was indeed desirous to escape, because I was not attached, but at liberty, which liberty I would fain have enjoyed (for the maintenance of my study beyond the sea, where I was reader in the Greek tongue), according to St. Paul's counsel. Howbeit *now*, being taken by the higher powers, and, as it were, by Almighty God's permission and providence, delivered into the hands of the bishops, only for religion and doctrine's sake, such as in conscience, and under pain of damnation, I am bound to maintain and defend; if I should now start aside, and run away, I should run from my God, and from the testimony of His Holy Word—worthy, then, of a thousand hells. And, therefore, I most heartily thank you both, for your goodwill toward me, beseeching you to bring me where I was appointed to be brought, for else I will go thither all alone.'

Such a man was not likely either to be awed by threats or cajoled by fair promises. He defended his opinions with great force and clearness; and his examiners were unable to drive him from his stronghold in the Scriptures and in St. Augustine. Cranmer, always gentle and loth to proceed to extremes, 'sent for him three or four times, to persuade him to leave his imagination, but, for all that we could do therein, he would not apply to any counsel¹⁷.' For Frith, as for Cranmer, there was no escape; the opinions advocated were unquestionably heresy, according to the standard of truth then received; the law was plain, and the penalty was inevitable. Frith was left to be dealt with by Stokesley, Longland, and Gardiner; and, although the last of these had been Frith's tutor at Cambridge, and was favourably disposed towards him, there was no mercy to be expected from the others, who were veterans in persecution. The authority of the Church in England was felt to be trembling to its fall; but the name of heretic was still terrible, and no one dared to question the sentence which handed Frith over to the temporal power to die the death of a heretic. The youthful martyr showed no sign of flinching from the dread ordeal; he repeated his opinions before the final tribunal clearly yet modestly; resolutely adhering to those points which seemed of essential consequence, expressing himself with caution on matters less clearly revealed.

Another young Kentishman, entrapped by the same traitor who had ensnared

¹⁷ Cranmer's Letter to Archdeacon Hawkins: *Remains*, Letter 14.

Frith, perished with him at the same stake on July 4. ‘And,’ says the old Martyrologist, ‘when he was tied unto the stake, there it sufficiently appeared with what constancy and courage he suffered death; for when the faggots and fire were put upon him, he willingly embraced the same, thereby declaring with what uprightness of mind he suffered his death for Christ’s sake, and the true doctrine, whereof that day he gave, with his blood, a perfect and firm testimony; the wind made his death somewhat the longer, which bare away the flame from him unto his fellow, that was tied to his back: but he had established his mind with such patience, God giving him strength, that even as though he had felt no pain in that long torment, he seemed rather to rejoice for his fellow, than to be careful for himself¹⁸.’ A martyr so steadfast and resolute needed not any human sympathy to encourage him to stand fast; but Tindale, learning the fresh danger which threatened his friend, wrote once again to comfort and strengthen him for the terrible trial which awaited him. It is exceedingly doubtful whether Tindale’s epistle ever reached Frith; whether, in fact, Frith had not been martyred before it was dispatched or even penned; but it is pervaded by the very spirit in which Frith acted, and thus affords a most touching illustration of the perfect ‘like-mindedness’ by which the two friends were animated. Foxe has entitled it, ‘A letter from William Tyndale, being in Antwerp, unto John Fryth, being prisoner in the Tower of London in England.’

‘The grace and peace of God our Father, and of Jesus Christ our Lord, be with you. Amen. Dearly beloved brother John, I have heard say that the hypocrites, now they have overcome that great business which letted them [i.e. the royal divorce], or that now they have at the least way brought it at a stay, they return to their old nature again. The will of God be fulfilled, and that [what] He hath ordained to be ere the world was made, that come, and His glory reign over all.

‘Dearly beloved, howsoever the matter be, commit yourself wholly and only unto your most loving Father and most kind Lord, and fear not men that threat, nor trust men that speak fair: but trust Him that is true of promise, and able to make His word good. Your cause is Christ’s Gospel, a light that must be fed with the blood of faith. The lamp must be dressed and snuffed daily, and that oil poured in every evening and morning, that the light go not out. Though we be sinners, yet is the cause right. If when we be buffeted for well-doing, we suffer patiently and endure, that is thankful with God; for to that end we are called. *For Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps, who did no sin. Hereby have we perceived love, that He laid down His life for us: therefore we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified: who shall change our vile body, that it may be*

¹⁸ Foxe, vol. v. p. 15.

fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Him.

‘Dearly beloved, be of good courage, and comfort your soul with the hope of this high reward, and bear the image of Christ in your mortal body, that it may at His coming be made like to His, immortal: and follow the example of all your other dear brethren, which chose to suffer in hope of a better resurrection. Keep your conscience pure and undefiled, and say against that nothing. Stick at [i.e. resolutely maintain] necessary things; and remember the blasphemies of the enemies of Christ, “They find none but that will abjure rather than suffer the extremity.” Moreover, the death of them that come again [i.e. repent] after they have once denied, though it be accepted with God and all that believe, yet is it not glorious; for the hypocrites say, “He must needs die; denying helpeth not: but might it have holpen, they would have denied five hundred times: but seeing it would not help them, therefore of pure pride, and mere malice together, they speak with their mouths that [i.e. what] their conscience knoweth false.” If you give yourself, cast yourself, yield yourself, commit yourself wholly and only to your loving Father; then shall His power be in you and make you strong, and that so strong, that you shall feel no pain, and [in?] that shall be to another present death: and His Spirit shall speak in you, and teach you what to answer, according to His promise. He shall set out His truth by you wonderfully, and work for you above all that your heart can imagine. Yea, and you are not yet dead; though the hypocrites all, with all they can make, have sworn your death. *Una salus victis nullam sperare salutem.* To look for no man’s help bringeth the help of God to them that seem to be overcome in the eyes of the hypocrites: yea, it shall make God to carry you through thick and thin for His truth’s sake, in spite of all the enemies of His truth. There falleth not a hair till His hour be come: and when His hour is come, necessity carrieth us hence, though we be not willing. But if we be willing, then have we a reward and thanks.

‘Fear not threatening, therefore, neither be overcome of sweet words; with which twain the hypocrites shall assail you. Neither let the persuasions of worldly wisdom bear rule in your heart; no, though they be your friends that counsel. Let Bilney be a warning to you. Let not their vizor beguile your eyes. Let not your body faint. He that endureth to the end shall be saved. If the pain be above your strength, remember, “Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, I will give it you.” And pray to your Father in that name, and He will cease your pain, or shorten it. The Lord of peace, of hope, and of faith, be with you. Amen.

WILLIAM TYNDALE.

‘Two have suffered in Antwerp, *in die Sanctae Crucis* [September 14], unto the great glory of the Gospel: four at Riselles¹⁹, in Flanders: and at Luke hath

¹⁹ Editors have conjectured that by *Riselles*, *Brussels* is meant; and that *Luke* is the suburb of

there one at the least suffered all that same day. At Roan [i.e. Rouen] in France they persecute; and at Paris are five Doctors taken for the Gospel. See, you are not alone. Be cheerful: and remember that among the hard-hearted in England there is a number reserved by grace: for whose sakes, if need be, you must be ready to suffer. Sir, if you may write, how short [soever] it be, forget it not; that we may know how it goeth with you, for our hearts' ease. The Lord be yet again with you, with all His plenteousness, and fill you that you flow over. Amen.

'If, when you have read this, you may send it to Adrian [or John Byrte], do, I pray you, that he may know how that our heart is with you.

'George Joye at Candlemas, being at Barrow, printed two leaves of Genesis in a great form, and sent one copy to the King, and another to the new Queen [Anne Boleyn], with a letter to N. for to deliver them; and to purchase licence, that he might so go through all the Bible. Out of that is sprung the noise of the new Bible [report that there was to be a new translation]; and out of that is the great seeking for English books at all printers and bookbinders in Antwerp, and for an English priest that should print [i.e. that intended to print].

'This chanced the 9th day of May.

'Sir, your wife is well content with the will of God, and would not, for her sake, have the glory of God hindered.

'WILLIAM TYNDALE.'

From the superscription of the letter, as well as from its contents, it seems certain that Tindale, wherever he may have been wandering since Frith left for England, had returned once again to his former abode at Antwerp. In the free cities of the German Empire, he, indeed, enjoyed a greater amount of personal security than in the Low Countries; but he was far removed from that land which was still his home, and in which all his interests were centred; and it was a tedious, an expensive, and an uncertain process to export his books from the heart of Germany to the shores of Britain. Charles V had revenged himself for his reluctant toleration of the Protestants in Germany, by the infliction of unrelenting severities upon the unfortunate inhabitants of his hereditary domains. The Inquisition was in vigorous operation; and every district had its little army of martyrs²⁰; the printing of heretical books was punished with extreme cruelty, and a universal system of espionage was established, by which it was hoped that heresy would be effectually rooted out. In spite of these serious drawbacks, Tindale seems to have determined to take up his residence permanently in Antwerp. There he was near England, and in constant communication with home; and the

Brussels, now called *Laeken*: the very slightest inquiry would have informed them that Riselles is the Flemish name of *Lille*, as Luke is of *Liege*.

²⁰ See Brandt, *Reformation in the Low Countries*; Crespin, *Histoire des Martyrs*; Henné, *Histoire du Règne de Charles-Quint en Belgique*

privileges of the great centres of trade were sufficiently powerful and recognized by the Government, to secure him a very considerable amount of protection, so long as he acted with caution. Here, therefore, his wanderings ceased; yet a few more years, and he was to follow the brave example which his best-loved friend had set, and to die as intrepidly as Frith had died.