

# William Tindale

## A Biography

Being a Contribution to the Early History of the  
English Bible

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The Old Manor House at Little Sodbury

## CHAPTER II

### TINDALE'S LIFE AT LITTLE SODBURY

A.D. 1521-1523.

THE manor-house of Little Sodbury, where Tindale was first introduced to the realities of life outside the walls of the Universities, was in his native county of Gloucester, almost within sight of the spot where he had spent the years of his childhood. The house is charmingly situated on the south-western slope of the Cotswolds, and enjoys a magnificent prospect over the richly-wooded

vale of the Severn, to the distant hills of Wales. Though somewhat shorn of its former dignity, and only in part inhabited, the house is still, in the main, intact; time, indeed, has dealt gently with it, and has added to the beauties of its graceful and varied architecture those mellowing touches which delight the eye of the lover of the picturesque. It is evidently in no material respect altered since the time when Tindale and his pupils used to issue from its spacious porch to climb the Cotswolds, or to ramble across the fields to the neighbouring village of Chipping Sodbury; and the original arrangement and destination of the various apartments are tolerably obvious to the glance even of the least practised antiquary. The great dining-hall, in which Tindale's voice was so often heard debating theological questions with the clergy of the neighbourhood, around the hospitable board of Sir John Walsh, wants little but appropriate furniture to recall its former appearance; and the whole mansion furnishes unmistakable proof that it was the residence of a gentleman of considerable wealth and position in the county.

One most interesting appendage of the old manor-house has, unfortunately, been destroyed. The little church of St. Adeline, which stood close behind the house, and in which Tindale, beyond any doubt, must have officiated, and made his earliest appearance as a preacher, was taken down in 1858, and rebuilt in a situation more convenient for the parishioners; but part of the western entrance, and two magnificent yew-trees, which must have been large even in Tindale's time, still remain to mark the spot<sup>1</sup>.

Behind the manor-house the hill rises almost perpendicularly, completely prohibiting the approach of the bleak north-eastern blasts. A few minutes' exertion conveys the traveller to the crest of the breezy Cotswolds, crowned with picturesque clumps of beeches visible for miles; and from the table-land on the summit, where Margaret of Anjou encamped before the fatal field of Tewkesbury, Tindale must often have looked upon the wooded heights of Nibley and Stinchcombe, and the level vale beyond, where his relatives were then established. Altogether the manor-house of Little Sodbury is the most interesting, as it is the most authentic locality associated with Tindale's active life in England. It is the only place of which we can definitely affirm, 'under this very roof Tindale spent several of the most important months of his life'; and it was in this house that he formed and first announced his great purpose, if God spared him, to translate the Holy Scriptures into his native tongue, that what had hith-

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<sup>1</sup> The manor-house is easily accessible either from Bath or Bristol. It is about an hour's walk from Yate, a station on the Bristol and Gloucester railway, the road leading through the old-fashioned village of Chipping Sodbury and across the fields.

erto been confined to the learned, might be open to all who could read.

The Walshes of Little Sodbury were one of the rising and prosperous families of the county of Gloucester. John Walsh had, in 1485, come into possession of the manor-house by his marriage to the heiress of the property. His son, the patron and employer of Tindale, a stalwart and expert man-at-arms, had been champion to Henry VIII on some occasions; and having been fortunate enough to secure the good graces of his sovereign, he was knighted, and received the more substantial reward of the neighbouring manor of Old Sodbury, which had devolved to the crown from Ann, Countess of Warwick. The handsome royal favourite had still further improved his position in the county by marrying Anne, daughter of Sir Robert Poyntz of Iron-Acton, a neighbouring family of ancient lineage, who could boast of alliances with some of the best blood in England. In consequence of these fortunate matrimonial alliances, and of the generous favour of the sovereign, Sir John Walsh was a man of very considerable importance; a point of no small consequence to Tindale, as it subsequently secured him a powerful protector when the boldness of his opinions had excited the hostility of the neighbouring clergy.

Tindale's position at the manor-house of Little Sodbury must have been that of chaplain rather than of tutor; in fact, we are probably doing no injustice to Sir John Walsh and his lady, if we consider the employment of a distinguished scholar from the University in the capacity of chaplain as a piece of ambitious ostentation on their part, which was intended to mark their sense of the high position at which they had now arrived. Their children were mere infants, more likely to profit from their nurse than from a learned tutor. We have no means of determining the precise time at which Tindale entered upon this new employment; but there seems no sufficient reason for believing that he resided more than two years at Little Sodbury, and as he was certainly in London before the close of 1523, it may be assumed that it was some time towards the close of the year 1521 that he became tutor to Sir John's children. And even at the close of 1521, the eldest of Sir John's sons was only six years of age, and little likely, therefore, to give any very serious employment to Tindale's energies, at least as an instructor. Tindale would thus have ample time for reading and reflection; and in a house such as that of Sir John Walsh, constantly resorted to by the gentlemen and clerical dignitaries of the neighbourhood, much must have been daily seen and heard to excite reflection in any earnest soul.

Since the time when Tindale left his home to reside in the Universities, no improvement had taken place in the religious condition of his native county. The bishop of the diocese, who was responsible for the spiritual oversight of its

population, resided a thousand miles off, in Italy; indeed, there was no resident bishop from 1512, when Sylvester de Gigliis retired to Rome, till 1535, when Hugh Latimer was consecrated the first reforming prelate of the long-neglected see. In the absence of the chief ecclesiastical authority who ought to have provided for the religious wants of the counties of Gloucester and Worcester, his duties were divided between Cardinal Wolsey, who was also, of course, non-resident, and far too deeply engrossed in other matters to pay much heed to them, and the chancellor of the diocese, who, during Tindale's residence at Little Sodbury, was Dr. Parker, a furious bigot, whom we shall speedily meet again in this biography. In 1521, the bishop of the diocese died at Rome, but his place was filled by another Italian prelate, no other than Julio de Medici, who as Clement VII was subsequently appealed to in the momentous question of Henry's divorce. On his resignation of the see, after a few months' episcopate, the bishopric was once more conferred upon a non-resident Italian prelate, Jerome de Ghinucci.

The time had gone by when such a scandalous state of affairs could exist unquestioned. Fear of authority might suppress any practical manifestation of insubordination; but authority could not restrain the shrewd remarks of intelligent observers; nor could it prevent men perceiving that even the highest dignitaries of the Church, in their anxiety to increase their revenues, thought little of the most flagrant disregard of the most sacred duties. The county of Gloucester, moreover, though far removed from the metropolis and the Universities, had not escaped the influence of that great intellectual revival which had reawakened the nations of Europe to mental activity. Bristol, then the second city in England, had given a favourable reception to the Lollard preachers; the merchants of the city were conspicuous for their energy; and the citizens were at all times distinguished for the freedom of their opinions, and the zeal with which they entered upon the discussion of all religious questions. Lutheran books, though rigorously prohibited, were probably not unknown amongst the imports that floated up the Avon to the warehouses of the Bristol merchants. Amongst the neighbouring gentry were several men of high character and considerable learning; and religion was the all-engrossing theme of the time, so that Tindale found himself surrounded at Sir John Walsh's table by the same atmosphere of theological controversy in which he had moved at the University.

Of this interesting period of Tindale's life Foxe has fortunately preserved an unusually copious and trustworthy account. Even as perused in the ordinary editions of the *Acts and Monuments*, the narrative strikes the attentive reader as the authentic record of a contemporary: but the first English edition of Foxe,

that of 1563, makes it quite clear that this part of the work was supplied to the Martyrologist by one who had it from Tindale's own lips. Foxe has not mentioned his authority, but we feel strongly convinced that his informant was Richard Webb, a native of the village of Chipping Sodbury, and subsequently a servant of Latimer, whose rectory of West Kington was only a few miles distant. This Webb may possibly have been a convert of Tindale's; in 1532 he was brought before Sir Thomas More for circulating prohibited books in Bristol; and he was alive when Foxe wrote his *Acts and Monuments*, and furnished him, as he acknowledges, with some valuable materials<sup>2</sup>.

But whoever was Foxe's informant, it is most important to observe that his record of Tindale's life at Little Sodbury rests upon the authority of a reporter who had it from Tindale himself, and is therefore entitled to the highest credit. In the following extracts the words of the original narrator are introduced as given in Foxe's first edition, instead of the less graphic narrative which the Martyrologist substituted in his later editions: 'The said Tyndale being schoolmaster to the said Master Walsh's children, and being in good favour with his master, sat most commonly at his own table, which kept a good ordinary, having resort to him many times divers great-beneficed men, as abbots, deans, archdeacons, and other divers doctors and learned men. Amongst whom commonly was talk of learning, as well of Luther and Erasmus Roterodamus, as of opinions in the Scripture. The said Master Tyndale being learned, and which had been a student of divinity in Cambridge, and had therein taken degree of school, did many times therein shew his mind and learning. Wherein as those men and Master Tyndale did vary in opinions and judgements, then Master Tyndale would shew them on the book the places by open and manifest Scripture; the which continued for a certain season divers and sundry times, until in the continuance thereof those great benefited doctors waxed weary and bear [bore] a secret grudge in their hearts against Master Tyndale<sup>3</sup>.'

We can easily realize the scene which the rough graphic language of the narrator here depicts. Beneficed clergymen and lordly abbots, whose learning had become rusty from disuse, and who hated the teaching of Erasmus and Luther as odious and heretical novelties, must have been sadly disconcerted by the shrewd and determined 'schoolmaster,' fresh from the University, an expert theological controversialist, with his terrible matter-of-fact habit of confronting their opinions with the plain and manifest words of Scripture printed

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<sup>2</sup> Foxe, vol. iv, p. 129. More's *Confutation*, p. 727.

<sup>3</sup> Foxe, p. 514; edition of 1563.

in the book.’ That in such encounters he should generally remain master of the field we can perfectly believe: and that his antagonists, annoyed at the presumption of the young scholar who dared to controvert the opinions of wealthy ecclesiastical dignitaries, and confounded by his arguments, should bear a secret grudge against him, is only too truly in keeping with human nature to excite any doubt. The narrative resumes:

‘upon a time some of those beneficed doctors had Master Walsh and the lady his wife, at a supper or banquet, there having among them talk at will without any gainsaying; and the supper or banquet being done, and Master Walsh and the lady his wife come home, they called for Master Tyndale, and talked with him of such communication as had been, where they came from [from], and of their opinions. Master Tyndale thereunto made answer agreeable to the truth of God’s word, and in reproving of their false opinions. The Lady Walsh being a stout woman, and *as Master Tyndale did report her* to be wise, being there no more but they three, Master Walsh, his wife and Master Tyndale “Well,” said she, “there was such a doctor, he may dispend [spend] two hundred pound by the year, another, one hundred pound, and another, three hundred pound; and what think ye, were it reason that we should believe you before them so great, learned, and beneficed men? “ Master Tyndale, hearing her, gave her no answer; nor after that had but small arguments against such, for he perceived it would not help in effect to the contrary.’

Tindale had the good sense to perceive that there was small hope of persuading such a disputant by appealing merely to reason and Scripture. There was another argument more likely to impress persons who estimated the soundness of opinions by the annual income of those who entertained them; he might appeal to the authority of a great name. Erasmus was still the great model of Tindale’s opinions; and if it could be shown beyond any doubt, that those very doctrines and opinions which the neighbouring abbots and wealthy doctors condemned, were maintained by the illustrious scholar with whose praises all Europe was ringing, who was in high favour with many of the most exalted rank in England, and especially with the primate and the king—then it might be hoped that even Lady Walsh would begin to appreciate the force of arguments which came recommended by such weight.

It was probably, therefore, as an important measure of self-defence that Tindale undertook the translation of one of the most popular of the works of Erasmus—the *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*, or, Manual of a Christian Soldier. This little treatise had been originally written in 1501, shortly after Erasmus’s first visit to England; and it was one of the earliest of that long series of works in which, with terse and graceful Latinity, the author attempted to ridicule the

popular misconception which placed religion in scholastic dogmas and ritual observances. As originally issued the work was remarkable rather for the graces of its style than for the strength of its opinions; but when the controversy between Luther and the Pope had deeply excited the minds of all thinking men, Erasmus reissued it with a fresh preface, written in a style of boldness and fire which must in calmer moments have alarmed the author himself, and which is in truth not altogether in keeping with the sober, rhetorical, half-classical, half-Christian manual to which it is prefixed. Thus reintroduced to public notice, the book became immensely popular; it was translated into many languages and exercised a wonderful influence all over Europe.

Of a book thus famous in its day, which was evidently highly valued by Tindale, and on which he first employed his skill and learning as a translator, the reader will not disdain to peruse a very few sentences. The original work had been censured because it did not treat its subject according to the methods of the schoolmen; the author thus defends himself in his new preface:—

‘I am content that my book be deficient in acuteness if only it be pious. Let it not train men for the discussions of the Sorbonne<sup>4</sup>, provided it train them for Christian peace. Let it be unserviceable for theological debating, provided it be useful for religious living. Besides, what is the use of discussing what every one discusses? Who is not engaged now-a-days in theological questions? What else do the swarms of scholastics do? There are almost as many commentaries on the *Sentences*<sup>5</sup> as there are names of theologians. What limit is there to the number of compilers, men who mingle over again various matters, and like chemists manufacture new things out of old, old out of new, one out of many, and again many out of one? How is it possible that a huge mass of such books can train men up to live well, when the whole of one’s life would not suffice to read them? As if a doctor were to prescribe to a man labouring under a rapid disease, that he must read the works of *Iacobus a partibus* and all similar treatises, in order to discover in them how to restore his health, while in the mean time death will have carried him off, and there will be no possibility of helping any one at that rate.... To say nothing of their treating things in a meagre and cold manner, how many people have leisure to read so many volumes, or who could carry about with him the works of Thomas Aquinas? And yet every one is bound to live well, and Christ has wished the way to good living to be easy

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<sup>4</sup> The Divinity School in Paris, the head quarters of Scholasticism.

<sup>5</sup> A compilation by Peter Lombard, who was usually called in consequence the Master of the *Sentences*; the Bible, in fact, of the schoolmen.

to all; not through the trackless labyrinths of debates, but through sincere faith and love unfeigned, accompanied by the “hope which maketh not ashamed.” Finally, let the great Rabbis, who must of course be few, study those huge volumes; but, nevertheless, we must in the mean time provide for the ignorant multitude for whom also Christ died.’

Would any one,’ he asks, ‘attempt to convert the Turks to the Christian religion by submitting to them the works of Occam, or Durandus, or Scotus, or Gabriel, or Alvarus? [All great scholastic doctors.] What will they think when they shall have heard those difficult and perplexing subtleties about form and essence and relation; especially when they see that on these points, so far are those great professors of religion from agreeing, that they contend with each other till they are pale in the face, till they scold each other, spit upon each other, even till they attack each other with their fists-when they see the Dominicans fighting in all manner of ways for their beloved Thomas [Aquinas], the Franciscans on the other hand, with joined shields, defending the most subtle doctor and the seraphic doctor [Scotus and Bonaventura]; some speaking as nominalists, some as realists? Christ has not died in order that wealth, abundance, arms, and the rest of the pomp of an earthly kingdom, which formerly were possessed by heathen, or at least Gentile princes, should now be in the possession of a few priests not unlike heathens.... In my opinion, it would be a far more appropriate plan for converting the Turks if we were to devolve upon some pious and learned men the duty of compiling from the perfectly pure fountains of the Evangelists and the Apostles, and the most approved commentators, an abridgement of the whole philosophy of Christ, simple yet learned, brief but not obscure. Those things which pertain to faith, let them be expressed in the fewest possible articles; those which pertain to good living, let them also be expressed in few words, and so expressed that men may understand that the yoke of Christ is easy and light, and not harsh; that they may see that in the clergy they have found fathers and not tyrants, pastors and not robbers, that they are invited to salvation, and not dragged to slavery.... Amid the general darkness that prevails, amid such tumults in the world, in such a conflict of human opinions, to what refuge shall we flee sooner than to that truly sacred anchorage of Evangelical doctrine? What man of real piety does not perceive with sighs that this is far the most corrupt of all ages? When did ever tyranny or avarice prevail more widely or with greater impunity? When was more importance ever attached to mere ceremonies? When did iniquity abound with more licentiousness? When was charity so cold? What is said, what is read, what is heard, what is decreed, except that which savours of ambition and gain?’

With equal boldness, Erasmus proceeds to indicate the vices to which the clergy of all ranks were liable, and by which they were losing the respect of the thinking men amongst the laity: the greed of the bishops, who were perpetually plundering their dioceses by their exactions, the superstition and hypocrisy of the religious orders, the avarice and ambition of the preachers, the wrangling of the theologians. Above all, he poured out his severest censure upon that one universal fault which affected all ranks of ecclesiastics, the wretched perversion of judgement, which led them to consider the violation of any of the ceremonies and ordinances of the Church as involving a far greater amount of delinquency, than the grossest neglect of all the ordinary obligations of Christian morality. A priest might be a gambler, a fighter, totally ignorant, entirely immersed in secular affairs, a sycophant, a liar, a calumniator, and yet might escape blame if only he were careful to observe that enforced law of celibacy, which, though a law of the Church only and not an ordinance of God, was deemed of more consequence than any other qualification in the clergy.

‘If,’ says he, with truth, ‘it had been only a slight danger to religion that lay concealed in ceremonies, Paul would not have spoken so sharply against them in all his Epistles. Not that we in all cases condemn ceremonies, when used in moderation, but that we deny that the beginning and ending of religion consist in them. St. Augustine even forbade the clergy, that he brought up in his house, to any special dress; and said, that if they wished to be commended to the people it should be by their life, and not by their dress. Now-a-days, what new, what extravagant ceremonies! Yet this is not what I find fault with; what I am surprised at is, that too much importance is attached to those things which, perhaps, ought to be blamed, and too little to those which alone ought to be looked to. I am not abusing the Franciscans or the Benedictines for embracing the rule of their order, but because some of them value their rule above the Gospel.... I am not abusing them because some live on fish, others on vegetables, others on eggs, but I warn them that they are seriously mistaken if, like the Jews of old, they look upon such things as these as proofs of their holiness, and set themselves above others on account of trifles of this sort, invented by men of little minds; whilst they consider it as no fault at all to assail a man’s good name with lies. Neither Christ nor His Apostles have anywhere given directions about the choice of food; St. Paul frequently despises it: but Christ does condemn all violent slander; the writings of the Apostles abhor it; and yet on the one matter of no importance we wish to appear scrupulously religious, on the other of great moment we are bold and fearless.’

Erasmus was well aware that for thus writing he would be charged with instigating the laity to rebel against their ecclesiastical guides; but he was not to

be deterred by the fear of any such imputations. It was all very well, he said, for the clergy to praise the virtue of obedience; but Christians were called to liberty; and it was both impossible and unnatural to attempt to keep men for ever in the ignorance and submission of children. As to religious vows, Erasmus wished that it was forbidden by law that any one should bind himself by such obligations till he had reached the age of thirty, when he might be supposed capable of knowing himself, and understanding the real power of religion; and even with this enactment there was no fear, he suggests, of the monasteries failing to find inhabitants, as there were plenty of fools in the world to replenish them. And as to the vow of chastity in particular, he did not hesitate to say that there was very little difference in point of merit between celibacy and chaste matrimony.

‘In fine,’ he concludes, ‘let no one foolishly pride himself because his way of living differs from others; but in every species of life let this be the common desire of all, prosecuted with all their energy, to reach that goal which Christ has set before all men; and when every one has done his best, let him not be like the Pharisee in the Gospel, who boasts of his good deeds before God, “I fast twice in the week,” &c.; but let him, according to the advice of Christ, say, and say from his heart, and for himself, not for others, “I am an unprofitable servant, I have done what it was my duty to do.” No one more truly possesses faith than the man who thus distrusts himself; no one is farther removed from true religion than the man who seems to himself to be extremely religious.’

To appreciate aright the boldness of such words as these, we must remember that when they were written, Luther still spoke of Leo X as ‘our most Holy Lord’; and professed himself willing to throw himself at the feet of his Holiness, and to submit implicitly to his judgement; and it was not till two months after the writing of this preface that Luther took the first of his bold steps, and appealed from ‘the most Holy Father, the Pope, ill-informed, to the most Holy Lord and Father in Christ Leo, tenth of that name, better informed.’ The treatise to which the preface was prefixed, being an early production of its author, bore several marks of less mature intellect. It is written with excellent sense, in scrupulously Ciceronian Latin, and is remarkable mainly for the extraordinary contempt with which Erasmus speaks of the literal interpretation of Scripture, and the undue value which he attaches to its spiritual or allegorical signification. Yet even in this treatise, written so early as 1501, Erasmus expressed himself with the same clearness on the superstition and uselessness of many of the ceremonies of religion and the observances of the monks. ‘Monkery,’ said he, ‘is not piety; it is merely a manner of life which may be useful or useless according to the temperament of body and mind of the man who adopts it; piety

consists neither in food nor in dress, nor in any outward observance.'

These brief extracts will have made it sufficiently evident to the reader, that Tindale could scarcely have found any better means of supporting those opinions of his which had given so much umbrage to the neighbouring clergy. Whether he wished to assert the supremacy of Scripture or to censure the laborious trifling of the schoolmen, to attack the gross abuses of the religious orders or to condemn the extravagant importance that was attached to ceremonies and ritual observances, he could boldly appeal to Erasmus as unquestionably pronouncing in his favour; and opinions which might have seemed rash and ignorant in a young scholar fresh from the University, would gain an enormous accession of weight when supported by the authority of the most illustrious scholar in Europe. It seems natural to conclude that the translation of the *Enchiridion* was intended by Tindale to be at some convenient time committed to the press; but there is no record of its ever having been printed. He took his manuscript with him to London; and Humphrey Monmouth, who so kindly entertained him in the metropolis, speaks of two copies of the book which had been extensively circulated amongst the clergy and others without exciting any opposition; but these were, beyond question, consigned to the flames along with Tindale's sermons and letters, when he had been publicly denounced as a heretic, and it was dangerous to be in possession of any of his writings.

The temporary and immediate purpose, however, for which Tindale had undertaken the translation, was most successfully accomplished. In the words of the old narrator, 'Then did he translate into English a book called, *as I remember, Enchiridion Militis Christiani*, the which being translated [he] delivered to his master and lady. And after they had read that book, those great prelates were no more so often called to the house, nor, when they came, had the cheer nor countenance as they were wont to have; the which they did well perceive, and that it was by the means and incensing of Master Tyndale, and at last came no more there.'

Such was the issue of Tindale's first appearance in public as a theological disputant. His opponents were discomfited, and Sir John Walsh and his lady were gained over to his opinions. By this victory Tindale had considerably improved his own position, and secured for himself peace and respect in the manor house where he resided; whilst he was well aware at the same time that he had provoked the bitter resentment of the clergy, and that he must be prepared to face the consequences of their indignation.

The ignominious repulse at Sir John Walsh's dinner table was not the only provocation of which the neighbouring priests had to complain. His duties as instructor of the very juvenile family at Sodbury Manor could not have occu-

pieced much of the time of an energetic man like Tindale; nor would his ministrations as family chaplain in the quaint little church behind the manor-house be any very serious tax upon his industry. A larger field of labour lay close at hand; he began to preach in the adjacent villages, and used also to repair to the great city of Bristol, and preach to the crowd that collected around him on the College-green. Such a proceeding was sure to be warmly resented by men who were still sore from the chagrin of their recent discomfiture. His conduct and his opinions were freely canvassed by no friendly critics. ‘These blind and rude priests,’ says Foxe, ‘flocking together to the alehouse, for that was their preaching-place, raged and railed against him; affirming that his sayings were heresy, adding moreover unto his sayings, of their own heads, more than ever he spake<sup>6</sup>.’ They determined accordingly to avail themselves of the power which the ecclesiastical organization of the country placed within their grasp, for silencing the voice of this troublesome preacher.

The bishop of the diocese, who would naturally have been invoked to protect the Church against this threatened inroad of heresy, was, as has been already remarked, non-resident; and Wolsey, who farmed the bishopric, was also at a distance, and not likely to pay much heed to what would seem to him a mere trifling squabble amongst some country clergy. But a new chancellor, Parker, had recently been elevated to the chief local administration of the diocese; and his violent temper and hatred of all innovations pointed him out as exceedingly likely to welcome any accusations of heresy, and to treat with sufficient severity any suspected persons. Tindale was accordingly secretly accused to the chancellor; and preparations were made in the same clandestine manner for securing his condemnation. A sitting of the chancellor was appointed, at which all the priests of the neighbourhood were summoned to appear, Tindale, of course, being summoned with the rest. He was not aware of the accusations that had been lodged against him, but he had some misgivings that evil was designed. ‘Whether,’ says Foxe, in the words of his informant, ‘he had knowledge by [i. e. of] their threatenings, or that he did suspect that they would lay to his charge, it is *not now perfectly in my mind; but thus he told me*, that he doubted their examinations; so that he, in his going thitherwards, prayed in his mind heartily to God to strengthen him to stand fast in the truth of His Word.’

Tindale himself has given us a brief account of this his first experience of the danger which he was incurring by his opinions. ‘When I came before the

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<sup>6</sup> Foxe, vol. v. P. 117. Latimer, who lived in the same neighbourhood some ten years later, speaks of the charges against him as having also originated in the alehouse.

Chancellor, he threatened me grievously, and reviled me, and rated me as though I had been a dog; and laid to my charge [things] whereof there could be none accuser brought forth, as their manner is not to bring forth the accuser; and yet all the priests of the country were the same day there<sup>7</sup>. The violence here ascribed to the chancellor, it may be remarked, is in perfect keeping with all that we know from other sources of his character. This, it is believed, was the only occasion previous to his last trial on which Tindale was brought before any ecclesiastical officer on the charge of heretical teaching. Sir Thomas More, indeed, asserts that 'he sometimes savoured so shrewdly of heresy that he was once or *twice* examined thereof; but there is no record of any other examination than this informal and futile one before Parker. That there were some *prima facie* grounds for suspecting him of heresy we may well believe; and that he would have some difficulty in showing that the opinions which he had uttered were in accordance with the recognized standard of orthodoxy, may also be taken for granted; but, on the whole, his defence seems to have been ably and successfully conducted; and he left the court neither branded as a heretic, nor yet trammelled by any oath of abjuration. His antagonist More, it is true, insinuated that because he had 'glosed his words with a better sense, and said and swore that he meant no harm, folk were glad to take all to the best'; but Tindale roundly declares that he not only never took any oath, but never was asked to take any.

Though he had thus come uninjured out of what might have been a most formidable danger, yet Tindale must have perceived the risk to which he was likely to expose himself by continuing openly to propagate the opinions which had given so much offence. He could not prevent suspicions being entertained, except by a cowardly reticence which was altogether alien to his temper; still he seems to have acted with sufficient caution to give his enemies no hold over him. But the whole transaction was calculated to excite serious reflection in his mind. The opinions which had given so much offence to the neighbouring clergy were taken from that Sacred Book which was admitted to be the perfect standard of truth; and they were supported by the authority of the fathers and of the great scholars of the day, whose words were usually cited with reverence. Why, then, had they been greeted with such general dislike? Tindale became every day more convinced that this opposition resulted from the extreme ignorance of the clergy with whom he came in contact. They were I a full ignorant sort'; men who knew no more Latin than was contained in the missal, and who did not always know even that; whose reading lay principally in an inde-

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<sup>7</sup> Preface to *The Pentateuch: Works*, vol. i. p. 395.

cent medical treatise, and in the digest of the *Constitutions* of the Archbishops of Canterbury, which was carefully studied that they might know what amount of 'tythes, mortuaries, offerings, customs, and other pillage' might lawfully be claimed as the heritage of God and of holy Church.

That such opponents should pervert and misunderstand his meaning, and denounce him at every alehouse as a heretic, was not surprising; it was inevitable; yet it was most melancholy. More melancholy even than this was the fact, daily becoming more apparent to Tindale, that these men were only too faithful representatives of the spirit that was predominant amongst the rulers of the Church. If he could defend himself by the authority of Holy Scripture and the early fathers, they could allege in support of their views the undeviating practice of several centuries, and the open countenance of all the great dignitaries of the Church. In spite of their ignorance they evidently understood better than he did the actual intentions of the Church's rulers, and were more truly actuated by their spirit. Even with all their ignorance they were better exponents of the current of what was deemed orthodox teaching in the Church than he was: he stood almost alone in his opinions; they were sure of the sympathy and approbation of multitudes. Had there been, then, a general declension of the Church from its original institution? Were the great authorities in the Church acting in open violation of what seemed to be the plain letter of Scripture? Tindale knew not what to think, or how to answer questions such as these which now began to force themselves upon him; and in his difficulty he went to consult 'a certain doctor that dwelt not far off, and had been an old chancellor before to a bishop.' Tindale had already been on terms of familiar acquaintance with him, and knew that he might expect a friendly reception from him, and he therefore frankly disclosed to him the serious doubts which were beginning to rise in his mind. His doubts were resolved in a most unexpected manner. 'Do you not know,' said the doctor, 'that the Pope is the very antichrist which the Scripture speaketh of? But beware what you say; for if you shall be perceived to be of that opinion, it will cost you your life. I have been an officer of his,' he added, 'but I have given it up and defy him and all his works.'

Such an answer formed an epoch in the spiritual life of Tindale; these bold words gave definite expression to what he had begun to suspect; and the idea thus suggested was ever after held by him as one of the axioms of his religious creed. In the light of this belief, much that had long been obscure and perplexing became clear and intelligible. If the Pope was in very deed the antichrist foretold by the apostles, then it was not surprising that he should use every effort to keep the people in ignorance of that Divine rule which would so completely expose the baselessness of his pretensions; it was only natural that the

Holy Scriptures should be buried in unknown tongues, and that the meaning of the passages which occurred in the services of the Church should be obscured by whimsical, allegorical interpretations. Tindale had a clear, logical head, and was not likely to shrink from the practical conclusion to which these reflections seemed to conduct him. Gradually he would become familiarized with the contemplation of that great work to which his life was to be consecrated, and with which his name will be for ever associated. For it was to his own diligent study of the Word of God that he himself owed all his superior enlightenment; and there was every reason, he might conclude, to believe that others would come to adopt his opinions, if they were equally able to consult the Divine oracles.

It was under the influence of these reflections, therefore, that Tindale began seriously to contemplate the translation of the New Testament into the English tongue, as the noblest service that he could render to his country, and an indispensable preliminary to any possible reformation of the abuses which abounded in the Church. To us this remedy seems so natural and obvious that we are liable to fail in appreciating its merit and boldness; but in Tindale's time, such an undertaking would be considered hardly less novel and adventurous than the voyage of Sebastian Cabot from the neighbouring port of Bristol to discover unknown lands beyond untraversed oceans. As yet the Reformation had not produced any vernacular version of Holy Scripture; Luther's translation indeed appeared in September, 1522, about the same time perhaps when Tindale had formed his purpose; but there is no reason to believe that it had reached England, or that it in any way suggested Tindale's work.

Tindale has himself recorded the circumstances which led him to entertain his great design: 'I perceived by experience how that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth, except the Scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother-tongue, that they might see the process, order, and meaning of the text; for else, whatsoever truth is taught them, these enemies of all truth quench it again, partly with the smoke of their bottomless pit, whereof thou readest in Apocalypse, chap. ix, that is with apparent [i.e. seeming, not real] reasons of sophistry, and traditions of their own making, founded without ground of Scripture, and partly in juggling with the text, expounding it in such a sense as is impossible to gather of the text, if thou see the process, order, and meaning thereof<sup>8</sup>.'

Tindale, it will be perceived, expresses himself with considerable vehemence, for he was at all times bold and outspoken, even to bitterness; but it

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<sup>8</sup> Preface to *The Pentateuch: Works*, vol. i. p. 394.

must be remembered that when he penned those words of indignant remonstrance, he had been for years an exile, hunted from place to place by the implacable resentment of his enemies, and stung to the quick by the fierce and dishonest denunciations which were fulminated by the great dignitaries of the Church against his translation of the New Testament. In the same strain of indignant protest he declares: 'In this they be all agreed, to drive you from the knowledge of the Scripture, and that ye shall not have the text thereof in the mother-tongue, and to keep the world still in darkness, to the intent they might sit in the consciences of the people, through vain superstition and false doctrine, to satisfy their filthy lusts, their proud ambition, and insatiable covetousness, and to exalt their own honour above king and emperor, yea, and above God Himself. A thousand books had they lever [rather] to be put forth against their abominable doings and doctrine, than that the Scripture should come to light. For as long as they may keep that down, they will so darken the right way with the mist of their sophistry; and so tangle them that either rebuke or despise their abominations with arguments of philosophy, and with worldly similitudes and apparent reasons of natural wisdom, and with wresting the Scripture unto their own purpose, clean contrary unto the process, order, and meaning of the text; and so delude them in descanting upon it with allegories, and amaze them, expounding it in many senses before the unlearned lay people, when it hath but one simple, literal sense, whose light the owls cannot abide, that though thou feel in thine heart, and art sure, how that all is false that they say, yet couldst thou not solve their subtle riddles. *Which thing only moved me to translate the New Testament*<sup>9</sup>.'

There is no doubt that in his reference to 'sophistry,' arguments of philosophy,' and 'subtle riddles,' Tindale was obliquely censuring Sir Thomas More's *Dialogue*, which had shortly before been printed, and which is certainly a most ingenious and subtle defence of the doctrines of the Church of Rome. The last words, *Which thing only moved me to translate the New Testament,*' are important. They indicate that Tindale's intention to translate was adopted just about the time when he left Little Sodbury, that is, about the end of 1522 or beginning of 1523.

It was scarcely to be expected that a man of Tindale's temperament should be able to suppress all mention of the great design on which all his thoughts were now concentrated. In spite of the obloquy and danger to which the declaration of his intentions was sure to expose him, he was provoked in the heat of controversy to reveal his secret. 'Communing and disputing,' says Foxe, 'with

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<sup>9</sup> Preface to *The Pentateuch: Works*, vol. 1. i. p. 393.

a certain learned man in whose company he happened to be, he drove him to that issue, that the learned man said, “ We were better be without God’s laws than the Pope’s.” Master Tindale hearing that, answered him, “I defy the Pope and all his laws”; and said, “*If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou doest*<sup>10</sup>.””

Tindale, in this famous declaration, was simply reechoing the noble sentiment of Erasmus already quoted; and not only was Erasmus still, so to speak, his spiritual guide, but the work which he was contemplating must have brought him afresh to the study of the writings of the great scholar. For, as became an accomplished Greek scholar, Tindale was resolved to translate the New Testament from the original language, and not, as Wycliffe had done, from the Latin Vulgate; and the only edition of the Greek text which had yet appeared, the only one at least likely to be in Tindale’s possession, was that issued by Erasmus at Basle in 1516, or even the second edition of 1519, the elegant Latin version of which had attracted the notice of Bilney, and had so unexpectedly been blessed to his soul. The work of Erasmus was, therefore, the constant study of Tindale in his leisure hours. Perhaps he may have actually commenced at Little Sodbury the first rude drafts of what was to grow into the noblest of English books; and most unquestionably, whether in his study (which is said to have been at the back of the Manor-house, looking out blank upon a patch of steep hill) or in his daily rambles over the Cotswolds, his thoughts were busily engaged upon his great undertaking, calmly and deliberately weighing the many questions involved in its successful accomplishment.

It need not be added that the secret of his intentions, when disclosed by him, was speedily published all over the neighbourhood, and that it was not likely to diminish the hostile feeling already entertained towards him. The priests waxed fiercer in their opposition, and loudly charged him with heresy; hinting, at the same time, that ‘though he bare himself bold of the gentlemen there in that country, yet notwithstanding, shortly, he should be otherwise talked withal<sup>11</sup>.’ The Tindales, it will be remembered, occupied a respectable position in the neighbourhood; his brother had very recently been appointed receiver of the crown-rents for the manor of Berkeley; Sir John Walsh was a person of distinction, whose anger was not to be lightly provoked; and it is evident also that Tindale’s arguments had made a profound impression upon several other gentlemen of influence in the vicinity. But, however powerful Tin-

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<sup>10</sup> Foxe, edition of 1563.

<sup>11</sup> Foxe, vol. v. p. 117.

dale's friends might be to protect him against any mere casual ebullition of clerical spite, they were quite powerless to shield him from any regularly organized proceedings by the great ecclesiastical authorities of the day. Tindale himself was not insensible of his danger: he replied boldly to the priests that they might 'remove him into any county in all England, giving him ten pounds a-year to live with, and binding him to no more but to teach children and to preach.'

But it was evident that matters were growing to a crisis; and Tindale saw too clearly that it would be impossible for him to remain at Little Sodbury in peaceful prosecution of his great purpose. This purpose, however, he was determined to prosecute, whatever inconvenience or danger it might bring upon him; and it seemed to him not impossible that he might find in some other part of England that liberty which was no longer attainable at Sodbury. He resolved, therefore, to give up the post which he held in the family of Sir John Walsh. I perceive," he said to his patron, "that I shall not be suffered to tarry long here in this country, nor you shall be able to keep me out of their hands; and what displeasure you might have thereby is hard to know, for the which I should be right sorry." So with the goodwill of his master he departed from him to London.'

Several considerations suggested London as the most suitable place to which Tindale might repair in his difficulties. If he succeeded in finishing his translation, it was of course desirable that it should be printed, in order that it might be within the reach of those for whom it was intended; and the metropolis offered greater facilities for printing than any town in England. Moreover, the old Bishop of London, the ignorant FitzJames, who had attempted to punish Colet, and who had rigorously prosecuted all heretics, was recently dead; and the vacant see was filled by a young accomplished prelate, a distinguished scholar, the friend of More and Erasmus, from whom, if from any one, Tindale might expect sympathy and patronage. To London, therefore, Tindale resolved to go, hoping to find in Tunstal a liberal patron under whose protection his work might be prosecuted. With the simple enthusiasm of a scholar, he immediately set about the translation into English of one of the orations of Isocrates, feeling confident that such a conspicuous proof of his knowledge of Greek would be the surest passport to the favour of a bishop who was famed for his love of learning and his liberality to scholars. Sir John Walsh, whose experience of the world enabled him more correctly to appreciate what was likely to secure the notice of the bishop, furnished him with a letter of introduction to his friend Sir Harry Guildford, Controller of the Royal Household, and high in favour with the Sovereign, whose recommendation therefore would probably

be of more service to an unknown scholar than any possible evidences of unquestionable learning. Thus provided, and carrying with him, doubtless, his copy of the Greek Testament of Erasmus and his manuscripts, Tindale, after taking farewell of his relatives and his pupils, turned his back on the smiling vale of Berkeley, which he was never to behold again, and set out on his journey to London, full of those bright visions of hope which the name of the mighty metropolis has so often conjured up in the bosom of inexperienced youth.