

William Tindale

A Biography

Being a Contribution to the Early History of the
English Bible

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CHAPTER V

TINDALE'S FIRST NEW TESTAMENT: DESCRIPTION OF THE BOOK IN ITS TWO FORMS: TINDALE'S QUALIFICATIONS AS A TRANSLATOR: SPECIMENS OF HIS WORK

THE issue of the first New Testament forms too important an event in the life of Tindale to be passed over with the mere historical narrative of its occurrence; the reader may reasonably expect to be supplied with detailed information as to the exact nature and merits of that work, which constitutes Tindale's claim on the gratitude of all English-speaking people. And it is the more necessary to present these details, because an enormous amount of misconception has long prevailed on the subject, which it is desirable, not for Tindale's sake merely, but also, in some measure, for that of the English New Testament, if possible, effectually to remove. Without, therefore, entering minutely into questions that belong more appropriately to the province of the antiquarian and the bibliographer, we shall endeavour clearly and succinctly to present in this chapter such information concerning Tindale's first New Testament as, it may be presumed, must be of interest to all intelligent readers.

According to the statement of Buschius, already quoted from Spalatin's journal, six thousand copies of the New Testament were printed at Worms; that is, as has been generally understood, three thousand in octavo, and as many in quarto. And the reader, perhaps, takes for granted, that of this large number, some considerable fraction has been preserved intact through the changes of three centuries and a half. Had the ravages of time alone been directed against the book, no doubt not a few might still be found safe in the shelter of our older libraries; but the New Testaments were for many years rigorously prohibited, they were eagerly sought for by the officers of the Church, and publicly burned whenever they were discovered. Thus it has happened that of the three thousand *quarto* New Testaments, only a single copy remains, and that in a most imperfect state: and of the *octavo*, only two are known to exist; one, incomplete, in the library of St. Paul's Cathedral, and the other, wanting only the title-page, in the Baptist College at Bristol. A brief description of the fragmentary quarto, and the nearly perfect octavo, will not be unacceptable to the reader, and cannot be thought out of place in a life of Tindale.

The quarto fragment is justly esteemed the chief treasure of the Grenville Library in the British Museum. So completely, indeed, had this New Testament begun at Cologne disappeared from view, that its very existence had been ignored and even denied; and eminent authorities had maintained that no New Testament was printed in English, before that which was issued surreptitiously at Antwerp towards the close of 1526. In 1834, Thomas Rodd, a London bookseller, in exam-

ining a volume which contained a treatise by the Swiss Reformer, Oecolampadius, found that there was bound up with it a fragment of the Gospel of St. Matthew in English. There was no title-page, nor anything to indicate the name of the translator, or the time or place of its publication. It was evident, however, that the leaves had originally formed part of what was intended to be a complete version of the whole New Testament; for the fragment contained a list of all the books in its Table of Contents. But notwithstanding the absence of all the ordinary indications of printer or authorship, there were not wanting certain clues by the help of which ingenious scholars were able to solve those obscure questions.

Thus it was observed that the prologue, with which the fragment began, commenced with an elegant ornamental Y (used for I), which on further investigation was found to occur in several books that were undoubtedly productions of Quentel's press. Still further, there was prefixed to the translation a large bold woodcut of Saint Matthew, represented as busily engaged writing his Gospel, and in the act of dipping his pen into an inkstand held for him by an angel. This very same woodcut is also used, curiously enough, in one of the volumes edited by Tindale's enemy, Cochloeus, during his exile at Cologne, viz.. a Commentary on St. Matthew by Rupert, Abbot of Deutz. In this latter work, however, in order to accommodate it to the smaller space available, the woodcut has been slightly reduced in size; and we have thus ocular demonstration that the fragment of the New Testament must have preceded the Commentary of Rupert; as the entire block must, of necessity, have preceded the reduced one. Rupert's work on St. Matthew was finished June 12, 1526; the fragment, therefore, belongs to an earlier date. The prologue, moreover, contains those very assertions for which Tindale's New Testament, on its first appearance, was held up to public reprobation. Thus every step in the identification is complete; and by internal evidence which it is impossible to dispute, the leaves are demonstrated to belong to that first edition of the New Testament whose history we have just read, which was begun under such favourable auspices at Cologne, and was so unexpectedly interrupted by the vindictive energy of Cochloeus. The precious fragment came subsequently into the possession of the Right Hon. Thomas Grenville, and was bequeathed by him to the British Museum. It consists of only thirty-one leaves, and finishes abruptly with the words 'Friend, how camest thou in hither and' in the twenty-second chapter of St. Matthew. The inner margin contains a few references to parallel passages, such as are commonly printed in modern Bibles; while in the outer margin are placed notes of various kinds, doctrinal, explanatory, and polemic, which are, in fact, the *pestilent glosses* so repeatedly denounced by the English authorities¹.

¹ The precious volume is numbered 12,179 in the Grenville Library in the Museum: it has been bound in blue morocco, and leaves have been inserted to make the book as near as can be calculat-

The history of the one nearly perfect copy of the *octavo* Testament of Worms can be traced back for upwards of a century. Somewhere about the year 1740, the Earl of Oxford, the collector of the famous Harleian Library, secured it through one of his numerous agents, whom he rewarded for the discovery with a payment of ten pounds, and an annuity of twenty. At the death of Lord Oxford his library was purchased by Osborne, the famous London bookseller, who, in complete ignorance of the value of the work, sold it to the great bibliographer, Joseph Ames, for fifteen shillings. After passing through the hands of another bookseller, it came into the possession of the Rev. Dr. Gifford, one of the Assistant Librarians of the British Museum, who gave twenty guineas for it. Dying in 1784, he bequeathed the precious treasure, with the rest of his valuable collection of Bibles and rare books, to the Baptist College in his native city of Bristol; and there the volume rests in a fire-proof safe, secure, it is to be hoped, against all further vicissitudes.

The book, as has already been stated, wants the title-page, and contains no date nor name of printer or translator; but the proof of its identity with the New Testament printed at Worms, as described in the previous chapter, is complete. It has been demonstrated by the most unquestionable of all evidence, the juxtaposition of facsimiles, that the same type is used in the Bristol New Testament as in other works of Schoeffer's printing preserved in the royal libraries at Stuttgart and Munich; that the water-marks are of similar design; and that some of the illustrative vignettes are identical. In short, no possible doubt remains on the identity of the book. Unlike the work begun at Cologne, this octavo New Testament contains neither prologue nor marginal glosses, nor anything in addition to the sacred text, except a very brief 'Epistle to the Reader,' subjoined to the book, mainly by way of apologizing for the haste and consequent imperfection with which the volume had been finished. The copy which has actually been preserved at Bristol seems to have belonged to some person of wealth; as all the capitals, vignettes, and paragraphs are illuminated, the pages are neatly enclosed with red lines, and references to parallel passages are inserted in ink in the margin, evidently by a contemporary hand².

Such are the two remaining specimens of Tindale's earliest labours in the translation of the New Testament; and a collation of the fragment of the quarto with the complete octavo, makes it quite certain that they contain one and the same version. There are, indeed, several differences in the spelling of the two; but these

ed to the original size. The prologue has been printed in the Parker Society Edition of Tindale's *Works*. The whole has been photolithographed by Mr. Arber, and issued with a valuable preface. No Biblical scholar can consider his library complete without a copy of this work.

² I have examined the volume myself; but in my details I have preferred to rely on Mr. Fry's Introduction to his admirable facsimile of the book: if any admirer of Tindale wishes an appropriate memento of the illustrious translator, let him procure Mr. Fry's beautiful work.

are sufficiently accounted for by the supposition, obviously an exceedingly reasonable one, that in reprinting the text at Worms, Tindale took the opportunity of correcting any mistakes in the orthography which had crept into the quarto at Cologne. The question, occasionally asked, whether the quarto or the octavo was first finished and sent to England, we do not pretend to answer. The fragment of the quarto that has been preserved, beyond all question preceded anything that was printed at Worms, for the evidence of Cochloeus is conclusive on this point; but whether the quarto, already begun, was at once completed, or whether its publication was delayed till the smaller issue was finished, is a point on which, in the total absence of all authentic evidence, any decision must be mere conjecture. All that can be affirmed with certainty is, that the very earliest official notice of Tindale's New Testament in England, distinctly specifies both the edition *with glosses* (the quarto), and that *without glosses* (the octavo), as dispersed in great numbers throughout the diocese of London.

Passing, however, from these details, which are only of minor moment, a far more important question demands our consideration. It may be asked, 'Was Tindale properly qualified to translate the New Testament, and what is the real literary value of his translation?' These questions are of prime importance, and they demand a plain and satisfactory reply.

It has been customary to speak of Tindale as an indifferent scholar, ignorant of Hebrew, imperfectly acquainted with Greek, knowing only Latin and perhaps German, and making his versions of Scripture from the Vulgate and from Luther. Even Fuller takes for granted that he 'rendered the Old Testament out of the Latin, his best friends not entitling him to any skill at all in the Hebrew³.' Fuller, to be sure, is no very great authority, and would have been sadly at a loss to name any of the *best friends of Tindale* who had thus acknowledged his total ignorance of Hebrew; but other writers who profess to have made elaborate inquiry speak in the same contemptuous style of Tindale's meagre scholarship. Hallam, 'classic Hallam, much renowned for Greek,' informs his readers, in a sentence replete with errors, that Tindale's New Testament was 'published in 1535 or 1536 ! 'and was 'avowedly taken from the German of Luther and from the Latin Vulgate.' Bishop Marsh, in his *Theological Lectures*, considers himself to have proved by copious induction, that Tindale's version was taken from that of Luther, and that, in fact, Tindale knew nothing beyond Latin and German. And in more recent times, Dean Hook, without entering into any examination of the subject, asserts incidentally, that Tindale's translation was only doing into English the Septuagint and the Vulgate⁴; forgetting, apparently, that the man who could' do the Septua-

³ Fuller's *Church History*, vol. iii. p. 162. Brewer's edition.

⁴ *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury*, vol. vi. p. 233. The Dean is very unfortunate in his statements on the history of the English Bible. He asserts, for example, that in 1526 Tunstal

gint into English' needed not to rely upon the Vulgate. Minor writers have, of course, followed in the wake of these authorities, and without ever having studied or even seen Tindale's work presume to indulge in ill-natured sneers against Tindale's supposed ignorance⁵.

Questions of fact can only be determined by testimony and investigation; and, fortunately, Tindale's scholarship can be sufficiently established by an overwhelming array of evidence both external and internal. Sir Thomas More, a thoroughly competent judge, perfectly free from all prepossession in Tindale's favour, admits that Tindale 'before he fell into these frenzies [of Luther's opinions] was taken for full prettily learned.' Whilst criticizing and condemning his translation on account of its countenancing Lutheran doctrines, he never denies Tindale's competent scholarship; nay, he even goes so far as to suggest that a certain book which he bitterly opposed, could not possibly have been written by Tindale on account of its lack of learning⁶. Cochloeus, whose determined hostility we have already noticed, speaks of Tindale and his associate at Cologne as 'learned, skilful *in languages*, and eloquent.' George Joye, an English Protestant refugee, who quarrelled with Tindale and writes with most extravagant vehemence against him, is, indeed, spiteful enough to insinuate in one part of his furious tirade that he 'wondered how Tyndale could compare his translation with *Greek* sith himself is not so exquisitely seen therein'; yet in another place he speaks freely of Tindale's 'high learning in his *Hebrew, Greek, Latin*, etc.'⁷ The testimony of Foxe and other admirers may, perhaps, be undervalued as prejudiced, but we have the authority of an eminent German scholar who had met Tindale at Worms in 1526, and who subsequently stated to Spalatin that the Englishman who translated the New Testament into English was '*so skilled in seven languages, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, English, French, that whichever he spoke you would suppose it his native tongue*'⁸. The scholar who has in such emphatic terms vouched for Tin-

bought up *the whole of Wycliffe's* translation of the New Testament and burned them!! What he meant to say being evidently his, that in 1529 Tunstal bought up a considerable number of *Tindale's* New Testaments and other prohibited works, and burned them in 1530.

⁵ An elaborate examination of the evidence of Tindale's Greek and Hebrew scholarship is contained in an exhaustive review of Dr. Mombert's edition of *William Tindale's Five Books of Moses*, printed in the *Athenaeum* for April 18 and May 2, 1885.

⁶ The words cited are from Sir Thomas More's *Answer to the first part of a poisoned book which a nameless heretic hath named 'The Supper of the Lord,' Works*, pp. 1035-1138; Sir Thomas often repeats the same opinion.

⁷ Joye's *Apology*; the passages quoted occur in C. iii. and E. ii. reverse; the book is not paged, and is extremely rare. I quote from a MS. copy of it kindly lent me by Mr. Fry. This exceedingly interesting and valuable little book has been made accessible to all readers by Mr. Edward Arber, who in 1882 printed it in his *English Scholar's Library*.

⁸ Schelhorn, *Amoenitates Literariae*, vol. iv. p. 431; under the day after S. Laurence's Day, 1526, i.e. August 11.

dale's learning was Hermann Buschius⁹, the friend of Erasmus and Reuchlin, one of the leaders in the revival of letters, one of the conjoint authors of the *Epistolae obscurorum virorum*, a critic, in short, whose verdict can only be questioned by one who is entirely ignorant of the literary history of the sixteenth century.

'But,' it may be asked, 'admitting that Tindale was sufficiently acquainted with Greek to be able to translate from the original, did he in fact translate from the original? and if so, what is meant by the accusation so frequently brought against him by his contemporaries, that he translated *Luther's* New Testament?' To this last question no satisfactory answer has yet been attempted in any history of the English Bible; it has been in general ridiculed as an idle and ignorant slander, and yet an explanation, complete and unanswerable, can readily enough be given.

To any one who has enjoyed the opportunity of placing side by side the folio of Luther's German Testament, printed in September, 1522, and the quarto of Tindale, printed in September, 1525, the whole matter is clear at a glance. Tindale's New Testament is Luther's in miniature; the general appearance of the page is the same; the arrangement of the text is the same; and the appropriation of the margins, the inner one for parallel passages, and the outer for *glosses*, is also the same. Still further, what is of far more importance, although it is now for the first time indicated¹⁰, the marginal notes, those '*pestilent glosses*,' against which the indignation of the clergy was especially excited, have been to a large extent translated by Tindale from those of Luther. Not that Tindale translated like a servile imitator, whose intellect was too barren to be capable of originality; everywhere he uses his own judgement; sometimes he curtails Luther's notes; sometimes he omits them; often he inserts notes of his own, and these of various kinds, explanatory and doctrinal. Some of the longest of these marginal glosses, as well as some of those which most emphatically propound the doctrine of justification by faith, are original to Tindale; in other cases the words of Luther have been expanded, and have formed not so much the source of Tindale's note as the nucleus out of which it has grown. Of the whole number of *ninety* marginal glosses which occur in the fragment of Tindale's quarto that has come down to us,—*fifty-two* have been more or less literally taken from Luther, and *thirty-eight* are original; and, if we suppose that the same proportion existed throughout the whole of the work, then it may be admitted, that the customary allegation that he 'translated Luther's New Testament,' while intended doubtless to attach opprobrium to the book, has also a sufficiently specious foundation to rest upon.

⁹ On Buschius, and his position in the *respublica literarum*, points which have been singularly neglected in histories of the Bible, see Sir William Hamilton's *Discussions*, p. 327, &c. Some of our English literary critics ought to ask the *literati* of the Continent what *they* think of men who dispute Buschius's testimony.

¹⁰ I leave these words in the text, because, although Mr. Arber has anticipated me in print, my researches were completed long before his book appeared.

Enough has been said on this point to show that in thus dealing with Luther's glosses, Tindale acted not as a mere feeble copyist, unable to walk alone, but as an independent scholar, thinking and judging for himself, even when borrowing from another. It were alike base and foolish to defend his originality at the expense of truth; and those who impartially weigh all the circumstances of the case, will probably not think it any serious derogation from Tindale's merits to believe, that living at Wittemberg, and following in the footsteps of Luther as a translator, he had come largely under the influence of that great master-mind of the age. The same explanation may be applied with equal justice to the prologue which Tindale has prefixed to his translation, and in which many passages have been borrowed from Luther, as the reader speedily begins to suspect from the characteristic ring of the sentences.

When, however, we pass from these, which are mere appendages to the work, to the text of the translation, then the genuine originality and independence of Tindale at once become conspicuous. In the very first verse of his translation he varies from that predecessor whom he is said to have implicitly followed; and he manifests the same independence throughout. Not that he translates without any regard to the labours of those who had preceded him in the work; it would be a small compliment to his good sense to believe that he undertook a labour of so much importance without availing himself of all materials that could in any way contribute to the successful completion of his task. Indeed, it is obvious to any one, who has sufficient scholarship to compare the various works, that, as he proceeded in his undertaking, Tindale had before him the Vulgate, the Latin version of Erasmus, and the German of Luther, and that in rendering from the original Greek he carefully consulted all these aids; but he did so not with the helpless imbecility of a mere tyro, but with the conscious independence of an accomplished scholar. He consulted those who had preceded him, as a modern classical critic consults the scholiasts and commentators who have laboured on the same work: and the imputation of servility or ignorance is as baseless in the one case as in the other. It is no derogation from the originality of any modern German editor of Virgil or Sophocles that we can trace in his writings the influence of previous editors; and equally it is no derogation from the independence of Tindale's version that we can trace in it the influence of previous translators.

To a scholar, the most convincing proof of what has now been asserted is that which arises from the actual comparison of Tindale's work with the original Greek, and with the versions which unquestionably lay open before him as he proceeded in his work¹¹; but to the general reader perhaps, the most satisfactory demonstration that can be given of the superlative merit of Tindale's work, is the

¹¹ On this point it may suffice to refer the reader to the excellent summary of Westcott, in his *History of the English Bible*, pp.172-212,

fact that the English New Testament, as we now have it, is, in its substance, the unchanged language of Tindale's first version. The English Bible has been subjected to repeated revisions; the scholarship of generations, better provided than Tindale was with critical apparatus, has been brought to bear upon it; writers, by no means over-friendly to the original translator, have had it in their power to disparage and displace his work; yet, in spite of all these influences, that Book, to which all Englishmen turn as the source, and the guide, and the stay of their spiritual life, is still substantially the translation of Tindale. And most emphatically may it be said of those passages of the New Testament which are most intimately associated with our deepest religious emotions, that they are the actual unchanged words of the original translator which are treasured up in our hearts, and are so potent in impressing the soul.

Mr. Froude has said, with equal eloquence and truth, Of the translation itself, though since that time it has been many times revised and altered, we may say that it is substantially the Bible with which we are all familiar. The peculiar genius-if such a word may be permitted-which breathes through it, the mingled tenderness and majesty, the Saxon simplicity, the preternatural grandeur, unequalled, unapproached in the attempted improvements of modern scholars, all are here, and bear the impress of the mind of one man William Tyndale¹². Of the truth of what may seem an overcharged panegyric, the reader will himself be able to judge from the following specimens, selected, not because in them Tindale has exhibited any special care, but because they are amongst the most impressive and the most familiar of the words of Holy Writ. To enable the reader to perceive at a glance how true it is that the Authorized Version is substantially that of Tindale, in the following passages what is still retained of Tindale's work is printed in Roman characters, and what has been changed in *Italic*¹³.

I.—ST. MATTHEW VII. 7-20.

7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you

8 For *whosoever* asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

9 Is there *any* man *among you* which would *proffer* his son a stone if he *asked him* bread?

10 Or if he asked fish, *would he proffer* him a serpent?

11 If ye then *which are* evil, *can* give to your children good gifts, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask of

¹² Froude's *History of England*, vol. iii. p. 84.

¹³ In these extracts the spelling is reduced to the modern standard, but no word has been otherwise altered; the first is taken from the Grenville fragment.

him?

12 Therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, even so do ye to them: this is the law and the prophets.

13 Enter in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat

14 *For* strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

15 Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of *briars*?

17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bring forth *bad* fruit, *nor yet a bad* tree can bring forth good fruit.

19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit *shall be* hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

II.—ST. JOHN XVII. 1-11.

1 These words spake Jesus and lift up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come, glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee.

2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

3 This is life eternal, that they might know thee *that only very* God, and whom thou hast sent Jesus Christ.

4 I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the works which thou gavest me to do.

5 And now glorify me *thou* Father *in thine own Presence*¹⁴, with the glory which I had with thee *ere* the world was.

6 I have *declared* thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou *hast given* them me, and they have kept thy *sayings*.

7 Now have they known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.

8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and have believed that thou didst send me.

¹⁴ In his subsequent revision of the New Testament, Tindale altered this into—*with thine own self*, which is the language of our present version.

9 I pray for them, I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine.

10 And all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.

11 And now am I no more in the world, but *they* are in the world, and I come to thee: Holy Father, keep *in* thine own name *them* which thou hast given me that they may be one as we are.

III.—ST. LUKE XV. 11-24.

11 A certain man had two sons

12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me *my part* of the goods that to me *belongeth*. And he divided unto them his *substance*.

13 And not *long* after, the younger son gathered all *that he had* together, and took his journey into a far country, and there *he* wasted his goods with riotous living.

14 And when he had spent all *that he had*, there rose a *great dearth* throughout all that *same* land: and he began to *lack*.

15 And he went and *clave* to a citizen of that same country, *which* sent him to the field to *keep* his swine.

16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the *cods*¹⁵ that the swine *ate*; and no man gave him.

17 *Then* he *remembered* himself¹⁶ and said, How many hired servants *at* my father's have bread enough, and *I die* for hunger.

18 I will arise and go to my father and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.

19 Nor am I not worthy¹⁷ to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants.

20 And he arose and came to his father. When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion *on him*, and ran *unto him*¹⁸, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, *neither* am I worthy *henceforth*¹⁹ to be called thy son.

22 *Then* said the father to his servants, Bring forth *that* best garment and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet.

23 And bring hither *that* fatted calf, and kill *him*, and let us eat and be merry

24 For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is *now* found.

¹⁵ i.e. shell or husk, as in peascod.

¹⁶ In Tindale's later version, *Then he came to himself*, as in the Authorized Version.

¹⁷ In Tindale's revision, *and am no more worthy*; so also in verse 21.

¹⁸ The superfluous words, *on him* and *unto him*, were omitted in Tindale's revision.

¹⁹ See note *supra*.

These passages, which have been selected exclusively on the ground of their being amongst the most familiar and most beautiful in the New Testament, will suffice to show how true it is that our Authorized Version is substantially the version of Tindale. Larger specimens would only confirm the conclusion: it has been found, for example, by actual examination that nine-tenths of the First Epistle of St. John, as we now have it, are retained from Tindale, and even in the difficult Epistle to the Ephesians, five-sixths are Tindale's; and similar proportions obtain throughout the whole volume. In short, the English New Testament as we now have it is, in its substance and form, the work of Tindale; no other man has left any trace of his individuality upon it.

Even this does not fully represent Tindale's influence on our present version. Not only is the great bulk of it still in his own unchanged words, but what changes have been made, have been, perhaps unconsciously, dictated by the spirit of Tindale. All subsequent revisions have been made in accordance with that type or standard which Tindale had fixed, and which three centuries have concurred in unanimously recognizing as the true ideal of the language appropriate to that sacred volume in which God speaks to men. Even as a literary work the issue of Tindale's translation forms an important era in our history. At a time when the English language was still unformed; when it had not as yet been the vehicle of any great literary undertaking; when men of learning still looked upon it as an imperfect instrument, fit only for commonplace purposes, Tindale showed that its capacity was unbounded; that in simplicity, majesty, strength, musical flow, ability to relate gracefully and perspicuously, to touch the feelings, to awe by its solemnity, to express the highest truths in the clearest words, it yields to no language ancient or modern. This is not the place to dilate upon the mere literary merits and benefits of Tindale's version; but we may be allowed to remark that, in thus holding up before the nation, in a book which has become sanctified by the reverence of ten generations, a model of the highest literary excellence, simple, honest, and manly; free alike from the pedantry of the verbal scholar, and the affected point and force of the mere man of letters, he has exercised a permanent influence of the most beneficial kind over the literary taste of the English people. When to this we add, or endeavour in imagination to add, the thousandfold higher and nobler purposes which his book has so effectually promoted (and what imagination can conceive them, what pen could worthily describe them?), shall we hesitate to say that as it was the consciousness of the will of God that prompted him to his noble task, so he was not without the aid of the Spirit of God in its accomplishment?

Tindale put forward no claim that his work should be considered either infallible or immaculate. He had honestly and diligently striven to do his task as well as he could; but the whole had been finished in little more than a single year (for we

cannot suppose that he had done much more in London than simply weigh the matter well and decide upon the best form of translation), and he was well aware that his work might be susceptible of improvement. He himself, in the noble address to the reader, subjoined to his octavo version, promised to revise and amend his translation if opportunity and leisure were vouchsafed to him; and so far from deprecating criticism he invited the learned to contribute their aid towards improving what was amiss. Tindale's words, the spelling modernized, run as follows:

'Them that are learned Christianly, I beseech (for as much as I am sure, and my conscience beareth me record, that of a pure intent, singly and faithfully I have interpreted it, as far forth as God gave me the gift of knowledge and understanding) that the rudeness of the work now at the first time, offend them not; but that they consider how that I had no man to counterfeit, neither was help with English of any that had interpreted the same, or such like thing in the Scripture before time. Moreover, even very necessity and cumbrance (God is record) above strength, which I will not rehearse, lest we should seem to boast ourselves [alluding, no doubt, to the interruption at Cologne], caused that many things are lacking, which necessarily are required. Count it as a thing not having his full shape, but as it were born afore his time, even as a thing begun rather than finished. In time to come (if God have appointed us thereunto), we will give it his full shape; and put out, if aught be added superfluously; and add to, if aught be overseen through negligence; and will enforce to bring to compendiousness that which is now translated at the length, and to give light where it is required, and to seek in certain places more proper English, and with a table to expound the words which are not commonly used, and show how the Scripture useth many words which are otherwise understood of the common people; and to help with a declaration where one tongue taketh not another; and will endeavour ourselves, as it were, to seethe it better, and to make it more apt for the weak stomachs; desiring them that are learned, and able, to remember their duty, and to help thereunto, and to bestow unto the edifying of Christ's body (which is the congregation of them that believe) those gifts which they have received of God for the same purpose. The grace that cometh of Christ be with them that love Him. Pray for us.'

And even more emphatic is the translator's declaration, in the opening sentences of that prologue which was prefixed to the edition interrupted at Cologne, and which may be supposed to express his more deliberate judgement, as it was written with more care than the short and hurried note which accompanied the octavo printed by Schoeffer:

'I have here translated, brethren and sisters most dear and tenderly beloved in Christ, the New Testament for your spiritual edifying, consolation and solace; exhorting instantly and beseeching those that are better seen in the tongues than I,

and that have higher gifts of grace to interpret the sense of the Scripture and meaning of the Spirit than I, to consider and ponder my labour, and that with the spirit of meekness. And if they perceive in any places that I have not attained the very sense of the tongue, or meaning of the Scripture, or have not given the right English word, that they put to their hands to amend it, remembering that so is their duty to do. For we have not received the gifts of God for ourselves only, or for to hide them; but for to bestow them unto the honouring of God and Christ, and edifying of the congregation, which is the body of Christ²⁰.

Tindale's life was not a long one, but he was spared to accomplish as much, perhaps, as was then possible, of that revision and improvement of his translation, which he so cordially recommends to all men of learning. From such a revision, conducted in the spirit which the first translator has described, no possible harm, nothing but good can result; and any revision, conducted in a different spirit, animated by the mere love of change, or by the foibles of grammatical pedantry, will meet only with the universal scorn of all English-speaking people.

²⁰ From the Grenville fragment: spelling modernized.