

William Tindale

A Biography

Being a Contribution to the Early History
of the English Bible

By Robert Demaus, M.A.

Author of 'Hugh Latimer: A Biography'

Popular Edition, Revised

By Richard Lovett, M.A.

The Religious Tract Society

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CHAPTER IX

CONTROVERSY WITH SIR THOMAS MORE

THE literary duel between Tindale and Sir Thomas More, a most important occurrence in the life of both these illustrious men, has been reserved for description in a distinct chapter, so as not to interfere with the continuity of the preceding and succeeding narrative. The combat may be said to have been maintained with more or less vigour for some five or six years, and forms by far too prominent an episode in Tindale's biography to be lightly passed over.

One of the earliest precautions adopted by the English authorities in order to isolate England from contamination by the Lutheran opinions which were spreading on the Continent, was to prohibit, under severe penalties, any one to import, sell, read, or possess heretical books. As early as 1521 Wolsey had peremptorily commanded all who possessed Lutheran works to give them up; but the ingenuity of adventurous merchants, and the zeal of devoted colporteurs, contrived without much difficulty to elude the vigilance of the authorities. The works of the Continental Reformers were imported into England in great numbers, and were widely circulated in London, in the Universities, and in those districts where the people had imbibed the opinions of the Wickliffites. Occasional discoveries of these books were made by the authorities; stray volumes were seized and publicly burned; but the bishops were quite unaware of the enormous dimensions which the circulation of those prohibited books had reached. The disclosures of the winter of 1527 and the spring of 1528 at length revealed to them something of the extent to which, in spite of their prohibitions, the forbidden works had been introduced into England. Upwards of three hundred and fifty such books had been introduced into Oxford in a single visit by a single agent; and they were, with very little reserve, offered for sale in the streets of London in hundreds.

In these circumstances, when it was at last ascertained that Tindale's New Testament, and the works of Luther, Lambert, Wickliffe, Zwingle, and other Reformers had been for years extensively read, it became evident to the bishops that it was necessary, if possible, to provide some antidote to what they considered the fatal poison, of which so many had already partaken. By greater diligence in the future, or by the strange device of purchasing all dangerous books, they hoped to be able to arrest the progress of heresy in time to come; but some other expedient must be adopted to undo the mischief that had already been done. Tunstal was prepared with a remedy. He resolved to use in defence of the Church the same weapon that had been so successfully employed against her.

The press had circulated the poison, he determined that the antidote should likewise be circulated by the press.

For this task of defending the Church with his pen against all assaults, one man, Sir Thomas More, was pre-eminently qualified, both by his incomparable genius and by his devoted adherence to the Church. It could not be objected to him that he was an ignorant bigot, and a foe to all polite learning, for he was one of the most distinguished scholars in Europe; it could not even be alleged that he was unable to enter into the feelings of the Reformers, and that his eyes were blinded by unreasoning prejudice, for he had been the bosom friend of Erasmus and Colet, and must therefore have been able to sympathize to some extent with the opinions which these great men had been amongst the first to propagate. Possessed of very considerable learning and inexhaustible ingenuity; naturally mild and placable; honest and sincere in his own beliefs, and hitherto an advocate for freedom and toleration; of personal character above all suspicion; and, finally, beyond all question, superior to all living Englishmen in every species of literary accomplishment; Sir Thomas More was of all men the best fitted to be the champion of the Church; the man most likely to present her cause in the most favourable light, and to produce the most plausible arguments against all her assailants. If Sir Thomas More could not defend the Church, her cause was hopeless.

Tunstal accordingly addressed himself to More, and entreated him to come to the help of the Church against her enemies. On March 7, 1528¹, he wrote to Sir Thomas, lamenting that ‘many children of iniquity had been found who endeavoured to introduce into England both the old and damnable heresy of Wickliffe, and also that of Luther by translating corrupt books into the Vernacular language, and printing them in great numbers; whereby it was greatly to be feared lest the Catholic faith should be endangered, unless good and learned men zealously opposed this malice by setting out in the common language books that should impugn these wicked doctrines. And forasmuch,’ he continues with elegant flattery, ‘as you can play the Demosthenes both in our native tongue and in Latin, and are wont to be a most zealous defender of Catholic truth in every assault, you will never be able to make a better use of any spare hours that you can redeem from your occupation, than by publishing in our native tongue something that will expose even to rude and simple people the crafty malice of the

¹ 1527, says Tunstal’s *Register*; but as it is added, ‘in the sixth year of our consecration,’ 1528 is meant; for Tunstal was consecrated October 19, 1522; Stubbs’s *Registrum Sacrum Anglicanum*.

heretics, and make them better prepared against those impious enemies of the Church.’ The example of Henry, who had descended into the arena of literary conflict to defend the Seven Sacraments against Luther, was naturally cited to stimulate More to the task; and the invitation was accompanied by a formal licence to read the heretical books which were supposed to be so seriously threatening the Catholic faith, and of which copies were forwarded to the champion of orthodoxy for his perusal; for, adds Tunstal, ‘it is of great avail towards victory to know the counsels of the enemy, and to understand perfectly what they think and whither they tend¹.’

Thus invited and encouraged by a prelate for whom he entertained the highest respect, and stimulated by the example of his sovereign, Sir Thomas More entered the lists as the Goliath of the falling Church. Tunstal’s letter had not specified Tindale by name as one of the ‘sons of iniquity’ who were seducing the people from the faith; but More, in the course of his study of the volumes sent to him, speedily discovered that the translator of the New Testament was the most formidable of the antagonists whom he had to encounter; and the perusal of *The Wicked Mammon* and *The Obedience*, which reached England while he was engaged on his work, would wonderfully deepen this conviction. In little more than a year from the date of Tunstal’s letter, Sir Thomas was ready with a considerable volume, occupying upwards of a hundred and eighty closely-printed folio pages in his collected works, entitled, ‘A dialogue of Sir Thomas More, Knight, one of the Council of our Sovereign Lord the King and Chancellor of his Duchy of Lancaster, wherein be treated divers matters, as of the veneration and worship of images and relics, praying to saints and going on pilgrimage; with many other things touching the pestilent sect of Luther and Tyndale, by the tone [one] begun in Saxony, and by the tother [other] laboured to be brought into England².’

Of this *Dialogue*, one of Tindale’s biographers has ventured to assert that ‘the English language had never been so prostituted before Sir Thomas More took up his pen. . . . No solitary selected expressions can convey an adequate idea of the virulence, not to say the verbosity, and fallacious reasoning of this writer. It certainly would exhaust the patience of most readers, in the present day, to wade through his folio *Dialogue*³.’ But this is a grossly unfair misrepresentation of Sir

¹ Wilkins’s *Concilia*, vol. iii. p. 711, from Tunstal’s *Register*.

² *First Edition*, June, 1529; *Second*, May, 1530, says Ames; Sir Thomas More’s *Works*, edition of 1557, pp. 104-288.

³ Anderson’s *Annals*, vol. i. p. 237.

Thomas's contribution to the defence of that Church for which he died a martyr. Virulence and verbosity may indeed, with perfect justice, be alleged against More's subsequent *Confutation* of Tindale's reply to his *Dialogue*, his *Debellation of Salem and Byzance*, and other works known only to the intrepid reading of two or three unwearied scholars; but the *Dialogue* itself, though indulging occasionally in some what sharp abuse of Tindale and the other Reformers, contains very little to justify such an epithet as *virulent*. There can be no battle without blows, no controversy without sharp words; and as we have hitherto protested against any condemnation of Tindale because he employed strong and bitter language in assailing what seemed to him intolerable abuses in the religion of Christ, so on the same grounds we protest against the condemnation of More for employing equally strong language in repelling attacks upon what seemed to him most holy and sacred.

Nor could any epithet be less suitable to the *Dialogue* than *tedious*. It is anything but tedious; indeed, after many years' study of our older literature, we still doubt if any work of equal size had appeared in the English language since the days of Chaucer which could be less appropriately styled tedious. The reader whose patience is unequal to the perusal of More's folio *Dialogue* may conclude with certainty that he is totally destitute of any true literary taste. *The Dialogue* is written with consummate skill; and is probably as able and ingenious a defence as is anywhere to be met with, of those doctrines and practices of the Church of Rome, which Protestants have generally attacked as amongst the most fertile sources of corruption in religion. Tunstal had made a wise selection of a champion: there was no subtler wit in England, no more facile pen, no better or more devoted son of the Church; and if Sir Thomas More could not defend the veneration of images and relics and going on pilgrimage, nothing but the rack and the stake could defend them.

The Dialogue professes to be a discussion between More and a messenger, whom some friend had sent to Chelsea, to consult him about the great religious events of the day, the trial and abjuration of Bilney, and the public burning of Tindale's New Testament, after its formal condemnation by Tunstal. This friend, the *quod he*, as Tindale ironically calls him, is represented as leavened with a considerable partiality for the doctrines of the Reformers (an admission probably that this had come to be a common state of opinion among the educated classes); and he accordingly speaks to some extent as the apologist of the Reformers, repeats some of their objections to the ordinary teaching of the Church and the common religious observances of the day, and in fact exhibits a considerable amount of controversial fence, only, of course, to be disarmed and vanquished when the proper moment arrives for More to appear on the scene in all the glory

of victory.

The structure of the book, it will thus be perceived, was eminently fitted to promote the purpose which it was intended to serve. It afforded More the opportunity of replying in the most impressive way to the customary arguments directed against the Church; it had the interest which a personal narrative possesses over a didactic treatise; it had the appearance of great candour and impartiality; whilst at the same time it left it perfectly free for Sir Thomas to evade any discussions that might seem inconvenient or injurious to his cause. Into many topics, accordingly, which were prominent among the complaints of the Reformers, he declines to enter. The ignorance and immorality of the clergy, for example, were open and notorious, and could neither be denied nor defended. Sir Thomas More, however, declines to enter into any full discussion of such topics; many of the clergy, he admits, were 'I very lewd and naught,' but indeed, he adds, 'we are all bad, clergy and laity alike; may God make us better V and with this confession he omits as impertinent any further treatment of an unpleasant subject, which more, perhaps, than any other had contributed to make the Reformation necessary; for the vices of the clergy were patent to all, and all had suffered by them.

All the ordinary arguments of the Romish controversialist are introduced and handled with great skill and force; the abstract metaphysical defences which have so often proved so serviceable to the Church of Rome are nowhere exhibited with more clearness and cogency; whilst the discussion is kept from being tedious by an interesting framework of pleasant gossip often containing charming autobiographical glimpses, by a varied narrative, by frequent anecdotes and stories (not always so decorous as they should be)¹, and by personal sallies against the English Reformers, who had hitherto displayed a most unworthy timidity in the hour of danger². On the whole, *The Dialogue* produces on the mind of a reader who honestly attempts to study it without prejudice, the impression that it is the work of one who was a master of every device of literary skill, and who anticipated an easy victory over antagonists who were looked upon as a mere illiterate rabble; and, moreover, that it was certain to inflict material damage on the cause of the Reformation, unless it were speedily and effectually answered.

¹ Tindale very properly censures the indecency of the legend of St. Valeri, as related by Sir Thomas.

² 6 Up to this time the history of the Reformation in England had been a history of bold words followed by timid and scandalous recantations; witness Barnes, Bilney, Arthur, Garret, and many others

The Dialogue was published in June, 1529, and some time, probably, would elapse before Tindale could procure a copy; but doubtless, long before the close of the year, whether at Antwerp or at Hamburg, he had become possessed of that book which in the eyes of the English bishops had completely demolished all his former writings, and he had studied it with the attention which it deserved. Tindale had not sought a controversy with this champion of the Church; but Sir Thomas More's book left him no alternative. He had been singled out by name on the very title-page of *The Dialogue* and had been virtually challenged to the combat; and he had no choice except to take up the gauntlet thus thrown down, or to acknowledge by his silence that he was unable to defend the position which the Reformers in England had assumed. The cause of the Reformation in England had already been seriously compromised by the timidity of many of its leaders, who had retracted and abjured when threatened with punishment; and irreparable injury would be inflicted upon it if Sir Thomas More's work were to be left unanswered, to be paraded, of course, as unanswerable.

From the moment, therefore, when he received the work, Tindale must have formed the resolution to reply to it. *The Practice of Prelates* may indeed be considered as in part an answer to *The Dialogue*; it treats of many of the subjects which More had discussed, and it contains several extremely severe reflections upon More's conduct in hiring out his pen to defend the Church, as Balaam had let out his prophetic skill for hire, in defiance of God and his conscience. This, however, would not suffice to meet the emergencies of the time; a specific reply to Sir Thomas More's book was imperatively required, and the preparation of it must have been Tindale's chief occupation during the year 1530; and when in the close of that year or the commencement of the next he finally left Marburg for Antwerp, he had already completed his defence¹; although, out of courtesy to his sovereign, who had been greatly offended by the plain speaking of *The Practice of Prelates*, its publication was for a short time delayed. Some time, however, in the spring or early summer of 1531 his *Answer* was committed to the press, and was issued, according to Joye's *Apology*, by some printer in Amsterdam under the superintendence of Frith.

Tindale's *Answer* consists of two parts; 'First,' to use his own words, I he declareth what the Church is, and giveth a reason of certain words which Master More rebuketh in the translation of the New Testament; after that he answereth particularly unto every chapter which seemeth to have any appearance of truth throughout all his four books.' As a literary production, Tindale's *Answer* is

¹ See Vaughan's letters in next chapter.

unquestionably inferior to the work of his more skilful and more practised antagonist. It lacks the structural skill, the variety, the artistic grace, which make Sir Thomas's book pleasant even to the mere literary reader who has no interest in the theological controversy.

The argumentative value of the book, however, is vastly superior to its literary merit. Tindale grapples in a plain, straightforward manner with the real essence of the controversy between the Church and the Reformers. With clear, hard-headed common sense he sets aside More's abstract metaphysical subtleties, and goes straight to the practical questions at issue. Sir Thomas, for example, had demonstrated with wonderful subtlety that the Church cannot err, that all that she ordains must be right and profitable, that it was sinful presumption in any individual, most especially in a layman, to presume to judge what so many popes and holy men had praised and practised. Tindale with a single stroke cuts all the intricacies of this Gordian knot: he appeals to every man, in the use of that judgement which God had given him, to decide whether fact and experience confirmed what theory and assumption boasted of demonstrating. More demanded submission and obedience, Tindale asserted freedom and the right of judgement. 'The Holy Ghost,' says he, 'rebuketh the world for lack of judgement; the spiritual judgeth all things, even the very bottom of God's secrets, how much more ought we to judge our holy father's secrets! judge, therefore, reader, whether the pope with his, be the Church, whether their authority be above the Scripture, whether all they teach without Scripture be equal with the Scripture; whether they *have* erred, and not only whether they *can*.' Sir Thomas's arguments, thus brought to the test of experience, fare very badly in Tindale's hands; what looked beautiful in theory had been depraved and corrupted by endless abuses in practice; that defence which seemed so strong when it set forth what *might* be, was completely overthrown when it was confronted with what *was* and *had been*.

In expounding his own opinions in the first part of the book, Tindale is clear and copious; in his detailed criticism of *The Dialogue* he is brief and almost contemptuous. Throughout his *Answer*, indeed, he writes in a tone of extreme personal bitterness towards More, excited apparently by two reasons which it is fair that the reader in judging the work should bear in mind.

In May, 1530, there had been assembled in London certain of the chief prelates and chief learned men of the Universities, and by them, after long deliberation and discussion, it had been solemnly determined, in the presence of Henry, not only that Tindale's works were full of heresies and errors, but especially that his translation of Scripture was 'corrupted as well in the Old Testament as in the New'; and he was accordingly held up to public execration all over the

kingdom¹. Sir Thomas More was one of the chief members of this assembly; and Tindale, whether on good or bad information, believed that his sinister wit and eloquence had been mainly instrumental in procuring the public condemnation of his books, and the official assertion by the sovereign that 'it was not *necessary* for Christian men to have the New Testament in their native language.' He expressly states that in the assembly 'More was the special orator of the bishops to feign lies for their purpose².' This suspicion, which probably rested on a basis of fact, was quite sufficient to have infused some bitterness into Tindale's reply; how else but bitterly could he speak of the man whom he considered the great enemy to the free circulation of the Word of God in the English tongue?

But worse, far, than this, Tindale had been informed that Sir Thomas was bribed by the bishops with promises of money, and prospects of advancement, to appear as the defender of doctrines and practices which, in his own conscience, he disbelieved and condemned. To this Tindale not unnaturally makes perpetual allusion throughout his *Answer*. A single specimen will indicate to the reader what he thought of the motives of his antagonist:—'I exhort him in Christ,' he says, 'to take heed, for though *Judas* were wilier than his fellows to get lucre, yet he proved not most wise at the last end; neither though *Balaam* the false prophet had a clear sight to bring the curse of God upon the children of Israel for honour's sake, yet his covetousness did so blind his prophecy that he could not see his own end³.' In this suspicion we know that Tindale had been misled by mere baseless gossip; More, whatever his faults were, was quite incapable of the baseness here imputed to him; but the reader who remembers that Tindale, on what seemed sufficient grounds, looked upon his antagonist as actuated by the vilest of motives, as little better than the traitor apostle or the prostitute prophet, will cease to be surprised at the tone of bitter contempt which pervades the *Answer*, and will allow that it was not more bitter than appearances warranted.

More's chief resentment was directed against Tindale's New Testament; he declares that it was 'corrupted and changed from the good and wholesome doctrine of Christ to devilish heresies of his own,' it was 'clean contrary to the Gospel of Christ'; 'above a thousand texts in it were wrong and falsely translated'; it was incurably bad, and could only be amended by translating it all afresh, for, as he wittily remarked, 'it is as easy to weave a new web of cloth as to sow up

¹ Warham's *Proclamation, and Preachers' Bill*: Wilkins, vol. iii. p. 728.

² Tindale's *Answer to More*, p. 168.

³ Tindale's *Answer to More*, p. 15.

every hole in a net¹.’ When pressed by *quod he* to give a more specific answer, Sir Thomas adduces as unpardonable heresies the substitution of *congregation* for *church*, *seniors* for *priests*, *love* for *charily*, *favour* for *grace*, *knowledge* for *confession*, *repentance* for *penance*, *troubled* for *contrite*; in fact, he alleged that Tindale had, in general, neglected the use of those words which long custom had sanctioned as being appropriately ecclesiastical, and had adopted others which had no peculiar association with theology.

To this charge Tindale’s answer was easy and obvious; not only was his rendering in accordance with the strict signification of the original, but the terms which he had avoided were depraved by so many abuses that their use could only mislead the unwary reader. The *Church* had come to be synonymous with the clergy, ‘the multitude of shaven, shorn, and oiled’; the *priests* had almost been confounded with the old heathen priests, their real origin and their real purpose having almost dropped out of sight; *charity* had ceased to be the name of an inward, Divine grace, and denoted only certain outward ostentatious deeds sanctioned by the ecclesiastics; *confession*, *penance*, *grace*, *contrition* were’ the great juggling words wherewith, as St. Peter prophesied, the clergy made merchandise of the people.’ In such circumstances, to continue to employ terms which could only convey erroneous ideas to the mind of the ignorant reader, would be to perpetuate error, and to throw the sanction of Scripture over abuses which had sprung up in defiance or ignorance of Scripture. All such technical language, therefore, Tindale avoided, and employed instead plain words which had not yet been introduced into the nomenclature of the Church, and were free from any misleading ecclesiastical associations². The subsequent revisions of the English Bible have not in all cases followed Tindale’s views; but circumstances have altered since his time, and there is no longer any serious apprehension of countenancing error or superstition by the use of terms which have been so long isolated from their former associations. And yet it may be doubted whether even amongst ourselves the popular conception of the noblest of Christian graces has not been materially lowered and injured by styling it *charity*, as Sir Thomas More recommended, and not *love*, as our translator originally rendered it.

On the other great themes of the *Dialogue*, the worship of images and relics,

¹ *Dialogue*, B. iii. c. viii.

² 12 Sir Thomas More justly objected to *seniors*, that it only called up incongruous French associations; Tindale admits this objection, and had already, he says, substituted for it the genuine English *elders*.

going on pilgrimage, and religious ceremonies in general, Tindale's answer is plain, clear, and convincing. All ceremonies, he admits, had, doubtless, been instituted for some laudable purpose; they had once had a meaning, and so long as that meaning continued to be known they might have been used, if not profitably, at least innocuously. It had been so under the Old Testament; the ceremonies of the law of Moses were 'signs preaching unto the people one thing or another'; and so long as the people observed and understood them as such, they were of service to the Jews. But in process of time the meaning of the ceremonies was lost, whilst the ceremonies continued, and came to be valued for their own sakes, and to be substitutes for those real virtues in heart and life of which they were merely the symbols and sacraments. So, also, had it been in the Christian Church. Signs, sacraments, ceremonies, 'three words of one signification,' had been borrowed from the Jews or invented by the zeal of pious worshippers.

'At the beginning there were significations unto them. And so long as it was understood what was meant by them, and they did but serve the people, and preach one thing or another unto them, they hurted not greatly: though that the free servant of Christ ought not to be brought violently into captivity under the bondage of traditions of men; as St. Augustine complaineth in his days, how that the condition and state of the Jews was more easy than the Christians under traditions; *so* sore had the tyranny of the shepherds invaded the flock already in those days. And then what just cause have we to complain of our captivity now; unto whose yoke from that time hitherto, even twelve hundred years long, hath ever somewhat more weight been added to, for to keep us down and to confirm us in blindness: howbeit, as long as the significations bode [remained], they hurted not the soul, though they were painful unto the body? Nevertheless, I impute this our grievous fall into so extreme and horrible blindness (wherein we are so deep and so deadly brought asleep) unto nothing so much as unto the multitude of ceremonies. For as soon as the prelates had set up such a rabble of ceremonies, they thought it superfluous to preach the plain text any longer, and the law of God, faith of Christ, love toward our neighbour, and the order of our justifying and salvation (forasmuch as all such things were played before the people's faces daily in the ceremonies, and every child wist the meaning); but got them unto allegories, feigning them every man after his own brain, without rule, almost on every syllable; and from thence unto disputing, and wasting their brains about words, not attending [i. e. heeding] the significations; until at the last the lay-people had lost the meaning of the ceremonies, and the prelates the understanding of the plain text, and of the Greek, and Latin, and *especially of the Hebrew*, which is most of need to be known, and of all phrases, the proper manner of speakings, and borrowed speech of the Hebrews.

‘And *as soon* as the signification of the ceremonies was lost, and the priests preached Christ no longer, then the common people began to wax mad and out of their minds upon the ceremonies. And that trust and confidence, which the ceremonies preached to be given unto God’s Word and Christ’s blood, that same they turned unto the ceremony itself; as though a man were so mad to forget that the bush at the tavern-door did signify wine to be sold within, but would believe that the bush itself would quench his thirst. And so they became servants unto the ceremonies: ascribing their justifying and salvation unto them, supposing that it was nothing else to be a Christian man than to serve ceremonies, and him most Christian that most served them; and contrariwise, him that was not popish and ceremonial, no Christian man at all. For I pray you, for what cause worship we our spirituality so highly, or wherefore think we their prayers better than the poor layman’s, than for their disguisings and ceremonies? Yea, and what other virtue see we in the holiest of them, than to wait upon dumb superstitious ceremonies?’

‘Yea, and how cometh it that a poor layman, having wife and twenty children, and not able to find [maintain] them, though all his neighbours know his necessity, shall not get with begging for Christ’s sake, in a long summer’s day, enough to find them two days honestly; when if a disguised monster come, he shall, with an hour’s lying in the pulpit, get enough to find thirty or forty sturdy lubbers a month long, of which the weakest shall be as strong in the belly, when he cometh unto the manger, as the mightiest porter in the weigh-house [custom-house], or best courser that is in the king’s stable? Is there any other cause than disguising and ceremonies? For the deeds of the ceremonies we count better than the deeds which God commandeth to be done to our neighbour at his need. Who thinketh it as good a deed to feed the poor, as to stick up a candle before a post, or as to sprinkle himself with holy water? Neither is it possible to be otherwise, as long as the signification is lost. For what other thing can the people think, than that such deeds be ordained of God; and because, as it is evident, they serve not our neighbour’s need, to be referred unto the person of God, and He, though He be a Spirit, yet served therewith? And then he cannot but forth on [thenceforth] dispute, in his blind reason, that as God is greater than man, so is that deed that is appointed to serve God greater than that which serveth man. And then, when it is not possible to think them ordained for nought, what can I otherwise think than that they were ordained to justify; and that I should be holy thereby, according to the pope’s doctrine; as though God were better pleased, when I sprinkled myself with water, or set up a candle before a block, than if I fed or clothed, or help at his need, him whom He so tenderly loveth that He gave His own Son unto the death for him, and commanded me to love him as myself?’

And when the people began to run that way, the prelates were glad, and holp to heave after with subtle allegories and falsifying the Scripture; and went and hallowed the ceremonies, to make them more worshipful, that the lay people should have them in greater estimation and honour, and to be afraid to touch them, for reverence unto the holy charm that was said over them; and affirmed also that Christ's death had purchased such grace unto the ceremonies to forgive sin and to justify. O monster! Christ's death purchased grace for man's soul, to repent of evil, and to believe in Christ for remission of sin, and to love the law of God, and his neighbour as himself; which is the true worshipping of God in the spirit; and He died not to purchase such honour unto unsensible things, that man to his dishonour should do them honourable service, and receive his salvation of them.

This I have declared unto you that ye might see and feel everything sensibly. For I intend not to lead you in darkness. Neither though twice two cranes make not four wild geese¹, would I, therefore, that ye should believe that twice two made not four. Neither intend I to prove unto you, that Paul's steeple is the cause why Thames is broke in about Erith, or that Tenterden steeple is the cause of the decay of Sandwich haven, as Master More jesteth. Nevertheless, this I would were persuaded unto you (as it is true), that the building of them and such like, through the false faith that we have in them, is the decay of all the havens in England, and of all the cities, towns, highways, and shortly of the whole commonwealth: For since these false monsters crope up into our consciences, and robbed us of the knowledge of our Saviour Christ, making us believe in such pope-holy works, and to think that there was none other way into heaven, we have not ceased to build them abbeyes, cloisters, colleges, chauntries, and cathedral churches with high steeples, striving and envying one another who should do most. And as for the deeds that pertain unto our neighbours and unto the commonwealth, we have not regarded at all, as things which seemed no holy works, or such as God would not once look upon. And, therefore, we left them unseen to, until they were past remedy, or past our power to remedy them; inas-much as our slow bellies, with their false blessings, had juggled away from us that wherewith they might have been holpen in due season. So that the silly poor man (though he had haply no wisdom to express his mind, or that he durst not, or that Master More fashioneth his tale as he doth other men's, to jest out the truth), saw that neither Goodwin Sands, nor any other cause alleged, was the decay of Sandwich haven, so much as that the people had no lust to maintain the

¹ One of Sir Thomas's jokes in his *Dialogue*.

commonwealth, for blind devotion which they have to pope-holy works.’

This specimen of Tindale’s *Answer will*, far better than any lengthened description, enable the reader to judge of the style and execution of the work, the clearness and occasional bitterness of its language, the force and practical character of its reasonings. Tindale does not, like More, make any systematic attempt at employing wit as an auxiliary to his argument; but he had a shrewd humour of his own, and when he does condescend to play at satire, his retorts are occasionally very happy. Thus, in criticizing Sir Thomas’s elaborate distinctions concerning the amount of reverence implied in *doulia*, *hyperdoulia*, and *latria*, he asks with exquisite irony, to which of these varieties of reverence should be referred ‘the worship done by More and others to my lord the cardinal’s hat’; alluding, of course, to the ridiculous scene which he has described in his *Practice of Prelates*. He shows considerable wit also in the manner in which he twits More, a man who ‘was *bigamous* and past the grace of his neckverse,’ with coming forward in the strange character of the champion of the celibacy of the clergy.

There is nothing finer in More’s *Dialogue* than the ironical comments of Tindale upon Sir Thomas’s fundamental proposition, that the Church could not err in its judgements; ‘whatsoever, therefore, the Church, that is to wit, the pope and his brood say, it is God’s Word; though it be not written, nor confirmed with miracle, nor yet good living; yea, and though they say to-day this, and to-morrow the contrary, all is good enough and God’s Word; yea, and though one pope condemn another, nine or ten popes a-row with all their works for heretics, as it is to see in the stories, yet all is right and none error. And thus good night and good rest! Christ is brought asleep, and laid in His grave, and the door sealed to, and the men of arms about the grave to keep Him down with pole-axes. For that is the surest argument to help at need, and to be rid of these babbling heretics, that so bark at the holy spirituality with Scripture, being thereto [besides] wretches of no reputation, neither cardinals nor bishops, nor yet great benefited men; yea, and without totquots and pluralities, having no hold but the very Scripture, whereunto they cleave as burs, so fast that they cannot be pulled away, save with very singeing of them off!’¹

His answer to Sir Thomas’s violent peroration is equally cogent in its argument and its sarcasm. ‘Look on Tyndale,’ said More, ‘how in his wicked book of *Mammonis*, and after in his malicious book of *Obedience*, he showed himself so puffed up with the poison of pride, malice, and envy that it is more than

¹ Tindale’s *Answer to More*, p. 102.

marvel that the skin can hold together. . . . He barketh against the Sacraments much more than Luther. . . . He knoweth that all the fathers teach that there is the fire of purgatory, which I marvel why he feareth so little, but if he be at a plain point with himself to go straight to hell¹.' To this, the most bitter passage in the *Dialogue*, Tindale replies with calm sarcasm : 'He intendeth to purge here unto the uttermost of his power; and hopeth that death will end and finish his purgation. And if there be any other purging, he will commit it to God, and take it as he findeth it, when he cometh at it; and in the meantime take no thought therefore, but for this that is present, wherewith all saints were purged, and were taught so to be. And Tyndale marvelleth what secret pills they take to purge themselves, which not only will not purge here with the cross of Christ, but also buy out their purgatory there of the pope, for a groat or a sixpence².'

If More's *Dialogue* left Tindale no choice but to attempt a reply or acknowledge himself vanquished, Tindale's *Answer* placed More precisely in the same predicament. Tindale had shown himself not unworthy to enter the arena with the greatest genius in England; he had defended with unquestionable ability the opinions of the Reformers; he had restated with the most cogent clearness the objections which More had evaded in his *Dialogue*; he had roughly and effectually silenced many of the arguments of his antagonist; and, beyond a doubt, he remained in several points of importance master of the field. Such an enemy could not be disregarded. What stronger proof, indeed, could be given of the ability of Tindale's work than the fact that Sir Thomas More, now Lord Chancellor of England, and involved in the endless occupations of the chief legal adviser of the crown at a most momentous crisis in English history, felt constrained to prolong the controversy?

Tindale's *Answer* had not been printed till about midsummer of 1531; but before the month of May of the next year³, Sir Thomas had published the first part of an elaborate *Confutation*, which he continued after his resignation of his office, till it swelled into five hundred folio pages. In truth, the refutation of Tindale may be said to have been More's chief employment down to the day of his death. It forms one of the main themes of his *Apology*, written after he had resigned his office; he recurs to the subject again in his treatise entitled the *Debellation of Salem and Byzance*⁴; and once more he pursues it through an

¹ More's *Dialogue*, p. 283; edition of 1557.

² Tindale's *Answer to More*, p. 214.

³ The date is ascertained by the express allusion on the title-page to his being still Lord Chancellor, and he resigned that office in May, 1532.

⁴ More's *Apology* was in reality an answer to a clever treatise, entitled *The Pacifier*: and the *Debellation* was a reply to the rejoinder which the author of the *Pacer* had issued under the

‘Answer to the Poisoned Book, which a nameless heretic [Tindale] hath named the Supper of the Lord.’ Altogether the controversy with Tindale, directly or indirectly, occupies upwards of a thousand folio pages in the collected edition of the great Lord Chancellor’s writings.

This statement alone is almost tantamount to the assertion that Sir Thomas had the worst of the controversy; and probably no one who has read the whole of More’s writings on the subject will venture to dispute this assumption. Brevity is the soul of wit, it is the essence of retort; and a *Confutation*, ten times the size of the book which it was intended to demolish, was, *ipso facto*, a failure. Such, as More himself confesses, was the general verdict of contemporary readers. He had commenced his *Confutation* with the intention of elaborately answering Tindale sentence by sentence, and almost word by word; or as he himself somewhat vain-gloriously expresses it, he trusted ‘to draw the serpent out of his dark den, as Hercules drew Cerberus from hell into the light,’ and to expose Tindale so that he should ‘have never a dark corner to creep into, able to hide his head in.’ But when he came to pen his *Apology*, in 1533, he had to confess that men charged his *Confutation* with being ‘over long and therefore tedious to read’; and, moreover, that the learned denied the force of his reasonings, and condemned his uncourteous treatment of Tindale, and his unworthy attempts to conceal the faults and vices of the clergy¹.

The biographer of Tindale will therefore be excused if, after carefully perusing the whole controversy, he endorses this decision of Sir Thomas More’s contemporaries. Such a man as More could not, of course, be silenced; nay, it was impossible that he should write so much without saying much that was characterized by ingenuity and good sense. He defended his own cause by subtle arguments; he exposed some minor flaws in Tindale’s translation, and some untenable positions in his reasonings, for Tindale entertained some singular opinions; but on the whole, the *Confutation* was a failure. The spirit of the age was with Tindale and the Reformers, and Sir Thomas’s voluminous *Confutation* was powerless against the great movement of the time.

Time eventually confuted the *Confutation*; when it was begun, the supremacy

title of *Salem and Byzance*. The author of the *Pacifier* was a lawyer, Christopher Saintgerman by name, whose writings were distinguished, as More admits, by their mild and charitable spirit. His *Dialogues on the Laws of England, and the Grounds of those Laws*, exhibit an ability beyond his age, and have continued to enjoy a certain reputation down to our own day. His mother, it is noteworthy, was Anne Tindale, of Hockwold, in Norfolk, the aunt of Edward Tindale, of Pull Court, according to the theory of the genealogists, and, if so, aunt also of the Reformer.

¹ Sir Thomas More’s *Works*, pp. 845, &c.

of the Church was still recognized in England; before it was finished, the power had passed into the hands of the sovereign, and the approaching downfall of the papal authority cast its shadows before, in such ominous transactions as the divorce of Catherine and the marriage of Anne, in defiance of the pope's express prohibitions.

The *Dialogue* had been eminently readable, but the *Confutation* and subsequent polemical works are tedious. The *Dialogue*, though occasionally bitter, did not, on the whole, transgress those limits which in a controversy of such vast importance were fairly allowable: the *Confutation* is extremely virulent. Not to speak of the ribald abuse poured forth in season and out of season upon Luther, the language applied to Tindale is altogether unpardonable. He is no longer simply a heretic, swollen with pride and malice against the Church, he is 'a beast,' discharging a 'filthy foam of blasphemies out of his brutish beastly mouth'; he is 'a shameful, shameless, unreasonable, railing ribald,' he has learned his heresies 'from his own father the devil that is in hell'; he is one of the 'hellhounds that the devil hath in his kennel¹.'

A single continuous criticism will show how entirely More had lost all self-control. Tindale had spoken unceremoniously of the writings of Thomas Aquinas, the angel of the schools, as mere 'druff'; and Sir Thomas thus fiercely retaliates: 'This glorious saint of God ... doth this devilish drunken soul abominably blaspheme, and calleth them [i.e. Thomas Aquinas and such like] liars and falsifiers of Scripture, and maketh them no better than druff. But this drowsy drudge hath drunken so deep in the devil's dregs, that but if he wake and repent himself the sooner, he may hap ere aught long to fall into the mashing-fat, and turn himself into druff as [which] the hogs of hell shall feed upon and fill their bellies thereof².' We have throughout this biography attempted to measure out impartial justice to both parties in the great religious controversy of the time; but surely such a passage as this-and many more such flowers of oratory may be culled from the same garden-must be held to be a conclusive disproof of the delusion, to which some fondly cling, that it is only amongst the illiterate and the Reformers that we find violent and abusive language. Tindale was bitter and fierce, but he certainly never defiled his pen with such Billingsgate as this; and whilst some consideration is surely due to an exile who had been persecuted for his faith, and who moreover protested against any use of physical violence; who shall venture to claim equal allowance for the Lord Chancellor of England, armed with full authority to burn all heretics, and using this authority without

¹ More's *Confutation*, pp. 446, 681, &c.

² More's *Confutation*, p. 679.

scruple in defiance of those principles of toleration and religious freedom which he had advocated in his youth?

There can be little doubt that amongst the causes which thus lashed into fury the man who had formerly advocated toleration, and whose temperament naturally disposed him to gentle and lenient measures, considerable weight must be attached to Tindale's insinuation that, like Judas, he had bartered away his conscience for gold. We have given Tindale's charge, and it is only justice to Sir Thomas More to insert his reply. 'In good faith,' says he, 'I will not say nay, but that some good and honourable men of the clergy would, in reward of my good will and my labour against these heretics, have given me much more than ever I did or could deserve [so that Tindale's accusation was not entirely groundless]: but I dare take God and them also to record, that all they could never *feef* me with one penny thereof, but, as I plainly told them, I would rather have cast their money into the Thames than take it. For albeit they were, as indeed they were, both good men and honourable, yet look I for my thank of God that is their better, and for whose sake I take the labour¹.'

More also endeavours to clear himself from the charge of having exhibited extreme cruelty towards the unfortunate heretics who had fallen into his hands, and he denies in the strongest possible terms, the truth of several of the stories which subsequently figured in the pages of Foxe; but his denial is accompanied with an important qualification.

Thus, when denying that he had caused any one to be bound to a tree in his garden and beaten, he admits that '*he had caused such things to be done by the officers of the Marshalsea to people guilty of sacrilege in a church, carrying away the pix or casting out the blessed sacrament from it,*' an admission susceptible of considerable latitude in the interpretation.

Further, More confesses that 'there was no man that any meddling had with them [the heretics] into whose hands they were more loth to come,' and even declares that 'none of them had wrong but that it were, for they were burned no sooner,' his defence can hardly be considered a brilliant success.

On the whole, the perusal of this long-continued controversy is not a pleasant task. The spectacle of two men, so good and so honest as Tindale and More, heaping terms of abuse upon each other, is not one that can gratify any well-constituted mind; and one feels disposed to cast a mantle of discreet reticence over the unhappy scene. We have endeavoured to judge of the contest without prejudice, and with due allowance for the excitement and irritation incident to

¹ Sir Thomas More's *Apology: Works*, p. 867.

theological debates; and we believe that few who take the trouble to read the controversy will doubt on which side the victory lay. Sir Thomas More's reputation suffered an irreparable injury by his share in the controversy; he lost the sympathy of the public by his unworthy abuse of his antagonist, without gaining the credit of having sufficiently established his own positions. Whatever was gained in the controversy was gained by Tindale. As the translator of the New Testament, the author of *The Mammon* and *The Obedience*, he already exercised a considerable influence over public opinion in England. Sir Thomas More's attack directed public attention still more strongly to him; and the skill and courage with which he met and foiled the great champion of the Church made his name familiar to all Englishmen, enlisted their sympathies in his favour as their protector against a common enemy, and secured for his works and for the doctrines of the Reformers that favourable consideration which was the best means of promoting their success.

The chancel wall of Old Chelsea Church is still adorned with the handsome marble monument which Sir Thomas More had, in his lifetime, erected for himself; over it, as if in triumphant superiority, there was placed about 1820, by some churchwarden ignorant probably of all this history, the memorial tablet of one of the *Tindale* family. Could the most ingenious sculptor have devised a plainer or more significant allegorical record of the controversy?