William Tindale

A Biography

Being a Contribution to the Early History of the  
English Bible

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Popular Edition, Revised

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‘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.’

*Tindale’s Preface to the Pentateuch,* 1530.

‘I call God to record against the day we shall appear before our Lord Jesus, to give a reckoning of our doings, that I never altered one syllable of God’s Word against my conscience, nor would this day, if all that is in the earth, whether it be pleasure, honour, or riches, might be given me.’

*Tindale’s Letter to Frith.*

EDITOR’S PREFACE

THE high estimation in which Demaus’s *William Tindale* is held by students of the history of the English Bible is a proof of the sterling value of the work. Demaus wrote out of a full knowledge, and his task was a labour of love. Hence it was but natural that the book should at once become the standard authority on the subject, which it is now admitted on all hands to be.

In the years which have passed since the book was first published Tindale’s reputation has been steadily growing in popular esteem. By an ever­-widening circle of reverent admirers he is recognized as one of England’s greatest benefactors. Indeed there are not lacking those who consider him to be the one man to whom modern Englishmen owe the largest debt of gratitude. London, never too prone to make haste in such matters, towards the close of the nine­teenth century on one of her most conspicuous sites erected a statue to the man who lived and toiled as an exile and who died as a martyr that his countrymen might have the Bible in their mother tongue.

The editor has had access to some notes which Mr. Demaus had prepared for a second edition of his book. They contain matters of importance.

The other notes contained in the Preface to the revised edition of 1886 have been incorporated as far as possible in the body of this volume. One of the most valuable contributions to Tindale literature is Mr. Francis Fry’s *Bibliographical Description of the Editions of the New Testament* (1878), in which the sequence of the early editions of Tindale’s Testament is clearly set forth. It has done much of the work referred to by Demaus as unaccomplished at page 441 of this volume. The most interesting fact brought to light is the identification of the last edition revised by Tindale himself, viz. No. 4 in Mr. Fry’s list, an edition usually described as the ‘1535-34, G. H.’ New Testament. The name of the printer and publisher and the place of printing of this edition have been the subject of much conjecture and discussion. We have no space to go fully into these matters here, but must refer the reader to Mr. Fry’s work. The late Mr. Henry Bradshaw of Cambridge, in a paper contributed to the first number of *The Bibliographer,* demonstrates that it was *published by* Godfried van der Haghen of Antwerp, though he dissents from the view that the printer was the man ‘whose name appears as Martin de Keyser when the book [printed by him] is in his native language, as Martinus Caesar or Caesaris when the book is in Latin, as Martin Lempereur when in French, and, lastly, as Martin Emperowr when in English.’

Mr. Bradshaw in the same paper shows conclusively that the translator himself spelt his name ‘Tindale.’

A reduced facsimile of the Vilvorde letter, the only specimen of Tindale’s handwriting in existence, is given at p. 536.

An exhaustive index has also been compiled, which renders the contents of the present edition readily accessible to those who may wish to consult it on special points.

The object aimed at has been to make this popular edition of the life of a great Englishman in every way worthy of its high subject. Next to the study of the Bible itself, this age needs to study with gratitude the lives of those who toiled and died to give English­-speaking peoples the Word of God in their own tongue. In this great service William Tindale was supreme.

AUTHOR’S PREFACE

CONSIDERING the profound and universal reverence which Englishmen entertain for their noble vernacular Bible, it is somewhat strange that so little care has been bestowed upon the accurate investigation of the literary history of that great work, and the career of the man whose name must ever be associated with it. It is only, indeed, within the present generation that the history of the English Bible has been treated with anything like adequate attention: our older writers abound in careless and erroneous statements on the subject, which our literary historians unfortunately continue to repeat with­out inquiry; and even now, after the patient researches of Anderson, Westcott, Fry, and others, much still remains to be done in this long-neglected department of literature.

As for Tindale, till the publication of Anderson’s *Annals of the English Bible,* in the year 1845, it can hardly be said that anything more was known of him than what had been recorded in Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments.* The biography of Tindale by the old Martyrologist, if somewhat defective, was eminently valuable. For it is evident to any one who takes the trouble to examine the earliest edition of the *Acts and Monuments,* that Foxe derived his information from men who had been intimately associated with Tindale in those two periods of his life whose history he has recorded. The value of Foxe’s narrative, so far as it goes, is thus placed beyond the reach of dispute; it has been accordingly accepted in the present work as the testimony of thoroughly well-informed contempo­raries; and, notwithstanding its mutilated condition, it might have been of admirable service as a nucleus, round which the labours of succeeding writers might have formed a complete and worthy biography. Nothing, however, in this direction was seriously attempted, till Anderson published what had been at first designed to be a Life of Tindale, though it was subsequently, and, perhaps, injudiciously, extended into the well­known *Annals of the English Bible*

Anderson’s work, though by no means free from faults even of a serious kind, was a most valuable contribution to our knowledge of the Life of Tindale and of the History of the English Bible; and the present writer has to express in the strongest terms his obligation to the labours of his predecessor in the same field. A similar acknowledgement is due to the edition of Tindale’s works so carefully superintended for the Parker Society by Professor Walter. The fac­similes of Mr. Fry and the manuscript collections of the late George Offor have also in various ways proved useful; and the charming treatise of Canon Westcott on the English Bible has never been consulted without profit, or indeed without envy.

Whilst thus freely availing himself of the researches of previous writers, the author has in no case trans­ferred their statements to his own pages till he has carefully investigated and verified them. No assertion has been taken for granted; everything has been ex­amined afresh; the originals have been consulted and deliberately weighed, it is hoped, without the distorting influence of any theory; the localities associated with the life of Tindale have been personally visited and explored; and especial care has been devoted through­out to the exact determination, so far as possible, of the precise dates of all the occurrences in the Biography. Thus, although there still remain, in the story of Tindale’s life, gaps where all information fails us, which we can only attempt to bridge over by the help of conjectures and probabilities, it is believed that in the following pages there is laid down a firm basis of fact, which no subsequent investigation will overthrow, and into which any future discovery will fit with the ease and harmony which belong to truth. In addition to the thorough sifting of what had been previously known, the writer has been able to shed fresh light upon various obscure passages in Tindale’s life by researches in the State Paper Office (which, for some reason or other, is not so accessible to the public at this portion of our history as it ought to be): and of the closing occurrences of Tindale’s career, a clear and satisfactory narrative is here for the first time presented to the English reader, the result of investigations amongst the archives of Brussels and other cities of Belgium.

Thanks are due to many friends for assistance and sympathy kindly rendered during the prosecution of the work, and especially to one to whom everything connected with the history of the English Bible is a matter of lively interest, Mr. Francis Fry, of Bristol. From many generous men of letters in Belgium also, an amount of help has been received, for which the warmest thanks are a poor acknowledgement: but for the aid of M. Gachard, the Archivist-General of Belgium, M. Galesloot, M. Genard, of Antwerp, M. Hollebeke, and many others, Romanists as well as Protestants, the present work would have lacked much of its value.

A man like Tindale, who is now coming to be recognized as ‘the true hero of the English Reforma­tion,’ needs no artifice on the part of his biographer to raise him in public esteem. No attempt, therefore, has been made in these pages to conceal his faults, to disguise his opinions, or to exaggerate his virtues. Tindale himself was at all times conspicuous for his fearless honesty; and his biographer is bound, were it only out of reverence to his memory, to be, above everything, honest and truthful. In this attempt to ascer­tain the truth it has been found impossible to avoid a certain controversial tone throughout the work; for many of the facts of Tindale’s life have been disputed or distorted, through carelessness, through prejudice, and through the malice of that school of writers in whose eyes the Reformation was a mistake, if not a crime, and who conceive it to be their mission to revive all the old calumnies that have ever been circulated against the Reformers, supplementing them by new accusations of their own invention.

Considerable extracts have been given from each of Tindale’s works, so as to afford the reader the oppor­tunity of judging for himself as to their character and merits. These extracts have been in general taken from the Parker Society Edition of the Reformer’s writings, and are presented in modernized spelling, there being no object to be gained by retaining the obsolete and capricious orthography of the originals. For what is enclosed within square brackets, it will be understood that the biographer is in all cases respon­sible: the words thus inserted are either brief explana­tions of antiquated terms, or, in the case of extracts from manuscripts, conjectural readings where the original document is defective or undecipherable.

The woodcut of the old castle of Vilvorde, the scene of Tindale’s imprisonment and martyrdom, has been taken from one of the interesting memoirs published by M. Galesloot, which was in its turn a reproduction of a water-colour in the Royal Library at Brussels. It has a special value as exhibiting the castle pretty much as it must have appeared in Tindale’s time.

In a word, every effort has been used to make the present work a worthy biography of one of the greatest of Englishmen, and as such, it is hoped, the reading public will be pleased to receive it.