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WILLIAM TYNDALE, MARTYR, 1536.

By W. Guy Johnson.

TEN years ago, in October, 1926, an article on William Tyndale and the English New Testament, by the present writer, was published in The Churchman. That year marked the fourth centenary of the appearance in this country of the first printed New Testament in the English language. The translation which was the work of William Tyndale, then an obscure English priest, had been printed on the Continent at the end of the year 1525 and speedily found its way into England, notwithstanding the efforts of the authorities to prevent its entrance. The fourth centenary of an event so far-reaching in its ultimate results did not attract the amount of attention which its importance deserved, for considered as a literary achievement alone, Tyndale's work marks an epoch in the history of our country. By way of commemorating it, Dr. Henry Guppy, the well-known librarian of the Rylands Library, Manchester, wrote an article, afterwards reprinted in pamphlet form, entitled "William Tindale and the Earlier Translators of the Bible into English," which has all the qualities of scholarship, lucidity and general interest characteristic of Dr. Guppy's pen. This pamphlet has now been incorporated with other material in a larger one issued from the Rylands Library last year to commemorate the four-hundredth anniversary of the publication of the first complete printed English Bible, October, 1935 (Coverdale's) Dr. Guppy's later pamphlet should be secured by all who are interested in studying the history of the text and transmission of the English Bible.

Tyndale only survived the completion of his work on the 1525 New Testament by eleven busy and troubled years, when his earthly course was closed by a violent death at the hands of his enemies and the enemies of Bible translation, on October 5, 1536, exactly four hundred years ago from this present month, and it is fitting that so noble a life should be once again brought to mind. If we are to obey the injunction to praise famous men there is none more worthy of such honour than the heroic and devoted scholar whose life, work and untimely end are being commemorated this year.

Tyndale's life was in one sense uneventful, for he stood apart from the stirring events and movements of his time and lived the life of a scholar and specialist. But there were few of his more active contemporaries who did as much as he to stimulate and to give permanence to the movements for reform which were going on around him. When in the household of Sir John Walsh, he is reported to have said to a priest, "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou doest." And to this purpose, in spite of dangers, discouragements and difficulties which would have daunted anyone of less heroic temper, he successfully devoted himself for the next sixteen years, at the end of which his only earthly

reward was martyrdom at the stake. As Bishop Westcott wrote: "From the first he had exactly measured the cost of his work; and when he had once made his resolve to translate the Scriptures, he never afterwards lost sight of it." [1]

The date and place of Tyndale's birth are not known. The general view seems to incline to somewhere near the year 1490, probably rather earlier, for he showed a maturity of opinion, scholarship and literary expression at an age which on this reckoning was very early in view of the limited material in the way of texts, grammars and lexicons at his command. A like obscurity envelops his early years, of which we know only what Foxe tells us, that "Tyndale was brought up from a child at the University of Oxford." This probably means that being a precocious boy he was sent to Oxford at an earlier age than was usual. Our knowledge of his earlier life is in fact confined to the following brief summary given by Foxe:

"William Tyndale, the faithful minister and constant martyr of Christ, was born about the borders of Wales, and brought up from a child in the university of Oxford, where he, by long continuance, grew up, and increased as well in the knowledge of tongues, and other liberal arts, as especially in the knowledge of the Scriptures, whereunto his mind was singularly addicted; insomuch that he, lying then in Magdalen Hall, read privily to certain students and fellows of Magdalen College, some parcel of divinity; instructing them in the knowledge and truth of the Scriptures. His manners also and conversation being correspondent to the same, were such, that all they that knew him, reputed and esteemed him to be a man of most virtuous disposition, and of life unspotted.

"Thus he, in the University of Oxford, increasing more and more in learning, and proceeding in degrees of the schools, spying his time, removed from thence to the University of Cambridge, where, after he had likewise made his abode a certain space, being now further ripened in the knowledge of God's word, leaving that University also, he resorted to one Master Walsh, a knight of Gloucestershire, and was there schoolmaster to his children, and in good favour with his master. This gentleman, as he kept a good ordinary commonly at his table, there resorted to him many times sundry abbots, deans, archdeacons, with divers other doctors, and great beneficed men; who there, together with Master Tyndale sitting at the same table, did use many times to enter communication, and talk of learned men, as of Luther and Erasmus; also of divers other controversies and questions upon the Scripture.

"Then Master Tyndale, as he was learned and well practised in God's matters, so he spared not to show unto them simply and plainly his judgment in matters, as he thought; and when they at any time did vary from Tyndale in opinions and judgment, he would show them in the book, and lay plainly before them the open and manifest places of the Scriptures, to confute their errors, and confirm his sayings." [2]

No reason is given for this removal from Oxford to Cambridge. We may be sure that the "divinity" he taught was of the new reforming type and we know that the authorities were already becoming suspicious of the spread of heretical opinions in the University. The expression "spying his time" would fit in with this. Or, it may be that the fame of Erasmus, who was lecturing

[1] *History of the English Bible.* Third Edition, p. 27, n.

[2] *Acts and Monuments.* Fourth Edition, Revised by the Rev. Josiah Pratt. Vol. v, pp. 114, 115.

on Greek at Cambridge, drew him. The late Principal Lindsay wrote of Tyndale as the favourite pupil of Colet,[1] a very interesting suggestion and perhaps not an impossible one, but the evidence, if there is any, seems to be lost. Colet exercised a profound influence upon Erasmus; and Tyndale's was the nature to profit largely by the same influence had he come within its range. He would not have come into direct contact with Colet at Oxford or with Erasmus at Cambridge, for both of them had left before Tyndale arrived, though the influence they had exerted would remain.

During the time when he was attached to Sir John Walsh's household he met the various local magnates, clerical and lay, who visited there, and as he appears to have spoken his mind freely, he fell under suspicion of heresy, and was cited before the Chancellor of the diocese, though nothing came of it. It was in Sir John Walsh's house that he declared his intention to translate the Scriptures, and in the preface to the Pentateuch, he gives the reason:

"Which thing only [the objection of those in power 'that the Scripture should come to light'] moved me to translate the New Testament. Because I had 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."[2]

Finding no place to accomplish his purpose in Gloucestershire, he turned his steps to London, where he hoped to find encouragement from the Bishop, Tunstal, who had felt the influence of the Renaissance and whose love of learning had been praised by Erasmus. With a translation of one of the orations of Isocrates in his pocket, and an introduction to the Controller of the Royal Household, he reached London in the middle of the year 1523. But as one of Tunstal's qualifications for his office was that he could with suitable dignity entertain the persons of consequence who visited London and the Court, he was hardly likely to be impressed by a poor and undistinguished student seeking his patronage. Tyndale in fact speedily found that there was no place in my lord of London's palace to translate the Scriptures, and he was soon to find that there was no place for the purpose in all England. He remained in London for about ten months, during which he preached at St. Dunstan's, Fleet Street, though the existing registers have no record of the fact. The church itself was destroyed in the Great Fire, the present building standing on the site. By a fortunate circumstance, Tyndale here made the acquaintance of a wealthy London merchant, Humphrey Monmouth, who took him into his house and befriended him both then and afterwards at much risk to himself, for he was later on brought before the authorities on the charge of aiding and abetting him.

It was by now plain that some other country must be sought

[1] *History of the Reformation*, vol. ii, p. 319.

[2] *Works* (Parker Society), vol. iii, p. 394. *The Five Books of Moses, a verbatim reprint of the edition of 1530*, p. 3. Edited by the Rev. J. I. Mombert, D.D. London, 1884.

where the New Testament could be with safety printed and published. Accordingly, in the month of May, 1524, he set sail for the Continent, never to see his native land again. He landed at Hamburg and, according to all contemporary evidence, proceeded to Wittenberg, to confer with Luther.

It is hardly necessary at this time of day to defend Tyndale against the charge of want of originality either in the design of his work or in its execution. He doubtless discussed scores of points of grammar and rendering with Luther and others, but they could give him no assistance with his English version, for the Continental reformers as a whole were generally unacquainted with the English language. The close and vigorous examination to which his work has been subjected has long since vindicated his claim to independence as a translator. The late Bishop Westcott has dealt fully with the matter in the work already referred to, and it is indeed no longer in dispute. Tyndale was undoubtedly greatly indebted to Luther, as every scholar is indebted to other scholars in the same field; but when the question of independence is raised differences have to be considered as well as resemblances, and the differences here are many and not always unimportant.

So far as is known Tyndale did not return to Wittenberg after his business at Hamburg was completed and the money needed for printing was in hand, but went to Cologne to have the book put into type. The choice of Cologne was well advised, for though it was a city thoroughly under orthodox influences, yet its printers were quite prepared to print in secrecy the Bible or other heretical books if it paid them to do so. It was less likely to be suspected than Wittenberg, and it offered greater facilities for the exportation of books to London, and here it was that Tyndale put the work in hand. The secret, unfortunately, leaked out: the story is well known, and Tyndale, taking with him the sheets already printed, fled farther up the Rhine to Worms, where he found a printer to complete the New Testament begun at Cologne. That version had the glosses or marginal notes which are said to have been responsible for the hunting down and destruction of Tyndale's translation. The notes were in some cases controversial, though in the fragment of the Cologne version which survives the great majority are merely explanatory or expository. There is nothing in them comparable to the very pointed note placed in the margin of the Pentateuch against Balaam's question "How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed?" where Tyndale says "The Pope can tell how." But arrangements were made to seize the books before it was known whether there were any notes or not. And the same efforts at destruction were levelled as fiercely at the edition without notes as at the one which had them. The annotated edition was in small quarto and only one fragment of it, which consists of St. Matthew's Gospel as far as ch. xxii. 12, and is in the Library of the British Museum, is known to exist. This has been reproduced in facsimile by the late Professor Arber and subsequently by the Oxford University Press. Professor Arber's edition has a valuable introduction with

much documentary matter, including William Roye's " Rede me and be not Wrothe."

But beside completing this quarto edition begun at Cologne, Tyndale put another in hand, an octavo volume without annotations or comments of any kind. Of these two editions six thousand copies were printed, three thousand of each, and of the smaller, the octavo, only two vestiges are known to have survived the furious energy of destruction which was for years directed against them. It is indeed remarkable in view of the circumstances and of the ordinary ravages of time, that one of these two survivals of four centuries should be complete and perfect except only for the title-page. This has been supplied by a facsimile title of a later edition, and the volume now rests safely in the strong room of the Baptist College at Bristol, one of the most precious possessions of the College and of the City. The other survival of this edition is only a fragment and is in the library of St. Paul's Cathedral, London.

In spite of the efforts which were made to keep copies from entering the country, large numbers were smuggled into England by various means and found eager purchasers and readers. Tunstal conceived the idea, suggested to him by a merchant named Packington, of buying up all the available copies at the source, viz. from the Continental printers, and commissioned Packington to execute it. It was a costly undertaking, but a goodly number was purchased and forwarded to the Bishop who had the satisfaction of sending them up in flames only to find when the bonfire had died down that the book was reaching England in more numbers than before. The sale had, of course, had the effect of enabling Tyndale to print more copies with some much-needed correction and revision. A further suggestion from Packington that he should buy the printer's stamps [types] found the Bishop unresponsive. He no doubt realised by then that, as the chronicler puts it, while he thought to have got God by the toe, he had got the Devil by the fist.

Thus within about two years of his leaving England Tyndale had accomplished the main portion of his original design. The Old Testament had still to be translated and this was the longer and more difficult part of the task, but except for the Pentateuch and the Book of Jonah it was to be left to other hands, though Tyndale's plans were probably well advanced. The Pentateuch which is almost as long as the whole New Testament, was translated and seen through the press within four years. It appeared quite early in 1530. It contains in the margin many of Tyndale's most pungent notes. To our modern ears the version would have been better without them; but we have not the hard, daily experience of sacerdotal tryanny, intolerance and extortion by which they were provoked. When all around men were being imprisoned, tortured, fined and even burnt alive for possessing the Scriptures in their own tongue or for doubting the monstrous fictions presented to them as truth, men can scarcely be blamed for expressing their abhorrence in language adequate to the occasion. No one who has heard of " annates," " first fruits," " Peter's Pence " and the whole

train of Papal extortions which history records can think that on Exodus xxxiv. 20 " None shall appear before me empty," the comment " That is a good text for the Pope " is unjustified. But when we have said this, and it ought to be said with emphasis, there is no doubt that of the truth of Demans's judgment that " the greatest of Tyndale's admirers must admit that his keen sarcasms are by no means so suitable an accompaniment to the sacred text as Luther's topographical and expository notes."

In the year following the issue of the Pentateuch, he published his translation of the Book of Jonah, which was the last contribution to be published in his lifetime of his translation work on the Old Testament. We need not dwell upon Tyndale's great qualifications as a translator. His knowledge of the original languages; his fidelity to the text; his choice of the simplest forms of expression; the dignity and restraint of his style; and his grasp of the spirit and meaning of the sacred writings, have been testified to by all competent scholars. Indeed, the proof lies in the fact that ninety per cent. of our matchless Authorised Version is the work of William Tyndale who thus gave to the English-speaking people the greatest treasure they possess. The astonishing thing is that he should have done so much in so short a time and done it so admirably under conditions so unfavourable to serious literary work of a kind which required the utmost concentration and ease. The choice of the right and appropriate words which should express most nearly and accurately the sense of the original text, needed a freedom from anxiety and some feeling of security from interruption which Tyndale could hardly ever have enjoyed for long together. At the first, moreover, he had much trouble with his amanuensis William Roye, a volatile person who was useful as a copyist and reader, but a great hindrance in other ways. Tyndale says of him: " As long as he had no money, somewhat I could rule him, but as soon as he had gotten him money he became like himself again. Nevertheless, I suffered all things till that was ended which I could not do alone without one, both to write and to help me to compare the texts together." Roye was a friar who had availed himself of the opportunity of the times to leave his monastery at Greenwich for a life freer from restraint, and was hardly a safe companion for one whose work depended so much on secrecy. Tyndale got rid of him at Worms after the New Testament was so far advanced that such mechanical help as he could give was no longer needed. He would hardly deserve mention if it were not that his facility in the making of " railing rhymes " rendered him actually a danger to his associates. His account, given in doggerel verse, of the action of the Bishops in burning the New Testaments, contains such satirical attacks on Wolsey, that the Cardinal, believing them to be by Tyndale, was not unnaturally provoked to violent personal hostility. Wolsey had not hitherto shown any special eagerness to hinder or to destroy the work of Bible translation, or any enmity to Tyndale, of whom probably he knew little if anything, but on the appearance of Roye's " Rede me

and be not wrothe," he set agents to work to find Tyndale's whereabouts and to obtain his arrest, though happily he did not succeed in this. It is the fact that he was driven from place to place in the effort to avoid his enemies which makes it so difficult to obtain any clear or definite knowledge of Tyndale's movements during the ten years which followed the publication in 1526 of the New Testament. We hear of his being at Hamburg, Wittenberg, Cologne, Worms, Marburg, Nuremberg, Antwerp, but rarely at one place for long.

It was not a life conducive either to study or continuous work of the kind he had in hand, but Tyndale so far from being deterred or discouraged spent the time in revising and perfecting his New Testament, in proceeding with the translation of the Old, in writing Prologues or introductions to the various books, in replying to Sir Thomas More's attacks and in other expository and controversial work. It may all be read in the three volumes devoted to Tyndale in that invaluable repository of first-hand Reformation documents, the publications of the Parker Society, now too rarely used. The Answer to More is in one volume by itself, for the duel was carried on during some five or six years. More had been urged by Tunstal to undertake the defence of the Church against the attacks which were being made upon it from so many quarters. Learned, witty, popular, of high personal character and great public and social standing, he was the one man best fitted to reply to the critics of the Bishops and clergy. He had seen Tyndale's New Testament, his "The Wicked (unrighteous) Mammon," and the "Obedience of a Christian Man"; and his treatise in the first place was an attack upon the translation, in which "above a thousand texts were wrong and falsely translated," but also on the teaching given in the Reformer's writings and notes and introductions to the separate books. As a literary production More's Dialogue has been judged to be the better, but in force of argument and demonstration of the truth of the position which the study of the Scriptures had led him to adopt, Tyndale, without doubt, had the advantage over his distinguished opponent.

In his various writings two main doctrinal positions of the Reformation stand out clearly and definitely. The first is naturally the sole and supreme authority of Holy Scripture, God's Word written and its sufficiency as a guide for the salvation and enlightment of any, even the humblest, believer. It was this only that moved him to make it accessible to his own countrymen in their mother tongue, and for this he was ready, if need be, to lay down his life. The other main principle of which he had a grasp no less firm than that of Luther himself was the doctrine of Justification by Faith only. This and what follows from it was one of the principal articles charged against him at his trial and there was no denying that he had boldly and without compromise taught it as a cardinal axiom of the New Testament. His own words were: "The key to the saving knowledge of Scripture is this: God gives us all things freely through Christ without regard to our works; or in other words faith in the mercy of God through Jesus Christ,

by the grace and works of Christ, and without any regard to any merit or goodness of our works, alone justifies us in the sight of God." This will be found again and again as a dominant note of his teaching throughout his writings; and his life was a complete answer to the calumny that such beliefs tend to make men disregard good works and lead to looseness of living. Sir Thomas More testified to his "right good living" before he left England. Similar testimony was given by Humphrey Monmouth with whom he resided for the ten months of his stay in London; and even the spies who were sent out to see in what way he could be captured gave a good report of him personally. Just as his enemies did not attempt to deny his learning, so they brought no imputations against his character. It was sufficient that he defied the powers of the Church by giving people the Bible that they might read and judge for themselves and therefore he must die. "The pitcher goes often to the well but is broken at last" and so it was with Tyndale. He had had many marvellous escapes, but was fated at last to be captured through the treachery of a fellow-countryman, and after an imprisonment of nearly a year and a half in the castle of Vilvorde during which period his trial dragged its weary course to its foregone conclusion, he was led to the stake on October 6, 1586, and after being strangled, his body was burned. Even in prison he was able to continue his work and it is generally understood that there he brought his translation of the Old Testament to the end of the books of Chronicles. The only specimen of his handwriting known now to exist is a letter which he wrote from prison asking that he might have new and warmer clothes for he suffered much from catarrh which his cell increased—a medieval dungeon was not a luxurious place—and he asked also for his Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Grammar and Hebrew Dictionary, and finishes "but if before the winter, a different decision be reached concerning me I shall be patient, abiding the will of God, to the glory of the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ, whose Spirit, I pray may ever direct your heart." It is a tragic, yet triumphant, ending to a noble life. His enemies might destroy his body, but his soul was unconquered, and the seeds of truth which he had sown grew and flourished exceedingly.

Tyndale has left a great example of what unflinching purpose and self-sacrifice for the truth can accomplish in the person of a man who accepts the words of Christ: "Fear not them which kill the body"; "He that loseth his life *for my sake*, the same shall find it." As we call him to mind this year, well may we say with the writer of old time, "The memory of the just is blessed."