

**THE LIFE AND
WORK
OF
WILLIAM TINDALE**

BY
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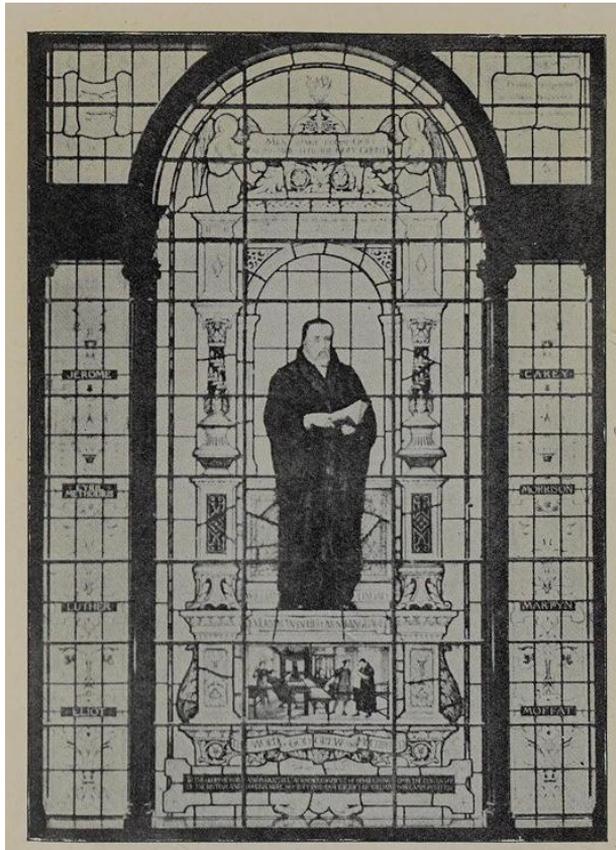
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The Window of Thanksgiving in the Bible House, London

To
A. M. C.
and
C. C. C.

"A seed is sown in Britain and whether men wait for a hundred
or a thousand years they will find it flowering."

(King Arthur).

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

THE author is gratified at the cordial reception which the first edition of his work has met with. The issue of a second edition has given the opportunity of making some minor corrections, and of including in the closing paragraphs an appreciative reference to the work of the American Bible Society.

Contemplation of the published work has suggested to the author that greater significance might have been attributed to the background and environment of Tindale's early manhood. The breaking up of the social and religious structure of his time, and the spread of the New Learning over Western Europe were events profoundly affecting the character and career of contemporary English youth. Thus, the disintegration and dissolution of the overawing authority of the Church, though she retained for decades sufficient power to strike down her foes; the splintered social unity which resulted from the decadence of the Feudal Order, with class suspicion and hatred ensuing, combined to throw men off their moral balance: and then into this moral confusion came rumours of literatures, unknown and ancient, which opened to the startled minds of teachers and students knowledge that at once widened and made more wondrous the world which men thought they knew. The discovery of the Greek and Latin literatures excited the imaginations of the younger men. Oxford and Cambridge students in groups crossed the English Channel and enrolled themselves in the Continental Universities that they might gain

at first hand the knowledge they desired. Grocyn, Linacre, and Colet came back eager to teach and guide. But most significant of all was this, that Erasmus landed in England.

Romantic stories were in the air of a New World beyond the seas.

Now the reaction of all this on the nation at large was a disquietude and disturbance that led confusion towards fear and panic.

Such was the atmosphere which as a youth Tindale breathed. Not the least of his claims to greatness are his deep insight into that disturbance of the national soul, and the adventurous confidence with which he entered on that long self-discipline which fitted him for the enterprise he so brilliantly fulfilled.

When four hundred years ago the Low Countries of Europe, Holland and Belgium, passed by inheritance to the reigning Spanish Sovereign, Charles I, these lands became the theatre of long and devastating warfare. Siege and sally, slaughter and suffering brought misery on the people like a flood.

Yet it was in that distracted country, amid suffering almost universal, that there came into being the unrivalled sweetness of belfry music. Singing towers all over the Netherlands sprang into the air. Carillons by the score were hung, and have been the delight and pride of the people for a dozen generations or more.

To much the same effect, we may say, out of the disquietude and suffering of those early years of the Sixteenth Century there came in our English tongue a work which has proved to

be "the most majestic thing in our literature, the most living spiritual thing in our tradition"; and we owe it to this high-hearted Apostle of our Faith, William Tindale.

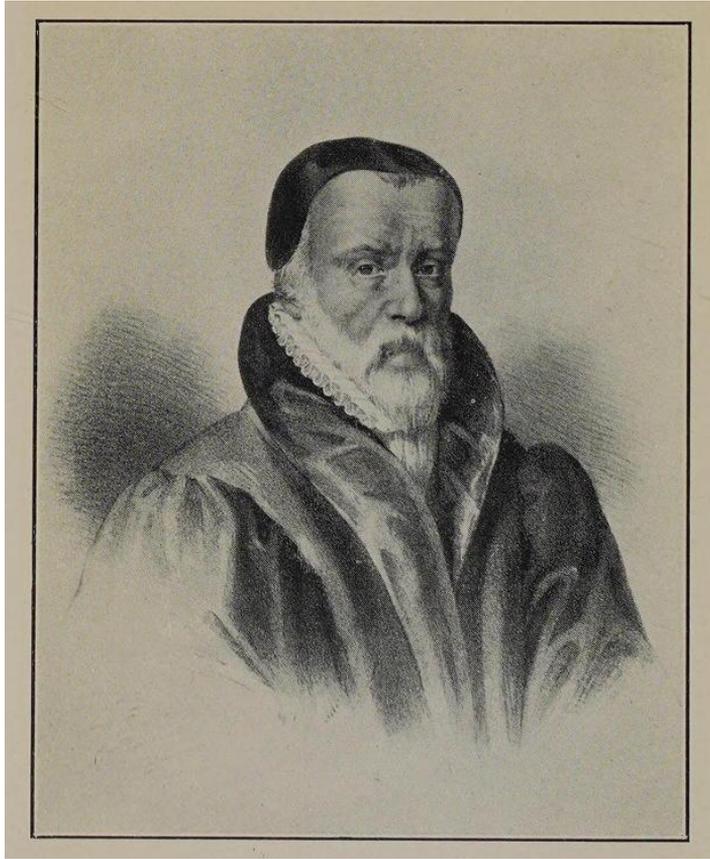
APRIL, 1925.

PREFACE

WITH the approach of the Fourth Centenary there is a demand for a memoir of Tindale, less detailed than the standard biography, yet preserving the perspective of history. To meet this demand this miniature has been prepared. It sets forth especially the ardent force of vision which sustained the exile in the depth and tumult of his toil.

Diligent use has been made of recognized authorities on the subject treated; and it is hoped the little volume may make room for itself in this busy age. For helpful suggestions, the author is indebted to Mr. A. M. Denovan and Mr. B. R. Brooker; and to the Religious Tract Society for kind permission to reproduce illustrations from their standard Biography of Tindale.

It is offered to the public under the tolerant aphorism: "So long as a man says sincerely what he thinks, he tells us something worth while."



WILLIAM TINDALE

INTRODUCTION

"THE first scholar and the first divine of his epoch"—the words stand true of William Tindale; but his personality is even more arresting, for only a man richly endowed with courage, sincerity, uprightness, the sense of duty and the love of country, could have served England so nobly as he did: yet England knows not the man.

Fifteen years, or sixteen at most, early in the Sixteenth Century, 1520-1536, enclose the immemorial labors of William Tindale. During that decade and a half there were for him experiences and enterprises which went to the making of the man, and show what manner of man he was: but which also set him forth as one of the greatest of his race.

Formative years preceded these; some thirty of them one conjectures; of which, however, we can discover little. We get glimpses of him and his doings; but they are like flashes of lightning in a dark sky. A narrative of this man's life would seem forever impossible: what letters there were, or other documents, disappeared long ago: and the path he trod with unflinching step we can trace in patches only.

For all that it is possible to set out the features of the man, realize the massive qualities he possessed, recall his surroundings, the atmosphere he breathed, the hostility he aroused, the victory he won at the cost of his life; and so to

recognize the valor, the magnanimity, and in a word the greatness of this too little known English worthy.

A biographic blank like this, where incidents of consequence must have transpired, is not altogether unknown in history.

History encounters the same difficulty in the life of Wyclif. The character of his parents is unknown. Not an anecdote of his boyhood remains. His life at Oxford, extending over forty years, yields but a single incident.

In one of Tindale's younger contemporaries in the northern kingdom, there occurs a similar desert stretch, where the silence is even more profound; and which the most diligent research has failed to break. John Knox was born in 1505; and of his inner life for the first forty years we know absolutely nothing. Then suddenly, against a background darker in Scotland than that in England, he emerges holding George Wishart's two-edged sword in his hand.

Of the crisis which lay behind, which changed him from a priest before the altar to the beloved disciple of this early martyr, we hear not a word. "In the solemn days of early faith", wrote the late Taylor Innes, "not a few men like him were in the desert until the time of their showing unto Israel. Not the polished shaft only, but the rough spear-head too was in the shadow of a mighty hand until the day when it was launched."

If ever Papini's paradoxical dictum be credible, it is in a life like this: "The most highly educational biographies are those of men of whom little or nothing is known. Those are the books that set forth the human ideal, that tell us what a man ought to

be." The paradox is elsewhere resolved by him when he says: "I care less for the whole course of a man's life than for his own distilling of its essence."

The distilled essence of Tindale's life comes to view again and again during these brief years; which were crowded with events, dramatic and of age-long significance, and which passed from drama to tragedy in the martyr fires he had long foreseen.

Centenaries are apt to miscarry. If such occasions serve only for the display of erudition and platform vanity, and fail to lead us to seek the essential message and the continuing inspiration of the great men they celebrate, what riches of the past remain sealed to us! There have been celebrations loudly acclaimed by men who would have bayed at the heels of the brave revolutionary whom they now eloquently praise. They simulate seeing he is no longer alive and dangerous, but a hero dead: and they join the chorus of universal praise. The effect is to emphasize the deadness of the past, not to rekindle glorious life—this is rekindled only where there is eagerness to be in or near the succession of the great, where there is sympathy with admiration, where there is in fine some kinship of spirit.

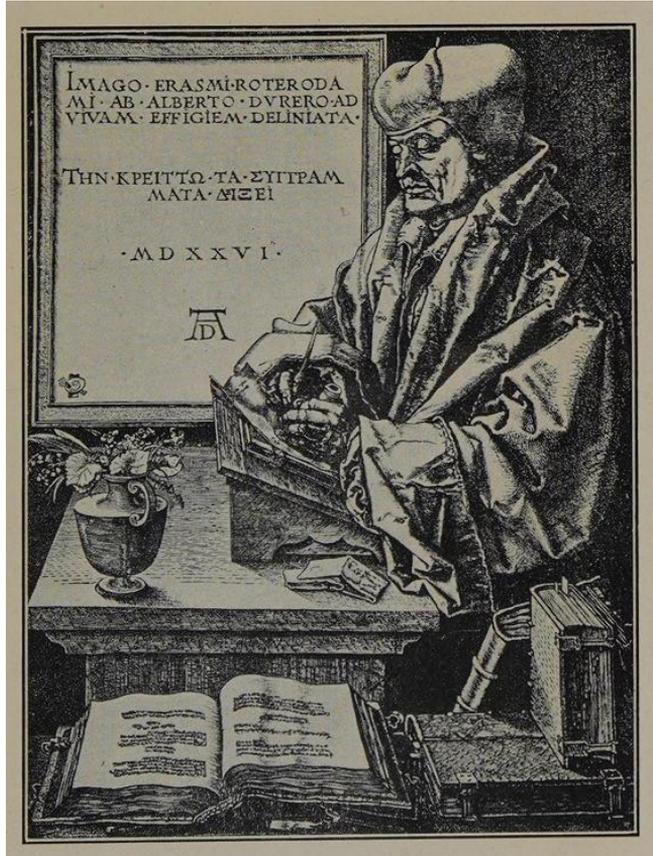
The true aim of Centennials is more psychological than historical. Not so much the magnification of the subject as the discovery of what was his lofty purpose, his high endurance, his nobility of spirit: not even his success, but his endeavor; and this in order that in our admiration we may draw inspiration for ourselves and emulate his spirit in the altered circumstances of the time. That resolve to recapture for the world of to-day a courage and a consecration of which the

world of his day was contemptuous, and to devote these invaluable virtues to the opportunities of our time—that is the soul-stirring aim in revivifying the past; and is not that the true heritage of all the ages?

CHAPTER I. CONDITIONS IN ENGLAND

CAN we picture to ourselves the world in which Tindale gradually came into public view, made his voice heard in palaces, manor houses and homes of the common people; making enemies rage, but winning friends innumerable, until finally a price was set on his head: and there were Englishmen eager to entrap him to his death?

What was the condition of England then? What figures stand out conspicuous in the life of the nation? In whose hands did administrative power lie? In what directions were events moving? In the forefront of the nation strode Wolsey, clothed with power, dominating every avenue of corporate action, the master of church and state, and irresistible so long as he could retain the indulgence of the king. It was the time when Wolsey had succeeded in substituting royal despotism for quasi-representative government, and had himself risen to giddy heights of power and affluence, only to fall headlong in infamy and remorse. His sovereign had at length turned with Tudor frenzy against his minister. The king's marriage projects, his impatience with the Cardinal's vanity, as extravagant as it was grotesque, were not the only cause for dishonor; the King had purposes which called for servants of another type, and Henry was resolved to wield the royal power alone.



DESIDERIUS ERASMUS.
After Albert Durer.

Erasmus, More and Colet were the men of letters conspicuous in ability and influence during Tindale's boyhood. The three men were in intimate sympathy with one another; and each in his own fashion, exponents of the new learning, gave the country whole-hearted service. All were men of outstanding

talent, and labored unceasingly for the ends they had in view. Colet was the preacher of renown. His University lectures on St. Paul's Epistles were scarcely less notable than his sermons in London. Sir Thomas More was witty, intense, versatile, broad-minded, gifted with imagination and courage; but when he encountered the violence of Luther suddenly changed to the recusancy of the bigots and the bishops. Erasmus, the greatest of the three, never altered his plans. He held on his way alike in all weathers undeterred, enlightening his time with the treasures he had found in the New Testament. It was in the year 1516 he issued his Greek Testament, with a Latin version alongside, correcting errors in the Vulgate; and that issue was a landmark in the history of the whole of Europe.

These three men incensed the conservatism of the Church. They refused to shut their eyes to the prevalent ignorance and unworthiness of the priesthood. They laid bare the open sores in the body ecclesiastic. Their irony and satire played about abbots, bishops and curés; but in all the castigation inflicted, there was no sign given by the priesthood of change or desire for reformation; only rancour and rage. As the truth got utterance given to it, the people took sides slowly, and the tides of feeling rose and spread. Listen to one voice from the multitude:

Men hurt their souls,
Alas! for Goddes will;
Why sit ye Prelates still
And suffer all this ill?
Ye Bishops of estates
Should open broad the gates
Of your spiritual charge
And come forth at large

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