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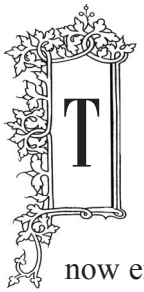

he truly great man, whose name occurs so often in this little work, William Tyndale, or Tindal, as the name is often spelled, was one of the foremost of that noble band of English reformers, to whose labors and sacrifices England owes most of the civil and religious liberty she now enjoys. Oppressed and restrained, both by church and state, her people knew nothing of freedom even by the name, and groping aimlessly in the dark, went down in unbroken ranks to the grave, without comfort in the present or hope for the future. The reformers of Oxford and Cambridge, Tyndale, Frith, Coverdale, Bilney, Latimer, and others, held up before the nation, both by precept and example, the religion of the gospel, and by their holy lives, and often by a martyr's death, riveted the truth in the hearts of the people.

But to Tyndale we owe far more than even this. His claims to the recognition and gratitude of all succeeding ages rest on still higher grounds. He was the first man who gave to the English people the New Testament, and large portions of the Old,

translated and printed in their own language, so that all might read and understand. Wycliffe had translated the Bible from the Vulgate into the old English then used, two hundred years before, but it was not printed, and the precious manuscripts were only to be found in detached portions in the libraries of the rich and the learned, while the common people were left to perish for lack of knowledge, thinking themselves happy if any among them could repeat the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments in English.

Tyndale's printed Bible went into the houses and hands of the poor as well as the rich, so that all might read and examine for themselves. It was the child of prayer, and it came at a time when the Spirit of God had made thousands of hearts ready to receive it, so that it might almost be said of that epoch, "A nation was born in a day."

This great work was no easy task with its devoted author. It entailed upon him persecution, exile, and at last death at the stake, but it had taken possession of every fiber of his being, and persevering amid all forms of discouragement, he gave himself no relaxation till he rested from his labors in death. Who can estimate the value of a life work like his? In what numbers can we compute the priceless worth of such a gift?

"But," says the young inquirer, "all this was centuries ago, and why should we go back into the dark past to hunt out buried men and old principles, amid the light now shining everywhere about us?"

Why should we do this? Simply because to these men and their belief we of the present age owe under God so much of all that makes this nineteenth century glorious. They were not dead doctrines, but living principles, which have come down to us through many ages, and they are even now stirring men's hearts as they stirred them in the days of Luther and Tyndale. For this cause,

if for no other, it is well to hold in grateful remembrance the pioneers in the great work of bringing back the world to the obedience of Christ, that we may know how to value properly the legacy they have left us.

In order to make this picture of bygone days as alive as possible, the writer has thrown herself into the past, and through extracts from the journal of a pupil of Tyndale's, Miss Anne Poyntz, a niece of Sir John Walsh of Sodbury Hall, has endeavored to depict the scenes as they may have appeared to her while passing. In doing this, however, great care has been taken to avoid "poetic license," and to preserve, in the sayings and doings of Tyndale and the other characters connected with him, only strict historic truth.

Mrs. S. T. Martyn, 1867

Chapter One
Life at Sodbury Hall

Little Sodbury Hall, September 10, 1521

Yesterday, it being my eighteenth birthday, brother Roger came up from London, bringing with him a parcel, done up in pretty wrappings and secured with ribbon.

Handing it to me, he said, "Here, little one, is my birthday gift, and as Margaret More chose it, I'm sure it will be acceptable."

"Ah, Roger," I replied, "what is this?"

For in my impatience I had hastily undone the parcel, and behold a book with illuminated vellum pages,[1] richly bound and clasped with gold, but with no words in it from beginning to end.

ILLUMINATED PAGE

[1] An illuminated book had colorful boarders or drawings on it. Vellum paper was typically made from animal skins.

"Did you never see the like at Chelsea, Anne, while you were at Sir Thomas More's? It is a book left blank, that you may write in it from time to time just what pleases you of the events of the day, your own thoughts, or whatever else may seem good to you. Margaret assured me you would like it, or I should have chosen differently."

"I give you a thousand thanks for it. But what have I, an ignorant damsel in this quiet country home, to write in a book so beautiful? Margaret is wise and educated, and has visitors from all parts of the world at her father's, so that she can never be at a loss for subjects, but with me it is far different."

"We shall see," replied Roger smiling. "I warrant there is enough in that pretty head to fill my little book twice over. But I hear my aunt's voice. Put away the parcel, and come with me to the dining hall."

I flew to hide my treasure in the turret-room[2] kindly given up to my use. Returning, I found Roger in the midst of the family, with Jack sitting on his knee, and Cicely and Maud standing as near him as possible, while Sir John and my lady looked on with smiles and the servants who were bringing in the dinner lingered to catch a look or word from the bright young visitor. Presently, when we were all seated at the table, Richard, the eldest boy, arrived. He had been out with the gamekeeper. Then there was another glad welcome, for the two are close friends, and Richard declares that when he is old enough, he will go into the warehouse with Roger, at which my aunt frowns, for she has not yet forgiven Roger's choice.

In the evening we had games in the hall. Though Friar Jerome and Friar Roger from Greenwich monastery were with us, there

[2] A small room in the tower of castle.

was no lack of merriment till bedtime, for both my uncle and aunt love to see happy faces, and cannot abide sadness or sorrow.

And now Roger has gone back again to London, and his visit was so short. Except for the gift he left, I could hardly believe he had been with us. But here is the little book whose clean white pages I am to spoil with my poor thoughts or poorer deeds, having promised Roger, I will not draw back. If I were like Margaret More, it would be easy for me to fill the book, for her diary must be full of interesting things, but then she has always studied with her father, and knows everything, while I am untaught, and but for her and good Sir Thomas, should know nothing at all.

Now to explain about myself. How shall I begin? Of my birth and parents I can say little. Having had the misfortune to be left an orphan in infancy, I know nothing of my parents, save that my father was Master William Poyntz of Ashe Hall and Fernley Manor, and that he died abroad, leaving Roger to the care of our mother's brother, Master Bradley of London. I was taken in by Sir John Walsh of Sodbury, who married my father's only sister and my godmother, with them I have lived ever since, having never known another home.

My uncle is one of the best of men, and having formerly been much at court, is known and esteemed by all the gentry. His wife, the Lady Anne Walsh, though still a fine-looking woman, and fond of fashionable society, is like a mother to me, the orphan daughter of her favorite brother. Roger, my darling brother, though urged by most of his family to go into the army, chose rather to become a merchant, and through the influence of his uncle, obtained a place in the warehouse of Humphrey Monmouth, the great London merchant, whose praise is in the mouth of all.

ERASMUS

Sodbury Hall is a much grander building than Sir Thomas More's house at Chelsea, with elegant tableware, fine furniture and an abundance of servants, yet at heart I like it not half so much, because here we have few books. I am sure that the great Erasmus[3] would never feel at home with us as he does at Chelsea, where he is known and loved so well. My cousins too are growing up without knowledge, though both Richard and Cicely, when they see me reading or writing, say they would gladly learn if the chance might but be given them.

Well, the time may perchance come, for I heard my uncle say the other day to Friar Jerome, who I do believe is an honest, good man, sincere in his faith, that if he could but find the right man, he would have a tutor for his children and a chaplain for the Hall, though from what he had seen of such priests, he should expect small good of him. Friar Jerome could say little for many of his brethren, but he told Sir John of a company of students at Cambridge, most of whom had gone there from Oxford, who were known all over the university for their religious zeal and the purity of their lives. Though admitted to the priesthood, they had not yet taken the vows of a monk. With the Bible in their hands and on

[3] Erasmus (c. 1466–1536) published the first version of the Greek New Testament. Several translators, including Tyndale, used his Greek New Testament to translate the Bible into their native language.

their tongues, they went among the rich and poor doing good, and trying to make men better, which caused others to condemn them.

As Friar Jerome is going to Cambridge soon, my uncle gave instruction to him to try and obtain one of the men of whom he had spoken as teacher and chaplain at the Hall, which he has little doubt of doing. Roger told me the other day in secret, and with strict command of privacy, that his master, Humphrey Monmouth, is a Bible reader, and mourns over the wickedness of priests and people; so that I am sure he is at heart one with these holy Cambridge students.

I am reminded that when I was at Chelsea, Sir Thomas More was once talking with Erasmus of Rotterdam, who was then his guest. He spoke with great bitterness of the sin and scandal occasioned by some who deemed themselves wiser than the church, naming Martin Luther[4] in Germany and others who he said had sold themselves to the devil to do his bidding among men.

Erasmus smilingly answered, "You have an English saying, that 'the devil is not so black as he is painted,' and the same may perchance be true of this monk Luther. Shall we not hope so?"

"I can hope for nothing good," Sir Thomas replied, "from one who causes a division in the church. If my power equaled my will, all such should be put down by the strong hand before the infection has time to spread."

I was frightened at the stern looks and harsh words of Sir Thomas, so unlike what I had ever seen in him. When alone with Margaret, I spoke of the matter, saying I wondered why Bible reading should cause so much mischief in the world."

[4] Martin Luther (1483–1546) nailed 95 Theses on the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg. He translated the New Testament into German.

"Beware, Anne," Margaret hastily answered, "how you think, and much less speak of matters such as these. A fire might be kindled that would utterly consume you. My dear father, so kind and gentle to every living thing, where his faith is concerned knows no mercy. Even Will Roper, who had a secret leaning toward the new doctrines taught in Germany, desired to yield, on pain of banishment from my father's house and heart."

"But if he really believed they were right," I inquired, "how could he give up his belief at the bidding of another, even if it were Sir Thomas More?"

PILLORY

"Ah," she said pleasantly, "both Will Roper and I believe devoutly that whatever my father does must be best, and whatever he thinks right must be so. Last week, I confess, my heart gave way when I saw old Wilkins with his gray head turned out of house and home, and condemned to stand in the pillory[5] half a day, for saying that the pope was only a man like another."

"How cruel," I could not help exclaiming, and was going on to express my opinion more fully, when the entrance of others checked our conversation, to the great relief of Margaret, who cannot abide that even a shadow of disapproval should fall on her idolized father.

Lady Alice More is a notable housewife, but I think she has little love for the books and studies in which her husband so much delights. She has more interest in preparing an ointment of roses to

[5] A wooden structure where a person's hands and head were confined.

clear the complexion, than in any question of church or state, and is happier arranging herbs, than in the society of Erasmus, or the other scholars who frequent her house. But since even scholars must eat, Sir Thomas is well satisfied to find his table properly arranged and his house in order, without complaining for the want of that which he cannot have.

With one exception, the daughters of Sir Thomas More resemble most their mother in character, though never was a father more fondly loved and prized by his entire household. The one exception is Margaret. She is so wise that Erasmus can converse with her as an intellectual equal. Her friendship I count the richest blessing of my life. Without her teachings and example, I should still have been only an ignorant girl, caring for nothing beyond the enjoyment of the present hour.

But I hear Richard's voice calling me loudly and must lay aside my pen.

When I went down yesterday, I found Richard at the southern entrance, with his mother's white horse saddled for my use, and as the weather was fine, he proposed to go riding. I gladly assented, and ran to get my riding gear, which is sadly out of order, having never been used since I came from Chelsea, now many months ago. Richard was mounted on Barbary, Sir John's bay hunter, and my aunt followed us to the park gate with advice and warning, which I am sorry to say, fell on unheeding ears. As soon as we were fairly out of sight, we gave our horses the rein, and then such a chase as Richard led me over the hills and dales, till the blood danced in my veins with pleasure.

I was ahead, and in the excitement of our wild run, was on the very verge of a deserted pit before perceiving it. I reined up my horse so suddenly as to throw all her weight on her front legs, and sat trembling in every limb at the danger I had escaped so

narrowly. Richard, seeing me stop so suddenly, came up quickly, but turned pale on discovering the deadly peril lying directly in our way, for we had turned aside from the beaten road, and were following a bridle path through the fields when this chanced. I begged him to say nothing of this incident at the Hall, lest his father should forbid our going out again without better attendance, and then all our pleasant rides would be over.

On our ride home we were joined by Friar Roye, who had been to take the confession of a poor woman in the next hamlet. I do not like this man, for his face seems to me like a mask worn to conceal something that he is trying to hide, and when he is in conversation with others, his talk is not as I think it should be, a fair exchange of thought for thought, but a mean attempt to cheat, by drawing from them their most secret feelings, without giving any thing in return. He may be honest, but if so, his looks hide it, for he never looks one in the eye, but gives sideway glances, as one who would say, "I have locked up my heart and hid the key, open it if you can."

Today several other dignitaries dined at the Hall and did me the honor to talk to me at the table and for half an hour afterwards. The bishop of Worcester, of which diocese Gloucestershire forms a part, is gentleman who resides mostly at Rome, and has never visited his diocese. His chancellor fills his place, receives the revenues, and orders matters after his own liking. He is a small man and ill-favored, but his voice is full of music, and while he talked of the dear family at Chelsea, I thought I could have listened all day. He says the king is well affected towards Sir Thomas and will have him often at court, so that his preferment is certain, if he wills it, but to a man so in love with domestic life what has a king to offer that can tempt him to give up his liberty?

After dinner, when the children came in, mention was made by my uncle of his wish to obtain a tutor for them, and one of the

guests spoke of a certain priest now at Cambridge, a man, as he said, of great learning, and withal of such strict religious devotion, that he had gathered about him, both at Cambridge and Oxford, a company of men likeminded, who spent their time in doing good.

"I fear such a man as you describe would be too much of a saint to suit me," exclaimed my uncle. "I am but a poor sinner myself, and should not like being put out of countenance by my tutor. Besides, I want none but cheerful faces around my table or in my sight. So good a man would be out of his element at Sodbury Hall or alongside of its master."

"Not so, my good host," replied the doctor, "Master Tyndale is a man of cheerful countenance, a pleasant companion, and one who so loves children that he would always be teaching them."

So after some discussion, the thing was agreed upon between them, and Master Tyndale is to be invited to come to the Hall as teacher and parish priest for the little church just over Combe Hill, on the edge of the forest. It is a lonely but pleasant place, where I often walk with Richard and Cicely, and as it is long since it has been occupied as a church, it will seem strange to see a priest in the small dark pulpit, where we have many times played hide-and-go-seek.