

CHAPTER II.

“ Though threatening danger lin'd
Each word he spoke, yet would he speake his mind.”

RETURNS TO HIS NATIVE COUNTY AS TUTOR IN A KNIGHT'S FAMILY—
BECOMES AN OBJECT OF PERSECUTION—COMES TO LONDON—IS A
POPULAR PREACHER.

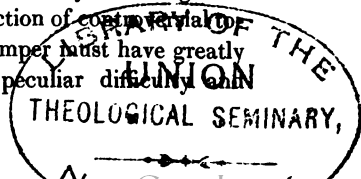
WHEN Luther's intrepid defiance of the Pope had rendered him an object of universal conversation, Tyndale, having returned to his native county, was engaged as tutor and chaplain to the family of Sir John Welch, a knight of Gloucestershire, and a hospitable gentleman, who, keeping a good table, frequently enjoyed the company of the neighbouring prelates and clergy. With these visiters, his chaplain occasionally entered into controversy on the Lutheran opinions, and, grieved at the ignorance of the Roman Catholic teachers, warmly advocated the reading of the New Testament. This, as Fuller wittily says, led them to prefer the giving up Squire Welch's good cheer, rather than to have the sour sauce of Master Tyndale's company. The Squire's lady, who was a sensible woman, felt hurt when she saw these great men, whom she had been brought up to venerate, overcome in religious disputation, and asked Sir William Tyndale* whether it was likely that she could prefer his judgment to that of such wealthy prelates. To this he thought proper not to reply, lest it should excite her temper, which he saw to be ruffled. But soon after, he translated Erasmus's "Enchiridion," and dedicated the manuscript to Sir John and his lady. They read it attentively, and became convinced of the spirituality of a Christian profes-

* The title given at that time to all priests: after the Reformation it gradually gave place to the title of Reverend.

sion ; and thus Tyndale secured their high esteem and friendship. The benefited clergy soon displayed their bitter hostility, and he was cited to appear before the ordinary. In his way thither, he spent the time in fervent prayer : the great object of his supplications was, that his heavenly Father would strengthen him, at all hazards, to stand firmly for the truth of his word. On his arrival, he found a numerous assemblage of his persecutors ; but either for fear of offending the hospitable knight, or by the secret providence of God, their mouths were shut, and nothing was laid to his charge. The ordinary, however, “ rated him like a dog.”

The persecuted Teacher, soon after this, consulted an old doctor, who had been chancellor to a bishop : he privately told him, that, in his opinion, the Pope was antichrist, but advised him by no means to avow any sentiment of the kind, as it would be at the peril of his life. Tyndale, however, soon proved himself incapable of concealment ; for being in company with a popish divine, he argued so conclusively in favour of a vernacular translation of the Bible, that the divine, unable to answer him, exclaimed, “ We had better be without God’s laws than the Pope’s.” This fired the spirit of Tyndale ; and, with holy indignation, he replied : “ I defy the Pope and all his laws ; and, if God give me life, ere many years the ploughboys shall know more of the Scriptures than you do :” a pledge which he amply redeemed by not only publishing the New Testament in English, adapted to the most refined society, but also in the orthography of the country people and ploughboys.

He now became so “ turmoiled” in the country, that he could no longer dwell there without imminent danger both to himself and to his worthy friends : in consequence of this, he left Gloucestershire, and preached frequently at Bristol, in London, and other places, to crowded congregations. He still continued his connexion with the Romish church, endeavouring in his sermons to win souls to Christ, while he avoided persecution by refraining from hard names, and from the pointed introduction of controversial topics. In this policy a naturally amiable temper must have greatly assisted him. His position was one of peculiar difficulty.



danger, and it required great talent to guide his course. Skilfully upholding the ark, he did not attempt to *pull down* the Dagon of his day; but error fell before truth, as Dagon fell before the ark of the Israelites at Ashdod.

A circumstance which took place at this time, shows the conduct of Tyndale to have been that of a man without guile, who judged of others by the measure of his own goodness. Erasmus had courteously commended Tonstall, then Bishop of London, as a patron of learning; and Tyndale was led to hope that a chaplaincy in his house would enable him, without molestation, to proceed in his great work of translating the Bible into English. He obtained from Sir John Welch an introduction to Sir H. Guildford, who recommended him to the Bishop. To secure his object, he translated one of Isocrates' Orations; and with this proof of his attainments in the Greek language, he waited upon Tonstall, hoping that his talent alone would secure for him a service in the bishop's house; but, as Fox quaintly says, "God gave him to find little favour in his sight." Thus disappointed, he found a comfortable asylum in the house of a pious and benevolent alderman, Humphrey Monmouth, and lived with him about six months of the year 1523.

This worthy citizen was, a few years after, sent to the Tower on suspicion of heresy; the principal crime laid to his charge being, his having aided Tyndale. The original articles, and Monmouth's memorial to the lord legate and the privy council, witnessed by Bishop Tonstall, are in the Harleian Collection of State Papers.* It was with some painful apprehension that I read these documents. A wealthy merchant of the city of London committed to such a prison, on so dangerous a charge, with all the terrors of confiscation, torture, and death before him, unless he pleased the enemies of Tyndale! How great a temptation to publish any slander or calumny, however unfounded, against a poor friar at that time in exile! But his character was without a blemish, and Monmouth, imbued with honourable prin-

* These papers are not dated; Strype ascribes them to 1528.

ciples, at every risk testified the truth. He thus narrates with candour all his knowledge of the character and conduct of his guest:—" Upon iiii yeres and a half past, and more, I herde the forsaid Sir William preache ij or iij sermondcs, at St. Dunstones in the weste, in London, and after that I chaunced to meet with him, and with communycation I examyned him what lyvinge he had, he said, none at all, but he trusted to be with my lord of London in his service, and therefore I had the better fantasye to him. And afterwarde he wente to my lorde and spake to him, as he tolde me, and my lorde of London answered him that he had chaplaines inoughe, and he said to him that he would have no more at that time, and so the priest came to me againe, and besought me to helpe him, and so I toke him in my house half a year, and there he lived like a good priest as me thought, he studyed moste parte of the daie and of the nyght at his booke, and he woulde eat but sodden meate by his good will, nor drinke but small single beer; I never saw him were lynen about him in the space he was with me; I did promys him ten pounds sterling to prairie for my father, mother, there sowles,* and all christen sowles. I did paie yt him when he made his exchang to Hamboro'. When I hard my lord of London preache at Powles Crosse that Sir William Tyndall had translated the New Testament in Englishe, and was noughtely translated, that was the first tyme that ever I suspected or knewe any evill by him, and shortly all the letters and treatyes that he sent me with dyuers copies of bookes that my servant did write, and the sermondcs that the priest did make at St. Dunstones, I did burne them in my howse, he that did write them did see it. I did borne them for feare of the translator more than for any yll that I knewe by them." The worthy citizen soon obtained his liberty, was

* Light broke in gradually upon his mind, like the man who, having been born blind, suddenly received his sight, and said, "I see men as trees, walking." After he left England, he defended the real presence against Barnes, but very soon gave up that extraordinary delusion. In reply to More, he professes an historic faith in the perpetual virginity of our Lord's mother. It is interesting to trace the progress of his powerful mind in throwing off the errors which he had imbibed in his education.—See Confutation of Tyndale, fol. 249 and 260.

knighted, and in 1535 served his shrievalty. He died in 1537, and was buried at Alhallows church, near the Tower. He was a great ornament to the city, of good wealth, and great charity; he contributed largely to the printing of the New Testament and other pious books against the errors of Rome. By his will, he appointed Latimer, Barnes, and two other gospellers to preach thirty sermons at his parish church, which he thought would do more good than so many masses said for the repose of his soul; and he forbade the ordinary superstitions of candles and singing dirige, and ringing of bells at his funeral.*

* Strype's Stow, Vol. I. p. 375.