

TYNDALE AND MORE.

A LITERARY BATTLE.

By A. ATKINSON.

A GAINST the south-east wall of Chelsea Old Church is the tomb which More built for his first wife, Jane Colt, and in which he had designed to rest with his second wife, Mistress Alice Middleton. *Dis aliter visum.* The tablet of black marble with the lengthy Latin inscription composed by More himself has been the subject of controversy. The words originally ran: "*neque nobilibus esset invisus, nec injucundus populo, furibus autem et homicidis hæreticisque molestus*—a terror to thieves, murderers, and heretics. More had submitted the inscription to Erasmus, but that humane scholar had objected to the word *hæreticisque*. It has been alleged that in deference to this suggestion More erased the word, but there is evidence to show that the inscription remained unaltered for more than 100 years after his death.¹ About the year 1644 the lettering had become decayed and Sir John Laurence caused it to be re-cut omitting the word *hæreticisque*, so that a gap in the inscription is clearly seen. Thus is history falsified, for the original wording undoubtedly suggests that More accounted heretics in the same category as thieves and murderers.

The older school of historians have spoken of More in disparaging terms, holding that when he wrote "Utopia," he had views on toleration which he afterwards abandoned under the pressure of Henry VIII. More, says Burnet, became the tool "of the blind and enraged fury of the priests." In him the "genial philosopher" according to Froude, "was transformed into the merciless bigot." Under the "sinister influence of Henry he had allowed his sentiments to be moulded by the official theology of the Court"; such is the verdict of Acton; and Creighton forms the same judgment: "He deceived himself by putting his principles aside"; and, again, Henry applied to More "the same measure of justice as himself applied to others."

It is not surprising that the fashion of whitewashing the less worthy characters in history should have led, especially since his canonization, to attempts to reverse the unfavourable estimate of More's character formed by older writers, particularly with reference to his attitude towards those of the reformed religion. Here the inscription on the memorial tablet already cited, written some three years before his execution can hardly be ignored.

There is a significant passage in Roper's *Life of More* where More foresees that England may cease to be a Catholic country when toleration in religious matters may become unavoidable, but he looks forward to such a time with horror: "Son Roper, I pray God that some of us, as high as we seem to sit upon mountains, treading heretics under our feet like ants, live not the day that we gladly would wish to be at league and composition with them, to let them have their churches quietly to themselves so that they would be content to let us have ours quietly to ourselves." This was another More from the author of the

¹ The letters may be found in Leclerc's edition of Erasmus: *Opera Omnia*, Vol. 3, Epistolæ 426, 466, in app. Leyden 1703.

Utopia, who, in 1516 had written : " For this is one of the ancientist lawes among them ; that no man shall be blamed for resoninge in the maintenance of his own religion." And again : " Utopus made a decree that it should be lawfull for everie man to favour and folow what religion he would. If he could not by faire and gentle speche induce them unto his opinion yet he should use no kind of violence."

By 1526 the bishops were thoroughly alarmed at the spread of Lutheran teaching in England. Tyndale's New Testament was being surreptitiously distributed notwithstanding proclamations and burnings and Tunstal, a stalwart defender of the old religion, saw that he must meet argument with argument and have recourse to the Press. He applied to Sir Thomas More to help him and could have chosen none better, for More, by his scholarship, wit and the grace of his literary style had achieved a European reputation. Tunstal, in his letter to More dated March 7th, 1528, says : " There are certain sons of iniquity who by translating Lutheran books and printing them in great numbers are trying to infect the land with heresy. You can play the Demosthenes both in English and Latin. You cannot better bestow your leisure hours, if you have any, than by writing an English work to show to simple-minded people the crafty malignity of these impious heretics." He concludes by granting More permission to read the prohibited books. It is strange to reflect that within twelve years Tunstal's name should appear authorizing the fourth edition of the Great Bible which was mainly Tyndale's work, as is our own Authorized Version. " Overseen and perused," runs the title page, " at the commandment of the King's Highness by the Right. Rev. Father in God Cuthbert (Tunstal), Bishop of Durham, and Nicholas (Heath), Bishop of Rochester. More set to work and in June 1529 produced his *Dialogue*, " touching the pestilent sect of Luther and Tyndale," a volume of more than 180 pages and of about 170,000 words. Thus began the greatest literary battle in history which lasted for five years. In July 1531 Tyndale's *Answer* was published from Amsterdam ; by the time it was received by More he had become Lord Chancellor. More found it necessary to reply, and published in May 1532 the first three books of his *Confutation* of Tyndale's *Answer*, and a year later put forth six more books making in all with similar writings a portentous work of 1,300 folio pages. In these three volumes there is the record of the controversy.

In the *Dialogue* a messenger the " quod he " questions More as from a friend, but acting in effect as a spokesman of the Lutheran party. All those points which still remain the ground of controversy between papists and protestants, the mass, the confessional, ceremonials, rituals, pilgrimages, prayers to the Virgin and the saints, dispensations and indulgences are passed in review, but it is Tyndale's New Testament that is specially aimed at. More supports the persecution of heretics who " he kept but for the fire first here and after in hell." Burning is " lawful necessary and well done." His attitude is that of " Giant Pope " sitting in the mouth of his cave hissing at Christian : " You never will mend till more of you be burned." Tyndale appeals to Scripture : " Judge whether the pope with his be the Church, whether their authority be above the Scripture, whether they *have* erred and

not only whether they can." Holy days, ceremonies, pilgrimages were once a help to religion, now they had become engines of priestly tyranny blinding the people. Although there is much hard-hitting on both sides, yet having regard to the controversial methods of the time, More in his first work perhaps does not surpass the common form. What that was may be learnt from many contemporary writings. It would hardly do in these days for one bishop to call another in print "a beastly belly-god and dampnable donge-hill," yet these are the words which Bishop Bale addressed to Bonner, who deserved them. The *Dialogue* is a skilful and ingenious defence of the doctrines and practices of the Church of Rome. But there are some hard words: "Luther and all his offspring with all those that favour and set forth his sect be very limbs of the devil and open enemies of the Faith of Christ." Tyndale's New Testament was full of heresies and errors, and many passages were wrongly translated. The bishops and More desired "church" where Tyndale translated "congregation," "priest," where he used "elder," and "penance" where he wrote "repentance." Tyndale is not backward in his complaints of More's language: "he biteth, sucketh, gnaweth and mouseth Tyndale." He introduces a little of More's humour. More had differentiated in the scholastic manner between different forms of reverence, *doulia*, *hyperdoulia*, *latria*. "Which," asks Tyndale, "was the worship done by More and others to my Lord the cardinal's hat"? alluding to the obeisance paid to Wolsey's hat when carried in procession through the streets and placed on the altar in Westminster Abbey as he had described in the *Practice of Prelates*. More's humour sometimes carries him away into indecorous stories and jokes, and Tyndale rightly censures him for the tale of the pilgrimage to St. Valeri, too indecorous to be repeated here.

But it is in his second work the *Confutacyon*, a dreary waste full of scurrilous language, that More loses all control over himself and, even allowing for the controversial standards of the day, it must be adjudged as Billingsgate. Tyndale is "a beast discharging a filthy foam of blasphemies out of his brutish beastly mouth." He is one of the "hell hounds that the devil hath in his kennel." "Of all which ever sprang in Christ's Church the very worst and most beastly be these Lutherans as their opinion and their lewd living sheweth." And, most dreadful of all: "After the fire of Smithfield hell doth receive them where the wretches burn for ever." It is melancholy that the mind of More in the maturity of his age and judgment should have been so deformed and darkened as to become the impassioned advocate of all that the most conscientious and enlightened men of his day were regretting or forsaking.

It is natural and perhaps fitting that More, though himself a bigamist, should have reproached Luther for breaking his vows and marrying the nun Catherine von Bora, but he repeats the abuse in every chapter with tedious reiteration. "Luther not only teacheth monks, freres and nuns to marriage, but also being a frere hath married a nun himself, and with her liveth under the name of wedlock in open incestuous lechery without care or shame." Again and again, probably more than one hundred times Luther is denounced for "his open

living in lechery with his lewd leman the nun." It is strange that More should have failed to see that Tyndale could hardly be blamed for Luther's fault and that these frequent twittings were indecent and irrelevant, since Tyndale remained unmarried and was of irreproachable life. More was constrained by adverse criticisms to put out an *Apology* in 1533, and to confess that men had complained of the *Confutacyon* as being "overlong and therefore tedious to read." Some of his friends, he averred, had read it three times; but these stout fellows can have had but few successors. It is indeed, doubtful if any man hereafter, will ever read again the whole of the *Confutacyon*. Tyndale's arguments are better than his literary style, but enough has been quoted to show that More's was none too polished and a great declension from the *Utopia*. Some excuse may be made for the exile whose life was in daily peril, but the same latitude can hardly be extended to those in the seats of authority.

More denies the stories of cruelty to which Foxe afterwards gave currency, as that he had a tree in his garden to which heretics were bound and whipped—a story which Froude accepts. "And of all that ever came into my hands for heresy," More says, "as help me God, saving the safe keeping of them, had never any of them any stripes or stroken given them so much as a fillip on the forehead." Nevertheless he admits that "there was no man that any meddling had with them (heretics) into whose hand they were more loth to come." "None of them had wrong but that it were for they were burnt no sooner." The sentiments are in accord with the inscription on his tomb.

The spectacle of two good men railing at one another with a sad lack of Christian charity is unpleasing. More's apologists have advanced in his defence the argument that he conscientiously believed that heresy led to sedition and disorder in the State. To apportion praise or blame is always an agreeable task: if a moral is to be drawn it surely is that history records that many evil deeds have been done by excellent men from conscientious motives, but that this does not make them right. The New Testament has been appropriately styled Tyndale's "Noblest Monument"; but he claimed no finality for his work. "If any man find faults either with the translation or aught beside, to the same it shall be lawful to translate it themselves and to put what they lust thereto. If I shall perceive, either by myself or by the information of others that aught be escaped me or might more plainly be translated, I will shortly after cause it to be mended." He would not have objected to a revised Revised Version.

The pedestrian leaving Chelsea Old Church and strolling eastward will presently find in the Victoria Embankment gardens a bronze statue, eleven feet high, by Boehm, R.A., erected in 1884 by public subscription at a cost of £2,400. Tyndale stands erect in doctor's robes with his right hand on an open copy of the New Testament resting on a printing press, copied from one in the Plantin museum at Antwerp. On the front the pedestal bears an inscription: "First translator of the New Testament into English from the Greek. Born A.D. 1484. Died a martyr at Vilvorde in Belgium, A.D. 1536. Thy word is a lantern unto my feet and a light unto my path."