

## DIALOGUE CONCERNING TYNDALE: BK. 3. CH. 15-16

### THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER

*The Messenger moveth against the clergy that, though they have made no law thereof, yet they will indeed suffer none English bible in no man's hand; but use to burn them where they find them; and sometime to burn the man too. And for ensample he layeth one Richard Hunne, showing that the Chancellor of London murdered him in prison and after hanged him, fayning that he hanged himself, and after condemned him of heresy, because he had an English bible, and so burned the bible and him together. Whereunto the author answereth.*

I suppose, quod he, that this opinion is rather growen another way; that is, to wit, by the reason that the clergy, though the law serve them not therefore, do yet indeed take all translations out of every layman's hand. And sometime, with those that be burned or convicted of heresy, they burn the English bible without respect, be the translation old or new, bad or good.

Forsooth, quod I, if this were so, then were it in my mind not well done. But I believe ye mistake it. Howbeit, what ye have seen I cannot say. But myself have seen and can show you bibles fair and old written in English, which have been knowen and seen by the bishop of the diocese, and left in laymen's hands, and women's too, such as he knew for good and catholic folk that used it with devotion and soberness. But, of truth, all such as are founden in the hands of the heretics they use to take away. But they do cause none to be burned, as far as ever I could wit, but only such as be founden faulty. Whereof many be set forth with evil prologues or glosses, maliciously made by Wiclif and other heretics. For no good man would, I ween, be so mad to burn up the bible wherein they found no fault nor any law that letted it to be looked on and read.

Marye, quod he, but I have heard good men say, that even here in London not many years ago, in the days of the bishop that last died, ⁊ they burned up as fair bibles in English as any man hath lightly seen, and thereto as faultless for ought that any man could find as any bible is in latin. And yet besides this they burned up the dead body of the man himself, ⁊ whom themself had hanged in the bishop's prison before, making as though the man had hanged himself. And of the burning of his body had they no colour but only because they found English bibles in his house, wherein they never found other fault but because they were in English.

Who told you this tale, quod I ?

Forsooth, divers honest men, quod he, that saw it, and specially one that saw the man hanging in the bishop's prison ere he was cut down. And he told me that it was well and clearly proved that the chancellor [of London] and his keepers had killed the man first; and then hanged him after. And that they had laid heresy to him only for hatred that he sued a premunire against divers persons for a suit taken about a mortuary in the audience of the archbishop of Canterbury. And

then they proved the heresy by nothing else but by the possession of a good English bible. And upon heresy so proved against him whom they had hanged, lest he should say for himself, they burned up the holy scripture of God, and the body of a good man therewith. For I have heard him called a very honest person and of a good substance.

Forsooth, quod I, of good substance he was I think well worth a thousand marks. And of his worldly conversation among the people I have heard none harm. But surely as touching his faith toward Christ, methinketh I may be bold to say that he was not honest. And as touching truth in words, he that hath told you this tale was not so honest indeed as methinketh ye take him for.

Why, quod he, do ye know the matter well?

Forsooth, quod I, so well I know it from top to toe that I suppose there be not very many men that knoweth it much better. For I have not only been divers times present myself at certain examinations thereof, but have also divers and many times sunderlye talked with almost all such, except the dead man himself, as most knew of the matter: which matter was many times in sundry places examined. But specially at Baynard's Castle one day was it examined at great length and by a long time every man being sent for before, and ready there, all that could be found that anything could tell, or that had said they could anything tell in the matter. And this examination was had before divers great lords spiritual and temporal, and other of the king's honourable council, sent thither by his highness for the nonce of his blessed zeal and princely desire borne to the searching of the truth. Whereunto his gracious mind was much inclined, and had been by a right honourable man informed, that there was one had showed a friend of his that he could go take

#### **RICHARD HUNNE**

him by the sleeve that killed Hunne, for Richard Hunne was his name whom ye speak of. I was also myself present at the judgment given in Poules, whereupon his books and his body were burned. And by all these things I very well know that he of whom ye have heard this matter hath told you tales far from the truth.

In good faith, quod your friend, he told me one thing that ye speak of now: that there was one that said he could go take him by the sleeve that killed Richard Hunne, and that he did so indeed before the lords, and came even there to the chancellor and said: "My lords, this is he." But when he was asked how he knew it, he confessed that it was by such an unlawful craft as was not taken for a proof. For it was, they say, by necromancy. And the bishops that were there would have had that man burned too for witchcraft. And told me also that there was another which had seen many men that had hanged themselves: a man that had been long in office under divers of the kynges almoners, to whom the

#### **THE KING'S ALMONERS HAVE THEIR GOODS WHO KILL THEMSELVES**

goods of such men as kill themselves be appointed by the law, and his office, as deodandes, to be given in alms. This man, as I have heard say, showed unto the lords by such experience as he had good and plain tokens by which they perceived well that Hunne did never hang himself. I have heard also that a spiritual man and one that loved well the chancellor, and was a labourer for that part, yet could not deny before all the Lords but that he had told a temporal man, and a friend of his, that Hunne had never been accused of heresy if he had never sued the premunire. And by saynte Marye that was a shrewd word. Howbeit indeed it went not so near the matter as the other

two things did.

Yes, in good faith, quod I, all three like nere when they were all heard. But of truth many other things were there laid that, upon the hearing, seemed much more suspicious than these. Which yet when they were answered, alway lost more than half their strength. But as for these three matters, I promise you, proved very trifles, and such, as if ye had heard them, ye would have laughed at them seven year after.

I beseech you, quod he, let me hear how they proved.

I am loth, quod I, to let you, and lose your time in such trifles. Howbeit since you long so sore therefore, rather than ye should lose your child for them, ye shall have them all three as shortly as I can.

First, ye must understand, that because the coming together of the Lords from Greenwich to Baynardes castell for the trying out of the matter should not be frustrate, there was such diligence done before, that every man that aught had said therein was ready there against their coming. Where they began with the first point that ye spake of, as the special motion whereupon the kynges highness had sent them thither. Wherefore, after the rehearsal made of the cause of their coming, the greatest temporal Lord there present said unto a certain servant of his own standing there beside, "Sir, ye told me that one showed you that he could go take him by the sleeve that killed Hunne. Have ye brought him hither?" "Sir," quod he, "if it like your lordship, this man it was that told me so," pointing to one that he had caused to come thither. Then my lord asked that man, "How say ye sir, can ye do as ye said ye could?" "Forsooth my Lord," quod he, "and it like your Lordship, I said not so much, this gentleman did somewhat mistake me. But indeed I told him that I had a neighbour that told me he could do it." "Where is that neighbour?" quod my Lord. "This man, sir," quod he, "bringeth forth one which had also been warned to be there." Then was he asked whether he had said that he could do it. "Nay, forsooth," quod he, "my Lord, I said not that I could do it myself; but I said that one told me that he could do it." "Well," quod my Lord, "who told you so?" "Forsooth, my Lord," quod he, "my neighbour here." Then was that man asked, "Sir know you one that can tell who killed Richard Hunne?" "Forsooth," quod he, "and it like your Lordship, I said not that I knew one surely that could tell who had killed him: but I said indeed that I know one which I thought verily could tell who killed him." "Well," quod the Lords at the last, "yet with much work we come to somewhat. But whereby think you that he can tell?" "Nay, forsooth," my Lord," quod he, "it is a woman, I would she were here with your Lordships now." "Well," quod my Lord, "woman or man, all is one, she shall be had wheresoever she be." "By my faith my Lords," quod he, "and she were with you, she would tell you wonders. For, by God, I have wist her to tell many marvellous things ere now." "Why," quod the Lords, "what have you heard her told?" "Forsooth, my Lords," quod he, "if a thing had been stolen, she would have told who had it. And therefore I think she could as well tell who killed Hunne, as who stole a horse." "Surely," said the Lords, "so think all we too, I trow. But how could she tell it, by the devil?" "Nay, by my troth, I trow," quod he, "for I could never see her use any worse way than looking in one's hand." Therewith the Lords laughed and asked, "What is she?" "Forsooth, my Lords," quod he, "an Egyptian, and she was lodged here at Lambeth, but she is gone over sea now. Howbeit, I trow, she be not in her own country yet: for they say it is a great way hence, and she went over little more than a month ago."

Now, forsooth, quod your friend, this process came to a wise purpose, here was a great post well whittled to a pudding prick. But I pray you to what point came the second matter of him that had been in office under so many of the king's almoners that he knew by his own experience and proved that Richard Hunne had not hanged himself.

Forsooth, quod I, he was called in next. And then was he asked whereby he knew it. But would God ye had seen his countenance. The man had of likelihood said somewhat too far, and was much amazed and looked as though his eyes would have fallen out of his head into the Lords' laps. But to the question he answered and said that he saw that very well; for he saw him both ere he was taken down and after. "What then?" quod the Lords, "so did there many more which yet upon the sight could not tell that." "No, my lords," quod he, "but I have another insight in such things than other men have." "What insight?" quod they. "Forsooth," quod he, "it is not unknown that I have occupied a great while under divers of the king's almoners, and have seen and considered many that have hanged themselves, and thereby if I see one hang, I can tell anon whether he hanged himself or not." "By what token can you tell?" quod the Lords. "Forsooth," quod he, "I cannot tell the tokens but I perceive it well enough by mine own sight. But when they heard him speak of his own sight, and therewith saw what sight he had, looking as though his eyes would have fallen into their laps, there could few forbear laughing, and said, "We see well surely that ye have a sight by yourself." And then said one lord merrily, "Peradventure as some man is so cunning by experience of jewels that he can perceive by his own eye whether a stone be right or counterfeit though he cannot well make another man to perceive the tokens; so this good fellow, though he cannot tell us the marks, yet he hath such an experience in hanging that himself perceiveth upon the sight whether the man hanged himself or no." "Yea, forsooth, my Lord," quod he, "even as your lordship saith. For I know it well enough myself. I have seen so many by reason of my office." "Why," quod another Lord merrily, "your office hath no more experience in hanging than hath an hangman: And yet he cannot tell." "Nay, sir," quod he, "and it like your lordship, he meddleth not with them that hang themselves as I do." "Well," quod one of the Lords, "how many of them have ye meddled with in your days?" "With many, my lord," quod he; "for I have been officer under two almoners, and therefore I have seen many." "How many," quod one of the lords? "I cannot tell," quod he, "how many: but I wot well I have seen many." "Have ye seen," quod one, "an hundred?" "Nay," quod he, "not an hundred." "Have ye seen four score and ten?" Thereat a little he studied as one standing in a doubt, and that were loth to lie; and at last he said that he thought nay, not fully four score and ten. Then was he asked whether he had seen twenty. And thereto without any sticking, he answered; "Nay, not twenty." Thereat the lords laughed well to see that he was so sure that he had not seen twenty, and was in doubt whether he had seen four score and ten. Then was he asked whether he had seen fifteen. And thereto he said shortly, "nay." And in likewise of ten. At the last they came to five, and from five to four. And there he began to study again. Then came they to three; and then, for shame, he was fair to say that he had seen so many and more too. But when he was asked, when, whom, and in what place, necessity drave him at last unto the truth, whereby it appeared that he never had seen but one in all his life. And that was an Irish fellow called Crook shanke, whom he had seen hanging in an old barn. And when all his cunning was come to this, he was bid walk like himself. And one said unto him that because he was not yet cunning enough in the craft of hanging: it was pity that he had no more experience thereof by one more.

Forsooth, quod your friend, this was a mad fellow. Came the third tale to as wise a point?

Ye shall hear, quod I. The temporal man that had reported it, upon the mouth of the spiritual man, was a good worshipful man; and for his truth and worship was in great credit. And surely the spiritual man was a man of worship also; and well knowen both for cunning and virtuous. And therefore the Lords much marvelled, knowing them both for such as they were, that they should be like to find either the one or the other either make an untrue report or untruly deny the truth. And first the temporal man before the Lords in the hearing of the spiritual person standing by, said, "My Lords all, as help me God and halidome, master doctor here said unto me, [by] his own mouth, that if Hunne had not sued the premunire he should never have been accused of heresy." "How say you master doctor?" quod the Lords, "was that true, or else why said you so?" "Surely, my Lords," quod he, "I said not all thing so; but marye, this I said indeed, that if Hunne had not been accused of heresy he would never have sued the premunire." "Lo, my Lords," quod the other, "I am glad ye find me a true man. Will ye command me any more service?" "Nay, by my trouth," quod one of the lords, "not in this matter: by my will, ye may go when ye will. For I have espied, good man, so the words be all one it maketh no matter to you which way they stand: but all is one to you a horse mill and a mill horse, drink ere ye go, and go ere ye drink." "Nay my Lords," quod he, "I will not drink, God yelde you." And therewith he made curtesie and went his way, leaving some of the lords laughing to see the good plain old honest man, how that as contrary as their two tales were, yet when he heard them both again, he marked no difference between them, but took them both for one because the words were one.

By my trouth, quod your friend, these three things came merely to pass, and I would not for a good thing but I had heard them. For

### **MISUNDERSTANDING**

here may a man see, that misunderstanding maketh misreporting. And a tale that fleeth through many mouths catcheth many new feathers: which, when they be pulled away again, leave him as pilled as a coote, and sometime as bare as a byrds arse. But I think verily for all this, there was great evidence given against the chancellor, for he was at length indited of Hunne's death, and was a great while in prison and, in conclusion, never durst abide the trial of twelve men for his acquittal but was fain by friendship to get a pardon. But I beseech you for my mind's sake, show me what thought yourself therein.

Of trouth, quod I, there were divers suspicious things laid against him, and all those well and substantially answered again for him. Howbeit, upon the telling of a tale often times, happeth that when all is heard that can be said therein yet shall the hearers some think one way and some another. And therefore though I cannot think but that the Jury, which were right honest men, found the verdict as themself thought in their own conscience to be truth: yet, in mine own mind, for ought that ever I heard thereof in my life, as help me God, I could never think it.

If he had not been guilty, quod your friend, he would never have sued his pardon.

Yes, quod I, right wise men have I heard say, ere this, that they will never refuse neither God's pardon nor the king's. It were no wisdom in a matter of many suspicious tales, be they never so false, to stand on twelve men's mouths where one may find a surer way. But I think verily, that if he had been guilty, he should never have gotten his pardon. For albeit that there was never, I trow, brought in this world a prince

## **KING HENRY THE EIGHT**

of more benign nature, nor of more merciful mind, than is our sovereign lord that now reigneth, and long mought reign upon us, whereby never king could find in his heart more freely to forgive and forget offences done and committed unto himself: yet hath his highness such a fervent affection to right and justice in other men's causes, and such a tender zeal to the conservation of his subjects--of whose lives his high wisdom considereth many to stand in peril by the giving of pardon to a few wilful murderers--that never was there king, I believe, that ever ware the crown in this realm, which hath in so many years given unto such folk so few [pardons]. And therefore I make myself sure that in such a wilful purpensed heinous cruel deed as this had been if it had been true, all the friends that could have been founden for the chancellor in this world could never have gotten his pardon to pass in such wise, had it not been, that, upon the report of all the circumstances, the king's high prudence--which, without flattery, pierceth as deep into the bottom of a doubtful matter as ever I saw man in my life--had well perceived his innocency. And since I verily believe that if he had been guilty he never could have gotten in such an heinous murder any pardon of the king's highness, I dare make myself much more bold of his innocency now. For ye shall understand that he never sued pardon therefore; but after long examination of the matter, as well the chancellor as the other, being indited of the deed, and arraigned upon the inditement in the king's bench, pleaded that they were not guilty. And thereupon the king's grace being well and sufficiently informed of the truth, and of his blessed disposition not willing that there should in his name any false matter be maintained, gave in commandment to his attorney to confess their pleas to be true without any further trouble. Which thing, in so faithful a prince, is a clear declaration that the matter laid to the chancellor was untrue. And as for myself, in good faith, as I told you before, I never heard in my life--and yet have I heard all I ween that well could be said--therein any thing that moved me, after both the parties heard, to think that he should be guilty. And besides all this, considering that Hunne was---as they that well know him say he was indeed--though he were a fair dealer among his neighbours, yet a man high-minded and set on the glory of a victory, which he hoped to have in the preunire, whereof he much boasted, as they said, among his familiar friends that he trusted to be spoken of long after his days and have his matter in the years and terms called Hunne's case. Which, when he perceived would go against his purpose, and that in the temporal law he should not win his spurs, and over that in the spiritual law perceived so much of his secret sores unwrapped and discovered that he began to fall in fear of worldly shame, it is to me much more likely, that for weariness of his life, he rid himself out thereof--which manner of affection we see not seldom happen, specially since the devil might peradventure join therewith a marvellous hope, of the which after happed, that the suspicion of his death might be laid to the charge and peril of the chancellor. This is, I say, much more likely to me than the thing whereof I never heard the like before, that the bishop's chancellor should kill in the Lollard's Tower a man so sore suspect and convict of heresy, whereby he might bring himself in business; whereas, if he hated the man (for kill him he would not ye wot well if he loved him) he might easily bring him to shame, and peradventure to shameful death also.

In good faith, quod your friend, wist I that it were true that he was an heretic indeed, and in peril to be so proved, I would well think that in malice and despair he hanged himself.

God, quod I, knoweth of all thing the truth. But what I have heard therein, that shall I show you. Myself was present in Poules when the bishop, in the presence of the Mayor and the aldermen of

the city, con-demned him for an heretic after his death. And then were there read openly the depositions by which it was well proved that he was convict as well of divers other heresies as of misbelief toward the holy sacrament

### **HUNNE WAS CONVICTED OF HERESY**

of the altar. And thereupon was the judgment given that his body should be burned, and so was it. Now this is, quod I, to me a full proof. For I assure you the bishop was a very wise man, a virtuous and a cunning.

By Saint Mary, quod he, the proof is the better by so much.

I shall tell you, quod I, another thing, which when ye hear, ye shall peradventure believe it yet the better.

That would I gladly know, quod he, for as far as I can hear, never man had him suspect of any such thing before.

Forsooth, quod I, that can I not tell. But so it happed that, as I remember, six or seven years after that Hunne was thus hanged, and his body burned for an heretic, there was one in Essex, a carpenter that used to make pumps, which had intended with other such as he was himself to do great robbery; and, thereupon, was he brought into the court, where, by the commandment of the king's grace, a great honourable estate of this realm, and myself, had him in examination. Wherein, among other things, he confessed that he had long holden divers heresies which he said that his brother, being a clerk of a church, had taught both his father and him. And I promise you those heresies were of an height. Then he showed us what other cunning masters of that school he had heard read, and specially in a place which he named us in London, where, he said, that such heretics were wont to resort to their readings in a chamber at midnight. And when he asked him the names of them that were wont to haunt those midnight lectures, he rehearsed us divers. And among other he named Richard Hunne. Whereof we somewhat marvelled in our minds, but nothing said we thereto, but let him rehearse on all such as he could call to mind. And when he stopped and could remember no more, then asked we of them that he had named what they were and where they dwelled. And he told us of some of them that were convicted, and some that were fled, and some that were yet at that time dwelling still in the town. And in the way, when we asked him what man was that Hunne that he spake of, he told us his person and his house. "And where is he now?" said we. "Mary," quod he, "I went to Tournai; and when I came thence again, then heard I say that he was hanged in the Lollard's Tower, and his body burned for an heretic." And thus there learned we, long after, that Hunne had haunted heretics' lectures by night long before, which we declared unto the king's highness as he had confessed. And his highness, though he was sorry that any man should be so lewd, yet highly did rejoice that the goodness of God brought such hid mischief more and more to light. So after had we, by the king's commandment, that man's brother in examination; which did indeed confess nothing, neither of the felonies nor of the heresies. But yet his brother did abide by them, and avowed them in his face, with such marks and tokens as it might well appear that he said truth. And surely marvel were it if he would falsely have feigned such heinous things against his own brother, his own father, and himself, being thereto nothing compelled nor put either in pain or fear. Now was the father dead, and other could we not come by, whom we might further examine of that night school, saving that he, which as I told you confessed this matter, showed us also at the first time

of one man in London taken for good and honest, which was, as he said, a scholar also of his brother's in those heresies. Which man for his honesty we forbore to meddle with till we should have the other brother. Whom as soon as we had in hands, and that he was committed to the Marshalsea, this other man, which was, as I told you, detected unto us for an heretic and a scholar of his, came to me to labour and sue for him pretending that he did it for charity. And forasmuch as we thought we could not fail of him when we would have him, we forbore therefore to examine him till we should have examined the other whom he laboured for. But then were we not aware in what wise we should be disappointed of him. For so mishapped it indeed that after his being at me to labour for him whose scholar in heresy he was detected to be, he was in his own house suddenly stricken and slain. And that wretched end had he. What conscience he died with, God knoweth, for I can tell you no further.

By St. John, quod your friend, but upon the whole tale it seemeth to me very clear that Hunne was himself not clear of the matter.

Surely, quod I, so seemed it, as far as I could wit, unto as many as ever heard it; and would yet I ween have seemed so more clearly if they had been present at the examinations, and seen under what manner the man came forth therewith.

But yet, quod your friend, as for this English bible, though Hunne were himself an heretic, yet might the book be good enough. And no good reason is there why a good book should be burned with an evil man.

Ye call me well home, quod I, and put me well in mind. For that was the thing whereby ye took occasion to talk of Hunne, of whom we talked so long, that at last I had forgotten wherefore and whereupon we entered into that communication. And yet make those books not a little to the matter that we had in hand; I mean, toward the perceiving what opinion that Hunne was of. For surely at such time as he was denounced for an heretic, there lay his English bible open, and some other English books of his, that every man might see the places noted with his own hand, such words and in such wise, that there would no wise man, that good were, have any great doubt, after the sight thereof, what naughty minds the men had, both he that so noted them, and he that so made them. I remember not now the specialities of the matter, nor the formal words as they were written. But this I remember well, that besides other things, framed for the favour of divers other heresies, there were in the prologue of that bible such words touching the Blessed Sacrament as good Christian men did much abhor to hear, and which gave the readers undoubted occasion to think that book was written after Wiclif's copy, and by him translated into our tongue. And yet whether the book be burned, or secretly kept, I cannot surely say. But truly were the clergy of my mind, it should be somewhere reserved for the perpetual proof of the matter, [since] there hath gone so much suspicious rumour thereof. Which, as I believe, were all well answered, and the mind fully satisfied of any man, that were wise and good therewith, that once had overlooked, read, and advisedly considered that book.

## THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER

*The Messenger rehearseth some causes, which he hath heard laid by some of the clergy, wherefore the scripture should not be suffered in English. And the author sheweth his mind that it were convenient to have the bible in English. And therewith endeth the third book.*

Sir, quod your friend, yet for all this, can I see no cause why the clergy should keep the bible out of laymen's hands, that can ' no more but their mother tongue.

I had went, \* quod I, that I had proved you plainly that they keep

#### **WHAT MANNER OF ENGLISH BIBLES ARE KEPT FROM MEN**

it not from them. For I have shewed you that they keep none from them but such translation as be either not yet approved for good or such as be already reprov'd for nought, as Wiclif's was, and Tyndale's. For as for other old ones, that were before Wiclif's days, remain lawful, and be in some folks' hands had and read.

Ye say well, quod he. But yet, as women say somewhat, it was alway that the cat winked when her eye was out. Surely so is it not for nought that the English bible is in so few men's hands when so many would so fain have it.

That is very truth, quod I; for I think that though the favourers of a sect of heretics be so fervent in the setting forth of their sect that they let not to lay their money together and make a purse among them for the printing of an evil made, or evil translated, book: which though it hap to be forboden and burned, yet some be sold ere they be spied, and each of them lose but their part: yet I think there will no printer lightly be so hot to put any bible in print at his own charge, whereof the loss should lie whole in his own neck, and then hang upon a doubtful trial whether the first copy of his translation was made before Wiclif's days or since. For if it were made since, it must be approved before the printing. And surely how it hath happed that in all this while God hath either not suffered, or not provided, that any good virtuous man hath had the mind in faithful wise to translate it--and thereupon either the clergy, or at the least wise some one bishop, to approve it--this can I nothing tell. But howsoever it be, I have heard and hear so much spoken in the matter, and so much doubt made therein, that peradventure it would let and withdraw any one bishop from the admitting thereof, without the assent of the remnant. And whereas many things be laid against it, yet is there in my mind not one thing that more putteth good men of the clergy in doubt to suffer it than this: that they see

#### **WHY THE CLERGY DOTHT NOT SUFFER THE BIBLE TO BE HAD IN ENGLISH**

sometime much of the worse sort more fervent in the calling for it than them whom we find far better. Which maketh them to fear lest such men desire it for no good, and lest, if it were had in every man's hand, there would great peril arise; and that seditious people should do more harm therewith than good and honest folk should take fruit thereby. *Which fear, I promise you, nothing feareth me;* but that whosoever would of their malice or folly take harm of that thing that is of itself ordained to do all men good, I would never, for the avoiding of their harm, take from other the profit which they might take, and nothing deserve to lose. For else *if the abuse of a good thing should cause the taking away thereof from other that would use it well, Christ should himself never have been born,* nor brought his faith into the world; nor God should never have made it neither, if he should, for the loss of those that would be damned wretches, have kept away the occasion of reward from them that would, with help of his grace, endeavour them to

deserve it.

I am sure, quod your friend, ye doubt not but that I am full and whole of your mind in this matter that the bible should be in our English tongue. But yet that the clergy is of the contrary, and would not have it so, that appeareth well, in that they suffer it not to be so. And over that I hear in every place almost, where I find any learned man of them, their minds all set thereon to keep the scripture from us. And they seek out for that part every rotten reason that they can find, and set them forth solemnly to the show, though five of those reasons be not worth a fig. For they begin as far as our first father Adam, and shew us that his wife and he fell out of paradise with desire of knowledge and cunning. Now if this would serve, it must from the knowledge and study of scripture drive every man, priest and other, lest it drive all out of paradise. Then say they that God taught his disciples many things apart, because the people should not hear it. And therefore they would the people should not now be suffered to read all. Yet they say further that it is hard to translate the scripture out of one tongue into another, and specially, they say, into ours which they call a tongue vulgar and barbarous. But of all thing specially they say that scripture is the food of the soul. And that the common people be as infants that must be fed but with milk and pap. And if we have any stronger meat, it must be chammed afore by the nurse, and so put into the babe's mouth. But methink though they make us all infants, they shall find many a shrewd brain among us that can perceive chalk from cheese well enough; and, if they would once take us our meat in our own hand, we be not so evil toothed but that within a while they shall see us cham it ourself as well as they. For let them call us young babes and they will, yet, by God, they shall for all that well find in some of us that an old knave is no child.

Surely, quod I, such things as ye speak, is the thing that as I somewhat said before putteth good folk in fear to suffer the scripture in our English tongue. Not for the reading and receiving, but for the busy

#### **WHY SCRIPTURE IS NOT SUFFERED IN OUR ENGLISH TONGUE**

chamming thereof, and for much meddling with such parts thereof as least will agree with their capacities. For undoubtedly, as ye spake of our mother Eve, inordinate appetite of knowledge is a mean to drive any man out of paradise. And inordinate is the appetite, when men unlearned, though they read it in their language, will be busy to ensearch and dispute the great secret mysteries of scripture, which, though they hear, they be not able to perceive. This thing is plainly forbode us that be not appointed nor instructed thereto. And therefore holy Saint Gregory Nazianzenus, that great solemn doctor, sore toucheth and reproveth all such bold busy meddlers in the scripture, and sheweth that it is in Exodie, by Moses ascending up upon the hill where he spake with God, and the people tarrying beneath, signified that the people be forbidden to presume to meddle with the high mysteries of holy scripture, but ought to be content to tarry beneath, and meddle none higher than is meet for them; but receiving from the height of the hill by Moses that that is delivered them--that is to wit, the laws and precepts that they must keep, and the points they must believe, look well thereupon, and often, and meddle well therewith not to dispute it; but to fulfil it. And as for the high secret mysteries of God and hard texts of his holy scripture, let us know that we be so unable to ascend up so high on that hill, that it shall become us to say to the preachers appointed thereto, as the people said unto Moses, "Hear you God, and let us hear you." And surely the blessed holy doctor saint Hierome greatly complaineth and rebuketh that lewd homely manner that the common lay people, men and women, were in his days so bold in the meddling, disputing, and expounding of holy scripture.

And sheweth plainly that they shall have evil proof <sup>13</sup> therein, that will reckon themselves to understand it by themselves without a reader. For it is a thing that requireth good help, **HOLY SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE UNDERSTANDEN WITHOUT A READER** and long time, and an whole mind given greatly thereto. And surely- since, as the holy Apostle saint Poule, in divers of his epistles, sayth, God hath by his holy spirit so institute and ordained his church that he will have some readers, and some hearers, some teachers, and some learners <sup>14</sup> -we do plainly pervert and turn upside <sup>15</sup> down the right order of Christ's church when the one part meddleth with the other's office.

Plato the great philosopher specially forbiddeth such as be not admitted thereunto, nor men meet therefore, to meddle much and embusy

#### **NOTE**

themselves in reasoning and disputing upon the temporal laws of the city, which would not be reasoned upon but by folk meet therefore, and in place convenient. For else they that cannot very well attain to perceive them, begin to mislike, dispraise, and contemn them. Whereof so followeth the breach of the laws and disorder of the people. For, till a law be changed by authority, it rather ought to be observed than contemned; or else the example of one law boldly broken and set at naught waxeth a precedent for the remnant to be used like. And commonly, the best

#### **THE COMMON PEOPLE LONG TO LIVE ALL AT LIBERTY**

laws shall worst like much of the common people, which most long--if they might be heard and followed--to live all at liberty under none at all. Now if Plato, so wise a man, so thought good in temporal laws--things of men's making--how much is it less meet for every man boldly to meddle with the exposition of holy scripture, so devised and indited by the high wisdom of God that it far exceedeth in many places the capacity and perceiving of man. It was also provided by the Emperor, in the law civil, that the common people should never be so bold to hold discussions <sup>16</sup> upon the faith or holy scripture; nor that any such thing should be used among them or before them. And therefore, as I said before, the special fear in this matter is, lest we would be so busy in chammung of the scripture our self (which ye say we were able enough to do) which undoubtedly, the wisest, and the best learned, and he that therein hath by many years bestowed his whole mind, is yet unable to do. And then far more unable must he needs be that boldly will, upon the first reading because he knoweth the words, take upon him therefore to teach other men the sentence, with peril of his own soul, and other men's too, by the bringing men into mad ways, sects and heresies, such as heretics have of old brought up, and the church hath condemned. And thus in these matters, if the common people might be bold to cham it, as ye say, and to dispute it; then should ye have the more blind the more bold, the more ignorant the more busy, the less wit the more inquisitive, the more fool the more talkative of great doubts and high questions of holy scripture, and of God's great and secret mysteries--and this, not soberly of any good affection, but presumptuously and unreverently at meat and at meal. And there, when the wine were in and the wit out, would they take upon them with foolish words and blasphemy to handle holy scripture in more homely manner than a song of Robin Hood. And some would, as I said, solemnly take upon them like as they were ordinary readers to interpret the text at their pleasure, and therewith fall themselves, and draw down other with them, into seditious sects and heresies whereby the scripture of God should lose his honour and reverence, and be, by such unreverent and unsuitable <sup>17</sup> demeanour, among much people quite and clean abused unto the contrary of that holy purpose that God ordained it for. Whereas, if we would no further meddle therewith; but well and devoutly read it

### **HOW LAYMEN SHOULD READ THE SCRIPTURE**

and, in that that is plain and evident as God's commandments and his holy counsels, endeavour ourself to follow with help of His grace, asked thereunto; and in his great and marvellous miracles consider his godhead; and in his lowly birth, his godly life, and his bitter passion, exercise ourself in such meditations, prayer, and virtues, as the matter shall minister us occasion, knowledging our own ignorance where we find a doubt, and therein leaning to the faith of the church, wrestle with no such text as might bring us in a doubt and perplexity <sup>is</sup> of any of those articles wherein every good Christian man is clear. By this manner of reading can no man nor woman take hurt in holy scripture. Now then, the things on the other side that unlearned people can never by themselves attain, as in the psalms and the prophets and divers parts of the gospel, where the words be sometime spoken as in the person of the Prophet himself, sometime as in the person of God, sometime of some other, as angels, devils, or men, and sometime of our Saviour Christ (not alway of one fashion; but sometime as God, sometime as man, sometime as head of this mystical body, his church militant here in earth, sometime as head of his church triumphant in heaven, sometime as in the person of his sensual parts of his own body; otherwhile in the person of some particular part of his body mystical) and these things with many other, oftentimes interchanged and suddenly sundry things of divers matters diversely mingled together--all these things, which is not possible for unlearned men to attain unto--it were more than madness for them to meddle withal; but [they should] leave all these things to them whose whole study is beset thereupon; and to the preachers appointed thereunto, which may

### **TEMPER THY SERMON AFTER THY AUDIENCE**

show them such things in time and place convenient with reverence and authority, the sermon so tempered as may be mete and convenient alway for the present audience. Whereunto it appeareth that our Saviour himself, and his apostles after him, had ever special respect.

And therefore, as I say forsooth, I can in no wise agree with you that it were meet for men unlearned to be busy with the chaming of holy scripture, but to have it chammed unto them. For that is the preacher's part, and theirs that after long study are admitted to read and expowne it. And to this entent weigh <sup>is</sup> all the words, as far as I perceive, of all holy doctors that anything have written in this matter. But never meant they, as I suppose, the forbidding of the bible to be read in any

### **THERE CAN BE NO REASON WHY THE BIBLE SHOULD NOT BE TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH**

vulgar tongue. Nor I never yet heard any reason laid why it were not convenient to have the bible translated into the English tongue, but all those reasons, seemed they never so gay and glorious at the first sight, yet when they were well examined they might in effect, for aught that I can see, as well be laid against the holy writers that wrote the scripture in the Hebrew tongue, and against the blessed Evangelists that wrote the Scripture in Greek, and against all those in likewise that translated it out of every of those tongues into Latin, as to their charge that would well and faithfully translate it out of Latin into our English tongue. For as for that our tongue is called barbarous, is but a fantasy; for so is, as every learned man knoweth, every strange language to other. And if they would call it barren of words, there is no doubt but it is plenteous enough to express our minds in anything whereof one man hath used to speak with another. Now as touching the difficulty which a translator findeth in expressing well and lively the sentence of his author (which is hard alway to do so surely but that he shall sometime minish either of the sentence or of the grace that it beareth in the former tongue) that point hath lien in their light that

have translated the scripture already either out of Greek into Latin, or out of Hebrew into any of them both, as by many translations which we read already, to them that be learned, appeareth.

Now as touching the harm that may grow by such blind bayardes ⁊ as will when they read the bible in English be more busy than will become them, they that touch that point harp upon the right string, and touch truly the great harm that were likely to grow to some folk. Howbeit, not by the occasion yet of the English translation, but by the occasion of their own lewdness and folly, which yet were not in my mind a sufficient cause to exclude the translation and to put other folk from the benefit thereof; but rather to make provision against such abuse, and let a good thing go forth. No wise man were there that would put all weapons away because manquellers misuse them. Nor this letted not, as I said,

**NO GOOD THING OUGHT TO BE PUT AWAY BECAUSE OF THE MISUSE THEREOF**

the scripture to be first written in a vulgar tongue. For scripture, as I said before, was not written but in a vulgar tongue such as the whole people understood, nor in no secret cyphers but such common letters as almost every man could read. For neither was the Hebrew, nor the Greek tongue, nor the Latin, neither any other speech than such as all the people spake. And therefore if we should lay that it were evil done to translate the Scripture into our tongue because it is vulgar and common to every English man, then had it been as evil done to translate it into Greek or into Latin, or to write the new testament first in Greek, or the old testament in Hebrew, because both those tongues were as very vulgar as ours. And yet should there by this reason also, not only the scripture be kept out of our tongue, but over that should the reading thereof be forbidden, both [to] all such lay people, and all such priests too as can no more than their grammar, and very scantily that. All which company, though they can understand the words, be yet as far from the perceiving of the sentence in hard and doubtful texts as were our women if the scripture were translated to our own language. Howbeit, of truth, seldom hath it been seen that any sect of heretics hath begun of such unlearned folk as nothing could else but the language wherein they read the scripture; but there hath alway commonly these sects sprung of the pride of such folk as had, with the knowledge of that tongue, some high persuasion in themselves of their own learning beside. To whose authority some other folk have soon after, part of malice, part of simpleness, and much part of pleasure and delight in new fangleness fallen in and increased the faction. But the head hath ever commonly been either some proud learned man; or at the least, beside the language, some proud smatterer in learning. So that if we should for fear of heretics that might hap to grow thereby, keep the scripture out of any tongue, or out of unlearned men's hands, we should, for like fear, be fain to keep it out of all tongues, and out of unlearned men's hands too; and wot not whom we might trust therewith. Wherefore there is, as methinketh, no remedy but if any good thing shall go forward somewhat must needs be adventured. And some folk will not fail to be naught. Against which things, provision must

**A COMMODITY OUGHT NOT TO BE KEPT BACK FOR THE HARM THAT MAY COME OF IT**

be made that as much good may grow, and as little harm come, as can be devised; and not to keep the whole commodity from any whole people because of harm that, by their own folly and fault, may come to some part: as though a lewd surgeon would cut off the leg by the knee to keep the toe from the gout; or cut off a man's head by the shoulders to keep him from the toothache. There is no treatise of scripture so hard but that a good virtuous man, or woman either, shall somewhat find therein that shall delight and increase their devotion. Besides this that every

preaching shall be the more pleasant and fruitful unto them when they have in their mind the place of scripture that they shall there hear expowned. For though it be, as it is indeed, great wisdom for a

### **A PREACHER IN HIS PREACHING MUST USE DISCRETION**

preacher to use discretion in his preaching, and to have a respect unto the qualities and capacities of his audience, yet letteth that nothing but that the whole audience may without harm have read and have ready the scripture in mind that he shall in his preaching declare and expowne. *For no doubt is there but that God and his holy spirit hath so prudently tempered Their speech through the whole corps of scripture that every man may take good thereby and no man harm but he that will in the study thereof lean proudly to the folly of his own wit.* <sup>21</sup> For albeit that Christ did speak to the people in parables, and expowned them secretly to his especial disciples, and sometime forbare to tell some things to them also, because they were not as yet able to bear them, and the apostles in likewise did some time spare to speak to some people the things that they did not let plainly to speak to some other, yet letteth all this nothing the translation of the scripture into our own tongue no more than in the Latin. Nor it is no cause to keep the corps of scripture out of the hands of any Christian people, so many years fastly confirmed in faith, because Christ and his apostles used such provision in their utterance of so strange and unheard mysteries, either unto Jews, Paynims, or newly christened folk, except we would say that all the expositions which Christ made himself upon his own parables unto his secret servants, and disciples with-drawn from the people, should now, at this day, be kept in likewise from the commons, and no man suffered to read or hear them but those that in his church represent the state and office of his apostles, which there will, (I wote well) no wise man say, considering that those things, which were then commonly most kept from the people, be now most necessary for the people to know. As it well appeareth by all such things in effect as our Saviour at the time taught his apostles apart. Whereof, I would not for my mind withhold the profit that one good devout unlearned layman might take by the reading, not for the harm that a hundred heretics would fall in by their own wilful abusion, no more than our Saviour letted for the weal of such as would be with his grace of his little chosen flock to come into this world and be *lapis offensionis et petra scandali*, <sup>22</sup> the stone of stumbling and the stone of falling, and ruin to all the wilful wretches in the world beside. Finally, methinketh, that the constitution provincial of which we spake right now, hath determined this question already. For when the clergy therein agreed that the English bibles should remain which were translated afore Wiclif's days, they consequently did agree that to have the bible in English was none hurt. And in that they forbade any new translation to be read till it were approved by the bishops, it appeareth well thereby that their intent was that the bishop should approve it if he found it faultless, and also of reason amend it where it was faulty, but if the man were an heretic that made it or the faults such and so many as it were more easy <sup>23</sup> to make it all new than mend it--as it happed for both points in the translation of Tyndale. Now if it so be that it would haply be thought not a thing meetly to be adventured to set all on a flush at once, and dash rashly out holy scripture in every lewd fellow's teeth, yet, thinketh me, there might such a moderation be taken therein as neither good virtuous lay folk should lack it nor rude and rash brains abuse it. For it might be with diligence well and truly translated by some good catholic

### **GOOD COUNSEL**

and well learned man, or by divers, dividing the labour among them, and after conferring their several parts together each with other. And after that might the work be allowed and approved by the ordinaries, and by their authorities so put unto print, as all the copies should come whole unto

the bishop's hand. Which he may after his discretion and wisdom deliver to such as he perceiveth honest, sad, and virtuous, with a good monition and fatherly counsel to use it reverently with humble heart and lowly mind, rather seeking therein occasion of devotion than of discussion. ⁂ And providing as much as may be that the book be, after the decease of the party, brought again and reverently restored unto the ordinary. So that, as near as may be devised, no man have it but of the ordinary's hand, and by him thought and reputed for such as shall be likely to use it to God's honour and merit of his own soul. Among whom, if any be proved after to have abused it, then the use thereof to be forbidden him, either for ever, or till he be waxen wiser.

By our Lady, quod your friend, this way misliketh not me. But who should set the price of the book?

Forsooth, quod I, that reckon I a thing of little force. For neither were it a great matter for any man in manner to give a groat or twain above the mean price for a book of so great profit, nor for the bishop to give them all free, wherein he might serve his diocese with the cost of ten pounds, I think, or twenty marks. Which sum, I dare say, there is no bishop but he would be glad to bestow about a thing that might do his whole diocese so special a pleasure with such a spiritual profit.

By my troth, quod he, yet wene I that the people would grudge to have it on this wise delivered them at the bishop's hand, and had liefer pay for it to the printer than have it of the bishop free.

It might so happen with some, quod I. But yet in mine opinion there were in that manner more wilfulness than wisdom or any good mind in such as would not be content so to receive them. And therefore I would think in good faith that it would so fortune in few. But, fore God, the more doubt would be lest they would grudge and hold themselves sore grieved that would require it and were haply denied it: which I suppose would not often happen unto any honest householder to be by his discretion reverently read in his house. But though it were not taken to every lewd lad in his own hands to read a little rudely when he list, and then cast the book at his heels, or among other such as himself to keep a

### **A POT PARLIAMENT**

quodlibet and a pot parliament upon, I trow there will no wise man find a fault therein. Ye spake right now of the Jews, among whom the whole people have, ye say, the scripture in their hands. And ye thought it no reason that we should reckon Christian men less worthy thereto than them. Wherein I am, as ye see, of your own opinion. But yet, would God, we had the like reverence to the scripture of God that they have. For I assure you I have heard very worshipful folk say, which have been in their houses, that a man could not hire a Jew to sit down upon his bible of the old testament, but he taketh it with great reverence

### **HOW REVERENTLY THE JEW DOTHTH USE THE SCRIPTURE**

in hand when he will read, and reverently layeth it up again when he hath done. Whereas we, God forgive us, take a little regard to sit down on our bible with the old testament and the new too. Which homely handling, as it proceedeth of little reverence, so doth it more and more engender in the mind a negligence and contempt of God's holy words. We find also that among the Jews, though all their whole bible was written in their vulgar tongue, and those books thereof, wherein their laws were written, were usual in every man's hands as things that God would have commonly knowen, repeated and kept in remembrance: yet were there again certain parts thereof which the common people of the Jews of old time, both of reverence and for the

difficulty did forbear to meddle with. But now since the veil of the temple is broken asunder that divided

### **THE VEIL OF THE TEMPLE IS BROKEN ASUNDER**

among the Jews the people from the sight of the secrets, and that God had sent his holy spirit to be assistant with his whole church to teach all necessary truth; though it may therefore be the better suffered that no part of holy scripture were kept out of honest laymen's hands, yet would I that no part thereof should come in theirs which, to their own harm, and haply their neighbours' too, would handle it over homely; and be too bold and busy therewith. And also though holy scripture be, as ye said a while since, <sup>s</sup> a medicine for him that is sick, and food for him that is whole: yet, since there is many a body sore soul sick that taketh himself for whole, and in holy scripture is an whole feast of so much divers viand, that after the affection and state of sundry stomachs one may take harm by the selfsame that shall do another good, and sick folk often have such a corrupt tallage <sup>s</sup> in their taste, that they most like the meat that is most unwholesome for them, it were not therefore, as methinketh, unreasonable that the ordinary whom God hath in the diocese appointed for the chief physician to discern between the whole and the sick, and between disease and disease, should after his wisdom and discretion appoint everybody their part, as he should perceive to be good and wholesome for them. And therefore as he should not fail to find many a man to whom he might commit all the whole, so, to say the truth, I can see none harm therein, though he should commit unto some man the gospel of Matthew, Mark or Luke, whom he should yet forbid the gospel of St. John, and suffer some to read the Acts of the Apostles, whom he would not suffer to meddle with the Apocalips. Many were there I think that should take much profit by saint Paul's epistle *ad Ephesios*, wherein he giveth good counsel to every kind of people, and yet should find little fruit for their understanding in his epistle *ad Romanos*,

### **THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS CONTAINETH HIGH DIFFICULTIES**

containing such high difficulties as very few learned men can very well attain. And in likewise would it be in divers other parts of the bible, as well in the old testament as the new. So that, as I say, though the bishop might unto some layman betake and commit with good advice and instruction the whole bible to read, yet might he to some man well and with reason restrain the reading of some part, and from some busybody the meddling with any part at all, more than he shall hear in sermons set out and declared unto him; and, in likewise, to take the bible away from such folk again, as be proved by their blind presumption to abuse the occasion of their profit unto their own hurt and harm. And thus may the bishop order the scripture in our hands with as good reason as the father doeth by his discretion appoint which of his children may for his sadness keep a knife to cut his meat, and which shall for his wantonness have his knife taken from him for cutting of his fingers. And thus am I bold, without prejudice of other men's judgment, to show you my mind in this matter, how the scripture might, without great peril, and not without great profit, be brought into our tongue, and taken to laymen and women both; not yet meaning thereby but that the whole bible might for my mind be suffered to be spread abroad in English. But if that were so much doubted that percase all might thereby be letted, then would I rather have used such moderation as I speak of, or some such other as wiser men can better devise. Howbeit, upon that I read late in the pistle that the King's Highness translated into English of his own, which his grace made in Latin, answering to the letter of Luther, my mind giveth me that his majesty is of his blessed zeal so minded to move this matter unto the prelates of the clergy (among whom I have perceived some of the greatest and of the best of their own minds well inclinable thereto already) that we lay people shall in this matter ere long time pass, except the fault be found in ourself, be well and fully satisfied and content.

In good faith, quod he, that will in my mind be very well done. And now am I for my mind in all this matter fully content and satisfied.

Well, quod I, then will we to dinner, and the remnant will we finish after dinner. And therewith went we to meat.

## THE END OF THE THIRD BOOK

<sup>1</sup> Richard FitzJames.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Hunne, *vide* Gairdner, *Lollardy and the Reformation*, vol. i, p. 278 ff.

<sup>3</sup> separately.

<sup>4</sup> thwyted.

<sup>5</sup> bald.

<sup>6</sup> premeditated.

<sup>7</sup> know.

<sup>8</sup> thought.

<sup>9</sup> *Gen.* 3. 22, 23.

<sup>10</sup> chewed.

<sup>11</sup> *Ex.* 24. 2.

<sup>12</sup> expowning.

<sup>13</sup> pefe.

<sup>14</sup> *Eph.* 4. II.

<sup>15</sup> up so.

<sup>16</sup> keep dispicions.

<sup>17</sup> text, unsitting.

<sup>18</sup> weresty.

<sup>19</sup> waye.

<sup>20</sup> men blind and reckless in their ignorant self-confidence.

<sup>21</sup> A good summary of More's argument for an authorised vernacular Bible.

<sup>22</sup> I. *Pet.* 2. 8.

<sup>23</sup> eth.

<sup>24</sup> dispicion.

<sup>25</sup> whyleere.

<sup>26</sup> savour.