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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE AND THE KING JAMES BIBLE¹

THIS paper has two intentions: to pay tribute to one of the great men of history, and to show how large and direct an influence Germans exerted on the evolution of our incomparable English Bible.

Wycliffe's manuscript version, made about 1380 from the Latin Vulgate, was not printed until 1850. Even before the sixteenth century its language had become archaic and dialectic: "Blessed ben pore men in spirit, for the kyngdom of heunes is herne ; blessed ben mylde men for thei schulen welde the erthe."

After Luther had appeared before the momentous diet at Worms, he submitted to a friendly kidnapping by Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony, and was secreted in the castle of Wartburg. Here he worked on his first New Testament, which appeared in September, 1522, and is known as the "September Bible". This was written in Kanzleisprache. Copies were smuggled into England, and made a sensation among the much-persecuted reformers there—among them William Tyndale, a saintly and beloved young priest of the English church. He took his M.A. at Oxford in 1515, and studied thereafter at Cambridge. He was a truly great classical scholar in a great age of classical scholarship ; he probably had associations in England with Erasmus, the greatest classical scholar of them all. Spalatin, Luther's friend, chaplain and private secretary of the Elector Frederick, testified that he was "learned in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, English, and French". He had been rebuked by his abbot for coquetting with the New Learning. Being fired with the idea of doing a similar translation into English, "which would cause a boy that driveth the plough to know the Scriptures", he asked the Bishop of London for his assistance—and was effectively snubbed: "there was no place for it in all England ; it was impossible to translate it into English; it was not lawful for laymen to have it; it would make them heretics and rebels against the King".

Tyndale then turned to the rich German Hansa merchants of the Steelyard who settled in London and whose great establish-

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ment, almost a city in itself, was on the Thames, near the northern end of London Bridge. It is not necessary to recount the familiar story of the Hanseatic League, that powerful confederation of North German cities, such as Lübeck, Hamburg, Lüneburg, Wismar, Rostock and Stralsund, whose extra-territorial trading stations extended over more than half of Europe. Henry III conferred on them important commercial privileges in 1259. From earliest times these German aliens were allowed to own property, do business, and enjoy freedom from imposts. Stow, in his *Survey of London* (1598), mentions the Steelyard, "a place for marchants of Almaine, that used to bring hither, as well Wheat, Rie, and other grains, as Cables, Ropes, Masts, Pitch, Tar, Flaxe, Hempe, linnin cloth, Wainscots, Waxe, Steele, and other profitable Marchandizes". They built their own Guildhall as early as 1260, and had their own Altermann, to administer laws within their settlement. In ordinary court-trials, one-half of the jury was to be chosen from their own German-speaking members. Their position in England was legalised in 1303 by the *Carta Mercatoria*. Their exclusive privileges were respected and their treatment friendly.

In 1474 the ground and buildings of the Steelyard (which had previously been rented) were made over to the Hansas "in perpetuity". These adventurous North Germans sided with the Reformation from the start.

Perhaps a short review of their later history in England may be in order. In 1547, the Emperor Charles V informed King Edward VI that he would suppress the rebels of the Protestant cities, Bremen and Hamburg. Commercial rivalry was growing in England. According to Stow, "they were great Marchants of corne . . . in so much that the occupiers of husbandry in this land was inforced to complaine of them". Stow further states that "in the year 1551 through complaint of the English marchants, the libirtie of the Stilliard Marchants was seised into the king's hands, and so it resteth"—this was in 1598. Sir Thomas Gresham had urged Queen Elizabeth to destroy the Steelyard, because of its unfair competition with English trade, and in 1598 she ordered the Germans to leave England. Their place and wares were confiscated by the Crown; the property was turned over for the use of the navy. Under Charles II, the land was returned to the Hanseatic League, and its Guildhall relieved of payments. The Great Fire of 1666 wiped out the entire establishment.

Under William and Mary the rebuilt warehouses, the land and many of the privileges of the Steelyard (though not its profitable monopolies) were restored to the league; as late as 1852 the site was sold by the cities of Lübeck, Bremen and Hamburg to the Southern Railway; upon it now stands the Cannon Street Station.

To revert to Tyndale: with a large stipend from these German merchants in London he sailed for Hamburg in 1524, at the age of thirty-two. They apparently commissioned him to "do" Luther's Testament into English. He is said to have gone first to Luther at Wittenberg; the next year he settled in Cologne, that lion's den of religious conservatism, called at the time "the Rome of Germany". Here he proceeded with the printing of his first quarto New Testament, of which many sheets were put through the press, and of which only *one* fragment, a little more than the first twenty-one chapters of Matthew, is preserved, in the British Museum. This witness to the first printed English New Testament, which had been bound up with some quarto tract, was discovered by a London bookseller. The printer was Peter Quentel of Cologne; the year, 1525. Like the fragments of Ulfilas, this material suffices to reconstruct a large picture.

The disreputable humanist, Cochlaeus, a fervent hater of Luther, got the Senate of Cologne to stop the printing; he also warned Henry VIII and Wolsey to watch the English ports. In 1526 Tyndale fled to Worms, where he completed and printed an octavo edition of the New Testament for use in England. Wolsey ordered Tyndale's arrest, and the buying-up of all his books. Most of these were intercepted, and burned in 1527 by the Archbishop of Canterbury at St. Paul's Cross. Sir Thomas More came to the Steelyard in February, 1526, and informed the Corporation that followers of Luther were among them. They all had to swear to the contrary. More and his followers then went through the rooms, and took all German books. No Luther-tracts were found, but contraband Bible and prayer-books were seized. The chief Germans were taken by More to Cardinal Wolsey in Westminster. A few years later, various Hansa-merchants abjured Lutheranism at St. Paul's Cross, the same spot where Tyndale's Testament had been burned.

After his stay in Worms, Tyndale withdrew to Protestant Marburg, where he published a number of English theological

tracts—the printer being the well-known Martin Kayser (called “Martin Emperour” on the title-pages). After this he went to Antwerp. Henry VIII demanded his surrender; he was imprisoned near Brussels for one year, tried for heresy, and burned there in 1536. His executioners paid a certain tribute to his personality, to the extent that they strangled him at the stake before lighting the fire. He had spent twelve years on the Continent, chiefly in Germany. Up to the time of his arrest, the Hanseatic merchants maintained him with the utmost liberality. With his Catholic opponent, Sir Thomas More, he may well share the honour of being the purest martyr to his faith in his century.

All of Tyndale’s Catholic contemporaries speak of his New Testament as “Lutheran”. He himself said: “It was reported that Tyndale was confederate with Luther; that is not truth.”

Tyndale had Luther’s German and Erasmus’ Greek New Testaments before him; he was an accomplished classical scholar while Luther’s mastery of Greek was incomplete. The evidence that Tyndale worked directly from Luther’s Testament of 1522 is fully convincing: one has only to compare “Die Bücher” and “The bokes conteyned”. It is to be noted that Luther independently and arbitrarily changed the standard order of the books according to his own evaluation of their authority. After numbering the “preferred” books, he takes out four less important ones, and relegates them, without numbers, to the end of the list. This arrangement (not accepted in later English Bibles) is taken over exactly by Tyndale. He does not, however, repeat Luther’s comment on the subject, in which the Book of James is called “an epistle of straw”. The pages at the beginning of Matthew are not only identical in substance and printed form, but give a literal translation of two of Luther’s marginal notes—without indicating their origin. It might seem that Tyndale simply copied Luther—but there could be no greater mistake. On page 18 of Tyndale there are five marginal notes, four of them original with him. Luther’s preface takes 3½ pages; Tyndale’s runs to 14. The first page and a half offer his apology for the work; he asks that anyone who is better versed should amend it. People who refuse light are “bedlem madde” (“Bedlam” points to London—not Wittenberg). Beginning on page 2, he translates, word for word, from Luther’s preface, without acknowledgment, for another page and a half; then he embarks

on his own, for the remaining eleven, offering a long discussion of Law and Gospel.

Some of the marginal notes and cross-reference are obviously direct borrowings, perhaps one-third of them being original with Tyndale. He tempers Luther's fierce interpolated polemics, as when he omits "The gang of Papists say that these commands of Christ are no commands, but just talk". Tyndale's harshest epithet for the Romanists is "Pharisees". He omits a section in which Luther lets loose his detestation of Free Will. In a long note on "Thou art Peter" he argues that "every Christian man and woman is Peter", and refers to Bede, Augustine, Jerome and Erasmus. He knew his authorities! Tyndale offers many extra notes to explain Palestinian antiquities.

Luther is extremely free, sturdy and popular in his diction; Tyndale, working in the white heat of potential martyrdom, rises, at times, to a poetic glow, transcending the style of the original Greek, which as Goodspeed points out, is on a rather pedestrian level.

There was possibly a return-influence of Tyndale's translation on subsequent Luther-Testaments, which underwent much revision, and show some later agreements with the English version.

Our King James version appeared in 1611, after forty-seven of the greatest English scholars, representing Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster, had worked over it for four years. The first edition is a royally sumptuous folio, rather larger than Webster's International Dictionary. A. Edward Newton, in *The Greatest Book in the World*, regretted that there are practically no examples of this work in the United States. He overlooks the fact that the Newberry Library in Chicago has *two* perfect original copies of 1611, superbly bound—one, the HE-Bible, the other the SHE-Bible—so called after variant readings in Ruth iii. 15.

The revisers state: "We never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new translation . . . but to make a good one better." Tyndale's version was used "when it agreed better with the text than the later English Bibles" (referring to Coverdale, the Great Bible, the Geneva, and the Bishops' Bibles—all of them based firmly on Tyndale). It stands to reason that a group of forty-seven professional philologists would be the last to be able to fashion such a masterpiece of matchless English style. In fact, their product, as published,

offered about seventy-five per cent of Tyndale's identical words—as can be proven by reading him anywhere at random : “ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the maintainers of peace, for they shall be called the children of God.” “ Ye have heard it said, Thou shalt love thine neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies ; Bless them that curse you ; Do good to them that hate you.” “ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are laden, and I will ease you. Take my yoke on you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart ; and ye shall find ease unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”¹

J. T. HATFIELD.

Philadelphia.

¹ Especially helpful material has been found in J. J. Lappenberg's *Urkundliche Geschichte des hansischen Ståhlhofes zu London* (Hamburg, 1851).