

Tyndale (1525)

The true father of the English Bible is William Tyndale, who was born in Gloucestershire about the year 1490. He was educated at Oxford, where he was a member of Magdalen Hall, then a dependency at Magdalen College.

Here he may have begun his studies of Biblical interpretation and of the Greek language under the great leaders of the new learning at Oxford, Colet of Magdalen and Grocyn of New College. He graduated as a B.A. in 1512, as M.A. in 1515; and at some uncertain date he is said to have gone to Cambridge, probably too late to have found Erasmus there, whose Greek New Testament he was destined to translate.

When exactly he decided to devote himself to this task is unknown; but while he was resident tutor in the House of Sir John Walsh, at Little Sodbury in Gloucestershire, between 1520 and 1523, he is recorded to have said, in controversy with an opponent, "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou doest." ⁱ

He had hoped that this might be accomplished under the patronage of the leaders of the Church, notably Tunstall, Bishop of London, to whom he applied in 1523 for countenance and support. Tunstall, however, refused his application, and although Humphrey Monmouth, an alderman of London, took him into his house for several months, it was not long before Tyndale understood "not only that there was no room at my lord of London's palace to translate the New Testament, but also that there was no place to do it in all of England."

(Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts by Frederick Kenyon, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1948 [1895], 212, Paragraph Structure Modified)

ⁱ Consciously or otherwise, Tyndale was repeating the sentiments of Erasmus: "I totally disagree with those who are unwilling that the sacred scriptures, translated into the vulgar tongue, should be read by primitive individuals... I wish they were translated into all languages of all peoples, that they might be read and known not merely by the Scotch and Irish, but even the Turks and the Saracens... I wish that the ploughman might sing parts of them at his plough and the weaver at his shuttle, and that the traveller might beguile with their narration the weariness of his way" (Preface to N.T. of 1516).