

"Rich and Hard by Name"

Part II

In **Journal No. 6**, after an attempt had been made to translate some Latin verses, found on the flyleaf of a 13th century Bible, once belonging to John Meade Falkner, the following questions were posed:

"One wonders where the little vellum Bible is now and what exactly Canon Christopher Wordsworth, who Falkner first corresponded with in September 1915 and who became a good friend, actually said in his *Notes*."

Thanks to the good offices of a member of the Society, Ian Jackson, the little Bible has been tracked down to the Bancroft Library, the University of California, Berkeley. Two members of Staff - Anthony Bliss, the Curator of Rare Books & Literary Manuscripts, and Jessica Lemieux, the Photoduplication and ILL Coordinator, were subsequently extremely helpful in correctly identifying the volume and sending detailed information about it.

Under "Provenance", the University had the following:

Manuscript associated with the diocese of Salisbury in the 15th century. Later belonged to the library of W. Cresswell; then in 1913 to that of John Meade Falkner; subsequently passed into the library of James K. Moffitt. On front pastedown: the bookplate of James K. Moffitt; below, bookplate of Pauline Fore Moffitt Library. On first free endpaper, in ink, "W. Cresswell. Iohannis M. Falkner d[ono] d[edit] d[edicavit] longae Amiciti[e?], [-----?] Et aurei to[-]g[---], haud im[--] [----] mcmxiii."

The script is Gothic in at least 3 hands and the binding is modern olive morocco with gilt tooling by Waters Newcastle. The title on the spine is "Biblia latina". Luckily, the three letters Canon Christopher Wordsworth wrote to John Meade Falkner on 10 February, 24 February and 12 April 1916 still accompany the volume.

Canon Wordsworth wrote from his home - S. Nicholas Hospital, Salisbury - on 10 February, to say that Falkner's "little ms. and note book arrived safely and I can see that the ms. is like nothing that I remember to have seen". He calls the verse "quasi-prophetic epigrams" and says he has compared them with the last page of the

Bishop of Salisbury's ms. of Statutes, which contains not only the same stanzas but a further unfinished stanza of 2½ lines and a concluding stanza of 4 lines.. He goes on - "I have looked in vain in such chronicles as I can lay my hands on for details of the horrid murder of the Bishop [Aiscough]. 'Bis sens': Aiscough's episcopate dates from 1438 to 1450. 'Guttore pleno' I suppose implies that he had swallowed the Sacrament at his mass at Edington Bonhommes' church."

The Canon's letter of 24 February (St. Matthias Day) is a much longer missive and is very difficult to follow. It is packed with Latin phrases and rather obscure erudition. As far as I can make out, Wordsworth is underlining the fact that William Aiscough is the early target. "Cordificis: Was it not the saying of some callous friend of Achithophal or of wicked Haman that 'He that is hanged by the neck shall not suffer from his cold or cough' or that 'your hangman is your only sure physician for a cough' ? If so might not our unpopular Bishop William be styled 'son of an aise - cough' ?"

Wordsworth is able to provide further information about Aiscough's grisly end. His enemies got hold of him after he had said his mass and drew him outside the church before he had disrobed. They were angry that the bishop always stayed with the king and not in his diocese, nor had he kept 'open house'. Poor Aiscough's brains were scattered everywhere and his bloodstained shirt was divided up for souvenirs - 'they cleft his head, spoiled him to the skinne, and renting his bloody shirt into a number of pieces, took everie man a ragge to keep for a monument of their worthy exploit'.

Canon Wordsworth's last letter on 12 April adds nothing to the plot, as it is mainly concerned with sending an accompanying photograph of the Bishop's copy of the Cordificis natus.

Thus, Wordsworth was able to prove to Meade Falkner that the poem was not about Richard III after all, but about two or more bishops of Salisbury. One cannot help feeling a certain smugness over the fact that, quite independently and without the same level of erudition, nearly 90 years later I came to a similar conclusion in the last *John Meade Falkner Society Journal*.

The Society is extremely grateful to

The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
and to Susan Snyder and her colleagues for allowing the John Meade Falkner Society to quote from the Wordsworth letters.

(BANC MS UCB 12)