

"Christian Brethren" in Tyndale's day.

The "Brethren" of 1525 and later were of course in no way connected with the "Brethren" of the 14th century; but it is interesting to learn that at a time of persecution and prohibition of Bible reading, there existed a society of "Christian Brethren" for the secret reading and dissemination of the Word of God; their truth versus error, as now. — The smouldering embers of Lollardism "needed but a breath to fan them into flame, and the breath came from William Tyndale. A young scholar from Oxford, he was drawn from his retirement in Gloucestershire by the news of Luther's protest at Wittenberg, and after a brief stay in London we find him on his way to the little town which had suddenly become the sacred city of the Reformation. Students of all nations were flocking there with an enthusiasm which resembled that of the Crusades.... Retiring to Hamburg Tyndale translated the Gospels and Epistles; and his press at Cologne and at Worms, where he was joined by a few scholars from Cambridge, was soon busy with his versions of the Scriptures, and with reprints of the tracts of Wyclif and of Luther. These were smuggled over to England, and circulated among the poorer and trading classes through the agency of an association of 'Christian Brethren' consisting principally of London tradesmen and citizens, but whose missionaries spread over the country at large. They found their way at once to the Universities where the intellectual impulse given by the New Learning was quickening religious speculation. Cambridge had already won a name for heresy, and the Cambridge scholars whom Wolsey introduced into Cardinal College spread the contagion through Oxford. Tyndale himself was an instance of their influence. The group of 'Brethren' which was formed in Cardinal College for the secret reading and discussion of the Epistles soon included the more intelligent & learned scholars of the University. It was in vain that Clark, the centre of this group, strove to dissuade fresh members from joining it, by warnings of the impending dangers. "I fell down on my ~~feet~~ knees at his feet," says one of them, Anthony Dalaber, "and with tears and sighs besought him that for the tender mercy of God he should not refuse me, saying that I trusted verily that he would give me grace to continue therein to the end. When he heard me say so, he came to me, took me in his arms, and kissed me saying 'The Lord God Almighty grant you so to do, and from henceforth ever take me for your father, and I will take you for my son in Christ.'" The rapid diffusion of Tyndale's works, and their vehement attacks on the bishops and the Church roused Wolsey at last to action. At Oxford the 'Brethren' were thrown into prison & their books seized; in London a pile of Testaments was burned in St. Paul's Churchyard, and a few recanted before the Cardinal in its Nave. But in spite of the panic of the Protestants, who fled in crowds over the sea, little severity was really exercised; and it was not till Wolsey's fall that forbearance was thrown aside"

See also
"The Evolution of the
English Bible." C. H. Moore
(Murray)
pp. 219-21.

From

Green's Short History
of the English People.