

## LECTURE XXVIII.

### THE ENGLISH BIBLE.

The revised version of the Bible, now in general use wherever the English tongue is spoken, was executed by order of King James I., and was completed and published in the year 1611.

Its relations to the English language are, for a variety of reasons, more important than those of any other volume; and it may be said, with no less truth, that no Continental translation has occupied an equally influential position in the philology and the literature of the language to which it belongs. The English Bible has been more universally read, more familiarly known and understood, by those who use its speech, than any other version, old or new. In the sixteenth century, the English people was more generally and more thoroughly protestantized than any other nation, and, of course, among them the Bible had a freer and more diffused circulation than it had ever attained elsewhere; for though, in individual German States, the reformed religion soon became the exclusive faith of the people, yet those States formed but a portion of the Germanic nation. Although, therefore, the philological as well as the religious influence

of Luther's translation was very great, yet it only indirectly and incidentally affected the speech of that great multitude of Teutons who neither accepted the creed of Luther, nor made use of his version.

Again : the discussion of the principles of the Reformation and of their collateral results, as a living practical question, connected not only with men's hopes of a future life, but, through civil government, with their dearest interests in this, was longer continued in England than in any other European State. The puritan movement kept the debate alive in Great Britain long after the wordy war was ended, and men had resorted to the last argument of Kings, in the Continental nations. From the year 1611, the Bible in King James's version was generally appealed to as the last resort in all fundamental questions both of church and state ; for even those Protestant denominations, which gave the greatest weight to tradition, allowed the paramount authority of Scripture, and admitted that traditions irreconcilable with the words of that volume, were not of binding force. From the accession of Elizabeth, therefore, and more especially from that of James, until the Acts of Uniformity, early in the reign of Charles II., for a time extinguished the religious liberties of England, the theological and political questions, which most concerned man's interests in this world and his happiness in that which is to come, were perpetually presented to every thinking Englishman, as points which he not only might, but must, decide for himself at his peril, and that by lights drawn, directly or indirectly, from the one source of instruction to which all appealed as the final arbiter. For these reasons, the Bible became known to the mind, and incorporated into the heart and the speech, of the Anglican people to a greater extent than any other book ever entered

into the life of man, with the possible exception of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Homeric poems, and the Arabic Koran.

Although particular points in the authorized version were objected to by the more zealous partisans on both sides of the controversy respectively, and though the English Prayer-Book continued to employ an older translation in the passages of scripture introduced into that ritual, yet the new revision commended itself so generally to the sound judgment of all parties, that in a generation or two, it superseded all others, and has now, for more than two centuries, maintained its position as an oracular expression of religious truth, and at the same time as the first classic of our literature—the highest exemplar of purity and beauty of language existing in our speech.

Those who assent to the views which have been so often expressed in these lectures, respecting the reciprocal relations between words, individual or combined, and mental action, will admit that the influence, not of Christian doctrine alone, but of the verbal form in which that doctrine has been embodied, upon the intellectual character of the Anglican people, can hardly be over-estimated. Modern philologists, Europeans even, have not been the first to discover the close relation which subsists between formulas, the *ipsissima verba* of the apostle, and the faith he proclaims. The believing Jew reads the Pentateuch not only in its original tongue, but, as he supposes, in a form approximating to the very inflectional and accentual utterance with which its revelations fell from the lips of Moses; and the pious Moslem allows no translation, no modernization, of the precepts of the Prophet, but contends that the inspired words of the Koran have survived, unchanged, the lapse of twelve centuries. There is little doubt that the immutability of form in the

sacred codes of these nations is one of the most important among the causes which have given their religions such a rooted, tenacious hold upon the minds and hearts of those who profess them; and the same remark applies, with almost equal force, to the modern Greeks, who, in their religious services, employ the original text, and to the Armenians, who use a very ancient translation of the New Testament. In like manner, the strict adherence of the Popish church to the Vulgate, and to ancient forms of speech, in all the religious uses of language, is one of the great elements of strength on which the Papacy relies.

The Hebrew and the Arab, the Brahmin and the Buddhist, the Oriental and the Latin Christian, inherit, with the blood of their ancestors, if not precisely the popular speech, at least the sacred dialect of their legislators and their prophets; but the Greek and Latin languages were too remote from the speech of the Gothic nations, to have ever served as a vehicle for imparting popular instruction of any sort among those tribes. Hence, the earliest missionaries to the Germanic and Scandinavian nations learned to address them in the vernacular tongue: portions, more or less complete, of the Scriptures, and of other religious books, were very early translated into the northern dialects; and every man, who adopted Christianity and the culture which everywhere accompanied it, imbibed its precepts through the accents of his own particular maternal speech. Accordingly, though ENGLISH *Protestantism* has long had its one unchanged standard of faith, common to all who use the English speech, yet PROTESTANT *Christianity*, from the number and diversity of the languages it embraces, has no such point of union, no common formulas; and this is one of the reasons why the