THE HISTORY
OF
THE ENGLISH BIBLE:
EXTENDING FROM THE
EARLIEST SAXON TRANSLATIONS
TO THE PRESENT
ANGLO-AMERICAN REVISION;

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE PROTESTANT RELIGION
AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

BY
BLACKFORD CONDIT.

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To

My Mother

Whose Interest in the Progress of these Pages has been scarcely less than my own

This Volume is Affectionately Inscribed.
PREFACE.

THE following chapters had their origin in the desire to trace the influence of the Bible upon the English language. Dr. Noah Webster, in the preface to his "Amended Bible," 1838, says: "The language of the Bible has no inconsiderable influence in forming and preserving our National language." A slight acquaintance with the subject showed that this influence could not be understood without tracing back the history to the earliest Saxon and English translations. All praise is due to King James' revisers for their wisdom in approving as well as improving the labors of previous translators. Their design was not to make a new translation "nor yet to make of a bad one a good one, but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one." Our English Bible of to-day, therefore, comprises in itself the labors of the best scholars during a period of two and a half centuries, together with a corresponding growth of the English language.

In the Louvre gallery at Paris the history of painting is illustrated by grouping the pictures on the walls in chronological order. Something of this plan may be found in the
following pages by way of illustrating the history of the English language. Specimens of the various Saxon and English versions of the Scriptures have been inserted in chronological order, and in their original spelling. All quotations from early English authorities are given literally as to wording and orthography, and in each case, so far as practicable, preference has been given to the earliest editions.

Another agreeable surprise in this investigation, was the important part the Anglo-Saxon language has played in the struggle between Protestantism and Romanism, before as well as since the Norman Conquest. The ascendancy of the Latin tongue meant practically the ascendancy of Rome not only in language and literature, but in religion and politics. It was the struggle of a David with a Goliath. And the victory was all the more remarkable because incidental. At the first the Reformers did not perceive the intimate relation between language and religion. Hopeless ignorance of the Latin on the part of the people was reason enough for translating the Scriptures into English. But afterward they learned that the Latin language was the stronghold of the Romish Church. The Latin tongue was imperial by birth, and seemed destined through its connection with victorious Rome to become the universal language. It was stately and magnificent, and in its movement it had something of the pomp and pride of a victorious Roman legion. Possibly it may be too much to affirm that the Latin, into which the Bible had for very many years been translated, exerted a powerful influence in Romanizing the Christian Church, since so little is known of the inner workings of that sad history. But we are safe in stating that leading bishops in the very beginning as well as in
the after development of the Roman Catholic Church, found the Latin language adapted to their ambitious purposes. Consequently when in after years their deep-laid plans were endangered by Vernacular versions of the Holy Scriptures, they erected their Latin barriers around both Bible and Church, and pronounced it heresy to translate or read the Bible save in the Latin tongue now chosen and ordained to be the sacred language of the Church. Pagan Rome failed in carrying out her ideal of Universal Empire, but Papal Rome, clothed with the same imperial language and inspired with the same imperial ideal, hoped to succeed. She still has faith in her destiny notwithstanding serious checks upon her power. The first of these checks was in the domain of language through Vernacular Versions of the Bible, which marks the rise and progress of Protestantism in its struggle with Romanism.

Intimately connected with the religious stands the literary element in this conflict of languages. At the period of the Norman Conquest the Saxon tongue had a hard struggle for mere existence. It was driven from the court and palace, but it took refuge around the firesides of the peasantry. The Latin tongue even down to the Elizabethan age was the literary language. But during this same period the English language had become a power, and by its inherent vitality was already the giant that succeeding centuries have proved it to be. And prominent among the causes which lie at the foundation of this victory of the English over the Latin tongue we must recognize the fact of early translations of the Scriptures into the language of the people. The design of the following chapters was not to treat this subject at large,
but in giving an account of the several translations to note incidentally the literary influence of these versions.

In order to bring down the history of English translations to the present time, an extended account will be found in the following pages, of various public and private attempts towards translations and revisions since that of King James' Bible, 1611. The great majority of these efforts were by private individuals and consequently of no special importance. There were other attempts made by public authority, and hence of greater significance. By far the most important of these, is the Anglo-American revision undertaken by the authority of the Convocation of Canterbury and with the express design of superseding King James' version. Whether it will accomplish this design must remain, for the present at least, an open question. It must be confessed, however, that in the history of English translations no version ever attracted so wide-spread expectation. And then it carries with it the recommendation of the most profound English and American scholarship—a scholarship in every way competent to deal with original authorities and to make the best use of all critical helps. While this is true of the New Testament revisers whose labors have just closed, it is equally true of the Old Testament revisers whose labors will not be completed for some three years to come.

At the expense of burdening the page with foot-notes, care has been taken to give credit to all authorities quoted—an honest though laborious mode of acknowledging indebtedness. The historic field of English Bible translations has been sadly neglected by Church historians. Fox, the martyrologist, is
an honorable exception. The early Black Letter editions of his "Acts and Monuments," are mines of wealth in the rich mass of facts he has brought together including original documents bearing upon the external history of the English Bible. Rev. John Lewis was the original pioneer in this special field; and in every bibliographical list, chronologically, his work must stand first. Lewis' "History of English Translations of the Bible" was first published as an introduction to Wycliffe's "Translation of the New Testament," 1731. The work was issued separately in 1739. He crowded so much into so small a space, to the general reader his account seems heavy; but to the searcher for facts his work, though not reliable in every particular, is most invaluable. Anderson's "Annals of the Bible" have been severely criticised, and yet they render most acceptable service in honoring the memory of the ever-memorable William Tyndale. The work was first published in 1845, in two octavo volumes. The earliest editions were burdened with extended sketches of the civil history of the times, which interfered seriously with the simple narrative. These sketches were afterwards omitted in the revised edition put forth by his nephew in 1862. "A General View of the History of the English Bible," by Canon Westcott, published in 1868 and 1872, together with the two noble volumes by Dr. Eadie, entitled, "The English Bible; an External and Critical History of the Various English Translations of the Scriptures," 1876, leave scarcely anything to be desired in the way of an extensive and critical account of English translations of the Holy Scriptures.

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