

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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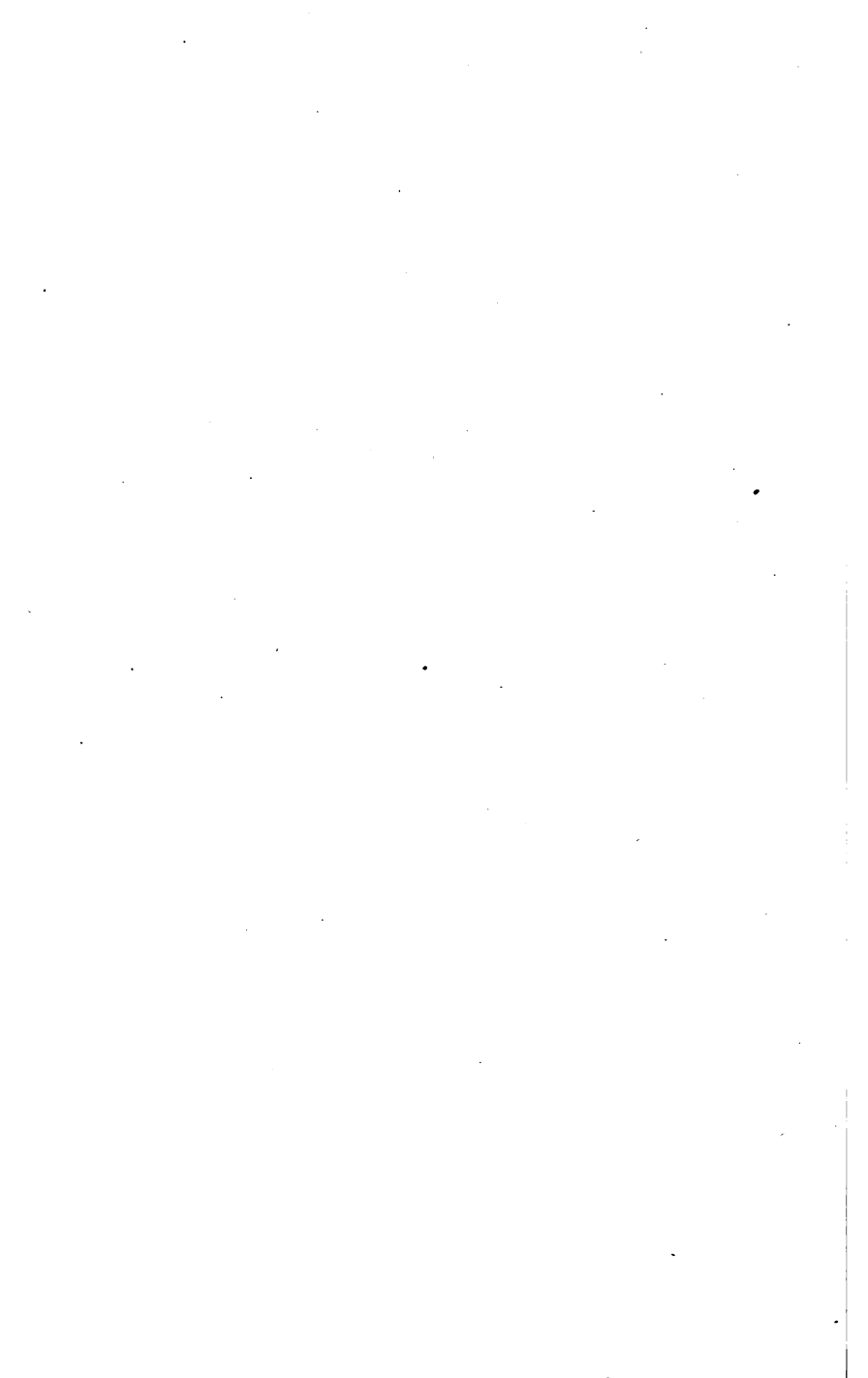
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To

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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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

SAXON AND ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE SCRIPTURES BEFORE THE TIME OF WYCLIFFE, A. D. 597-1324.

	PAGE
CHRISTIANITY AS FIRST INTRODUCED AMONG THE SAXONS.—ROME NOT AS YET OPPOSED TO THE BIBLE IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE.—COLMAN AND WILFRITH.—THE WHITBY SYNOD.—CÆDMON.—BEDE'S ACCOUNT OF.—CÆDMON'S PARAPHRASE.—SPECIMEN.—GUTHLAC'S PSALTER.—SPECIMEN.—ALDHELM, "THE GOOD AUTHOR."—HIS VERSION OF THE PSALMS.—BEDE.—ALCUIN.—INVASION OF THE DANES.—KING ALFRED.—EXTENT OF HIS BIBLE TRANSLATIONS.—SPECIMEN.—SAXON VERSIONS OF THE FOUR GOSPELS.—SPECIMEN.—ÆLFRIC.—HIS HEPTATEUCH.—SPECIMEN.—CLOSE OF THE SAXON PERIOD.—SAXON LANGUAGE IN RELATION TO THE NORMAN CONQUEST.—THE BEGINNING OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND ITS LITERATURE.—A NEW ERA OF BIBLE TRANSLATIONS.—THE ORMULUM.—SPECIMEN.—SOWLE HELE.—SCHORHAM'S VERSION OF THE PSALMS.—PROBABLY THE EARLIEST PROSE VERSION.—SPECIMEN.—RICHARD ROLLE'S VERSION OF THE PSALMS.—SPECIMEN.—EARLY ENGLISH.—VERNACULAR VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE, A PROTESTANT IDEA.—THE WAY PREPARED FOR JOHN WYCLIFFE	17

CHAPTER II.

WYCLIFFE AND THE WYCLIFFITE VERSIONS, A. D. 1380.

BIRTH OF JOHN DE WYCLIFFE.—HIS EDUCATION.—CIVIL AND CANON LAW.—MONASTIC ORDERS.—WYCLIFFE'S ATTACK UPON THE MENDICANTS.—CHURCH AND STATE.—WYCLIFFE DEFENDS THE PARLIAMENT.—WYCLIFFE AT BRUGES.—HIS LECTURES ON DIVINITY.—WYCLIFFE BEFORE THE COUNCIL.—HIS DEFENSE.—JOHN BALL AND WAT TYLER.—WYCLIFFE AS A REFORMER.—AT LUTTERWORTH.—HE TRANSLATES THE BIBLE.—LATIN LANGUAGE AND ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.—ROMISH HATRED OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE.—EARLIER AND LATER TEXTS OF THE WYCLIFFITE VERSIONS.—WYCLIFFE AND HEREFORD.—SPECIMENS OF THE EARLIER TEXT.—JOHN PURVEY.—THE AUTHOR OF THE LATER TEXT.—"WYCLIFFE'S GLOSSER."—SPECIMENS OF THE LATER TEXT.—FORSHALL AND MADDEN'S WYCLIFFITE VERSIONS, 1850.—THE BISHOP'S

	PAGE
REGISTERS.—MANUSCRIPTS OF SINGLE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE.—ANTIQUATED FORMS AND OBSOLETE WORDS.—WYCLIFFE'S SUPERIOR RENDERINGS.—EXAMPLES.—RELATION OF VERNACULAR VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE TO LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE.—INFLUENCE OF WYCLIFFITE VERSIONS UPON RELIGION AND LANGUAGE.—CHARACTER OF WYCLIFFE.—WYCLIFFE AND CHAUCER.—DEATH OF JOHN WYCLIFFE.—HIS EPITAPH.....	53

CHAPTER III.

TYNDALE AND HIS TRANSLATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, A. D. 1525.

REVIVAL OF LEARNING IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.—PRINTING INTRODUCED INTO ENGLAND.—GREEK AND LATIN NEW TESTAMENT OF ERASMUS.—OPPOSED BY ROMISH PRIESTS.—BISHOP STANDISH APPEALS TO THE KING AND QUEEN.—THE WAY PREPARED FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT IN ENGLISH.—WILLIAM TYNDALE.—REMOVES TO CAMBRIDGE.—ACTS AS TUTOR IN THE FAMILY OF SIR JOHN WALSH.—TYNDALE IN LONDON.—DEPARTS TO HAMBURGH.—COLOGNE.—WORMS.—PRINTING OF THE FIRST ENGLISH TESTAMENTS.—HANSEATIC SHIPS CONVEY THEM TO LONDON.—ENGLISH TESTAMENTS CONCEALED IN THOMAS GARRETT'S HOUSE.—“DILIGENT SEARCH” INSTITUTED.—NEW TESTAMENT DISTRIBUTORS ARRESTED.—BURNING OF NEW TESTAMENTS.—STORY OF ANTHONY DALABER.—BISHOP TONSTAL AT ANTWERP.—THE SEARCH FOR TYNDALE.—“BITTER DAYS OF PERSECUTION.”—MARTYRDOM OF JOHN FRYTH.—TYNDALE'S REVISED NEW TESTAMENT, 1534.—EXAMPLES BY WAY OF COMPARISON.—SPECIMENS OF TYNDALE'S TRANSLATION.—WITH SPELLING MODERNIZED.—THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE OF THIS PERIOD.—TYNDALE'S RELATION TO WYCLIFFE.—LATINISMS.—EXAMPLES.—FAMILIAR EXPRESSIONS.—EXAMPLES.—OBSOLETE WORDS.—ARCHAIC FORMS.—OLD ENGLISH IDIOMS.—TYNDALE'S SECOND REVISION, 1535.—HIS TRANSLATIONS OF PORTIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.—TYNDALE'S BETRAYAL AND ARREST.—HIS LETTER FROM PRISON.—TRIAL AND MARTYRDOM.—HIS CHARACTER AND LIFE. WORK.....	38
--	----

CHAPTER IV.

COVERDALE'S BIBLE, A. D. 1535.

THE NEW TESTAMENT OF ERASMUS.—RELIGIOUS AWAKENING.—SOCIETY OF “CHRISTIAN BROTHERS.”—TYNDALE'S NEW TESTAMENTS.—PRIOR BUCKINGHAM'S SERMON.—HUGH LATIMER'S ANSWER.—MYLES COVERDALE.—A PUPIL OF DR. BARNES.—HIS SYMPATHY WITH LATIMER AND BILNEY.—REVIVAL AT BUMSTEDE.—GOSPEL MEETINGS.—COVERDALE BEFORE THE BISHOPS.—IS WITHDRAWN FROM PUBLIC NOTICE.—ENTERS UPON THE WORK OF TRANSLATING THE BIBLE.—CROMWELL'S PATRONAGE.—COUNCIL CALLED.—HENRY VIII. PRESIDES.—OPPOSITION TO THE SCRIPTURES IN ENGLISH.—LATIMER'S LETTER TO THE KING.—DEMAND OF THE PEOPLE FOR THE BIBLE IN ENGLISH.—CRANMER'S EFFORTS UNSUCCESSFUL.—COVERDALE'S BIBLE.—THE DEDICATION.—CROMWELL'S INJUNCTIONS.—BISHOPS IN COUNCIL.—COVERDALE AS A TRANSLATOR.—HIS VERSION OF THE PSALMS AND PROPHETIC BOOKS.—SPECIMENS.—IN ORIGINAL AND MODERN SPELLING.—QUAINTNESS IN STYLE.—FAMILIARITY IN EXPRES-
--

	PAGE
SION.—ARCHAIC FORMS AND OBSOLETE WORDS.—ROMISH OPPOSITION.—“ENGLISH BIBLERS.”—THE DIGLOTT NEW TESTAMENT.—COVERDALE IN ENGLAND.—ARRANGEMENTS FOR A NEW TRANSLATION.—MATTHEWE'S BIBLE APPEARS IN ENGLAND	139

CHAPTER V.

MATTHEWE'S BIBLE, A. D. 1537.

CONFUSION IN THE ACCOUNTS OF THE SEVERAL EDITIONS OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE.—ORIGIN OF THE NAME OF MATTHEWE'S BIBLE.—JOHN ROGERS.—HIS INTIMACY WITH TYNDALE.—EDITOR OF MATTHEWE'S BIBLE.—THIS BIBLE PRINTED AT ANTWERP.—INTRODUCED INTO ENGLAND BY GRAFTON.—CRANMER'S ZEAL FOR ITS CIRCULATION.—CROMWELL'S PROCLAMATION.—HIS INJUNCTIONS.—ROMISH OPPOSITION.—OCCASIONS OF OFFENSE.—THIS VERSION THE BASIS OF SUBSEQUENT REVISIONS.—TITLE.—PREFATORY MATTER.—TAVERNER'S BIBLE.—PREFATORY MATTER.—THIS REVISION INSTIGATED BY THE PRINTERS.—TAVERNER A SCHOLAR AND LAY PREACHER.—SECOND EDITION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.—THE EDITION OF 1549.—“IN SUNDRY PARTES.”—BECKE'S TAVERNER, 1551.—PETYT AND REDMAN'S EDITION OF MATTHEWE'S BIBLE, 1540.—BECKE'S MATTHEWE, 1549.—SPECIMENS OF THE TRANSLATION.—REPRINT OF MATTHEWE'S BIBLE BY HYLL AND REYNOLDS.—“FAULTILY DONE.”—NYCOLAS HILL'S EDITION, 1551.—SPECIMENS.—NICKNAMED THE “BUG BIBLE.”—A NEW ENTERPRISE PROJECTED.....	172
--	-----

CHAPTER VI.

BIBLES OF THE LARGEST VOLUME, A. D. 1540.

CROMWELL'S BIBLE.—EDITED BY MYLES COVERDALE.—GRAFTON AND WHITECHURCH IN PARIS.—LETTERS TO CROMWELL.—THREATENED BY THE PAPISTS.—PRINTERS AND PRESSES BROUGHT OVER TO LONDON.—FIRST EDITION PUBLISHED APRIL, 1539.—HOLBEIN'S FRONTISPIECE.—PREFATORY MATTER.—SPECIMENS OF THE TRANSLATION.—CONDEMNATION OF LAMBERT.—CRANMER AGAINST THE “BLOODY SIX ARTICLES.”—MONASTIC HOUSES DISSOLVED.—HENRY VIII. FAVORS THE SCRIPTURES IN ENGLISH.—CRANMER'S BIBLE, 1540.—PROLOGUE.—EDITED BY COVERDALE.—“SUPPLEMENTARY CLAUSES.”—CHANGES NOT ALWAYS IMPROVEMENTS.—EXAMPLES.—CHARACTER OF CROMWELL.—NOVEMBER EDITION OF THE GREAT BIBLE.—CONVOCATION, 1542.—GARDINER'S SCHEME FOR A LATINIZED ENGLISH BIBLE.—LIST OF LATIN WORDS TO BE RETAINED.—CRANMER'S SUCCESSFUL OPPOSITION.—LATIN LANGUAGE AND LATIN CHURCH.—LATIN THE LANGUAGE OF LITERATURE.—ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT THIS PERIOD.—PERSECUTION.—REIGN OF EDWARD VI.—SIR JOHN CHEKE'S TRANSLATION OF PORTION OF NEW TESTAMENT.—HIS PURISM.—ORTHOGRAPHY.—SPECIMENS OF HIS TRANSLATION.—ENGLISH LANGUAGE GROWING IN IMPORTANCE.—ROGER ASCHAM.—HIS “TOXOPHILUS” AND “SCHOLE MASTER.”—PROGRESS OF BIBLE TRUTH DURING THE REIGN OF EDWARD VI.—RETALIATIONS AGAINST THE PROTESTANTS DURING THE REIGN OF QUEEN MARY.—PERSECUTION AND THE GENEVAN BIBLE.....	199
---	-----

CHAPTER VII.

THE GENEVAN BIBLE, A. D. 1560.

	PAGE
WILLIAM WHITTINGHAM.—HIS REVISION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, 1557.—VERSE DIVISIONS.—ORIGINALITY OF WHITTINGHAM'S VERSION.—SPECIMENS.—PROTESTANTS OF GENEVA.—THE GENEVAN BIBLE, 1560.—DEDICATION.—ADDRESS TO THE READER.—NOT AN INDEPENDENT TRANSLATION.—SPECIMENS FROM O. T.—AN IMPROVEMENT ON PRECEDING TRANSLATIONS.—THE GENEVAN BIBLE AND THE PURITANS.—CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS.—MARGINAL NOTES.—EXCESSIVE USE OF COMMENTARIES.—HOW TO READ THE BIBLE.—"MAPPEE."—WOOD-CUTS.—EXTENDED CIRCULATION OF THE GENEVAN BIBLE.—ITS SAXON LANGUAGE.—ENGLISH VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.—INFLUENCE OF PAGAN ROME UPON LITERATURE AND SOCIAL LIFE.—LYLY'S "NEW-FANGLED ENGLISH.—LITERARY INFLUENCE OF THE GENEVAN BIBLE.—ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT THIS PERIOD.—RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE.—ANTIQUATED AND OBSOLETE TERMS.—EXAMPLES.—TITLE-PAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT OF 1560.—SPECIMENS OF THE TRANSLATION.—LAWRENCE TOMSON'S REVISION OF N. T., 1576.—HIS RENDERING OF THE GREEK ARTICLE.—EXAMPLES.—ENLARGEMENT OF THE ENGLISH VOCABULARY.—NEW WORDS NOT TRACEABLE TO THE RHEIMS VERSION.—EXAMPLES.—ANNOTATIONS.—EXCERPTS FROM TOMSON'S N. T.—POPULARITY OF THE GENEVAN VERSION.—OPPOSITION BY ENGLISH BISHOPS.—A NEW VERSION PROPOSED BY ARCHBISHOP PARKER.—GENEVAN AND AUTHORIZED VERSIONS.....	254

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BISHOP'S BIBLE, A. D. 1568.

QUEEN ELIZABETH'S REIGN.—ORDER IN THE STATE AND UNIFORMITY IN THE CHURCH.—ECCLESIASTICAL PARTYISM.—EVANGELICAL SPIRIT AMONG CLERGY AND PEOPLE.—MANNERS AND MORALS.—SABBATH REFORM.—INFLUENCE OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE.—PARKER'S PLAN FOR A NEW REVISION.—RULES PRESCRIBED.—CO-OPERATION OF THE BISHOPS.—WHY CALLED THE BISHOP'S BIBLE.—TITLE-PAGE.—PREFACE.—THE REVISION BASED UPON CRANMER'S BIBLE, 1540.—BUT FEW CHANGES IN THE O. T.—EXAMPLES.—SPECIMENS OF THE TRANSLATION.—SCHOLARSHIP OF THE N. T.—COLLATION SHOWING CHANGES FOR THE BETTER.—SPECIMEN OF THE TRANSLATION.—AFFECTATION IN LANGUAGE.—RESISTED BY THE REVISERS OF THIS BIBLE.—COMMONPLACE WORDS AND PHRASES.—COLLATION OF.—EXPLANATORY PHRASES.—EXAMPLES.—LATINISMS.—EXAMPLES.—OBSOLETE WORDS.—EXAMPLES.—VULGAR TERMS AVOIDED.—PASSAGES TO BE OMITTED IN PUBLIC READING.—MARGINAL NOTES.—CIRCULATION LIMITED.—THIS VERSION A LINK IN THE CHAIN OF AUTHORIZED REVISION.—ROMISH HATRED.—FULKE'S REPLY TO MARTIN.—MYLES COVERDALE.—HIS LIFE AND LABORS.—HIS DEATH, 1569	266
---	-----

CHAPTER IX.

RHEIMS NEW TESTAMENT, A. D. 1582. DOUAY BIBLE, A. D. 1609.

	PAGE
REASONS FOR PUBLISHING THE DOUAY BIBLE.—GREGORY MARTIN THE CHIEF TRANSLATOR.—THE NEW TESTAMENT FIRST PRINTED.—TITLE-PAGE.—PREFACE.—FULKE'S REFUTATION.—WHY TRANSLATED FROM THE VULGATE.—UNTRANSLATED WORDS.—EXAMPLES.—DARK PHRASES.—EXAMPLES.—SPECIMENS OF THE TRANSLATION.—LATINIZED ENGLISH.—EXAMPLES.—RHEMISH VERSION AND SCRIPTURE VOCABULARY.—ILLUSTRATIONS.—SAXONISMS.—EXAMPLES.—AN UNTRUTHFUL TRANSLATION.—PAPISTICAL NOTES.—COLLATION OF.—CARTWRIGHT'S CONFUTATION.—THE CONTROVERSY.—THE OLD TESTAMENT.—TRANSLATED FROM THE VULGATE.—RIVAL EDITIONS OF THE VULGATE.—CLEMENTINE EDITION, 1592, ADOPTED.—TITLE-PAGE.—LIMITED CIRCULATION.—THE LATIN TEXT THE FOUNDATION OF THE WYCLIFFITE VERSIONS.—THE VULGATE THE SOURCE OF EARLY RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE.—INFLUENCE OF THE VULGATE UPON ENGLISH THEOLOGICAL SPEECH.—EXAMPLES.—OFFICE OF THE WYCLIFFITE VERSIONS.—NARY'S TRANSLATION OF THE N. T.—HIS DESIGN.—DR. WETHAM'S VERSION, 1730-33.—DR. CHALLONER'S REVISED EDITION OF DOUAY BIBLE, 1749-50.—SPECIMENS.—DR. MURRAY'S EDITION, 1825.—CONFORMED TO THE AUTHORIZED VERSION.—DR. LINGARD'S FOUR GOSPELS.—TENDENCY TO LIBERALITY AMONG MODERN CATHOLIC REVISERS.—THE ROMAN CATHOLIC BIBLE OF TO-DAY NOT THAT OF 1609-1635.—ITS CIRCULATION AMONG AMERICAN CATHOLICS.....	255

CHAPTER X.

THE AUTHORIZED VERSION, A. D. 1611.

ACCESSION OF JAMES I.—HAMPTON COURT CONFERENCE.—A NEW TRANSLATION RESOLVED UPON.—COMMITTEES APPOINTED.—THEIR EMINENCE FOR SCHOLARSHIP.—RULES FOR THEIR GUIDANCE.—TITLE-PAGE.—DEDICATION.—PREFACE.—OPPOSITION TO THE NEW TRANSLATION.—HUGH BROUGHTON.—DR. GILL.—"AUTHORIZED VERSION."—"KING JAMES' BIBLE."—THE BISHOP'S BIBLE THE BASIS OF THE REVISION.—LATIN VERSIONS ACCESSIBLE.—RECENT VERNACULAR VERSIONS.—HEBREW BIBLES EXTANT.—SONCINE AND BOMBERG'S.—COMPLUTENSIAN AND ANTWERP POLYGLOTTIS.—TEXT OF ERASMUS.—THIRD EDITION OF STEVENS.—TEXT OF BEZA.—"TEXTUS RECEPTUS."—RELATION OF KING JAMES' BIBLE TO PREVIOUS ENGLISH VERSIONS.—CHANGES FOR THE BETTER.—SOMETIMES FOR THE WORSE.—ILLUSTRATIONS.—GREEK ARTICLE.—EXAMPLES.—SINGLE GREEK WORD TRANSLATED BY SEVERAL ENGLISH WORDS.—EXAMPLES.—SEVERAL GREEK WORDS BY SINGLE ENGLISH WORD.—EXAMPLES.—PUNCTUATION.—EXAMPLES.—SAXON ELEMENT OF OUR LANGUAGE RE-ESTABLISHED IN KING JAMES' BIBLE.—LITERARY INFLUENCE.—THE BIBLE THE BOOK OF THE HOUSEHOLD.—WORDS IN *action*.—LATIN DERIVATIVES DISPLACED BY SAXON WORDS.—MILTON.—SHAKESPEARE.—RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE.—TYPOGRAPHICAL ERRORS.—ILLUSTRATIONS.—CORRUPTED BIBLES.—CORRECTED EDITIONS.—HEBRAISMS.—OLD ENGLISH IDIOMS.—EXAMPLES.—ARCHAISMS.—OBSOLETE WORDS.—EXAMPLES.—RELATION OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE TO TEXTUAL CRITICISM.—

	PAGE
EARLIEST GREEK MSS.—COLLATION OF FACTS, AND SECOND THOUGHTS OF BIBLICAL SCHOLARS.—RESULTS OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM IN ITS APPLICATION TO OUR ENGLISH BIBLE.—EXAMPLES.—DOUBTFUL PASSAGES.—INTEGRITY OF OUR ENGLISH BIBLE.—YET A REVISED EDITION DESIRABLE.—THE ANGLO-AMERICAN REVISION NOW IN PROGRESS	324

CHAPTER XI.

REVISIONS AND TRANSLATIONS SINCE A. D. 1611.

<p>DEMAND FOR A REVISION OF KING JAMES' BIBLE.—EARLY ATTEMPTS.—PROPOSALS BY HENRY JESSEY AND PROF. ROWE, 1650-55.—RESOLUTIONS IN THE LONG PARLIAMENT, 1658-58.—ERA OF THE RESTORATION.—ITS UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES.—KING JAMES' BIBLE FIRMLY ESTABLISHED.—"TIDE OF GLOWING PANEGYRIC."—INFLUENCE, LITERARY AND RELIGIOUS, OF KING JAMES' BIBLE.—MACE'S VERSION OF THE N. T.—"A DOUGHTY TRANSLATION."—PURVER'S TRANSLATION, 1764.—UNDERTAKEN FOR THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.—HARWOOD'S N. T., 1768.—ITS "ELEGANCE" IN LANGUAGE.—BLANEY'S EDITION OF THE BIBLE, 1769.—A CORRECTED ENGLISH TEXT.—DR. LOWTH'S TRANSLATION OF ISAIAH, 1778.—DR. GEDDES' TRANSLATION OF PARTS OF THE O. T., 1780-97.—DR. GEORGE CAMPBELL'S FOUR GOSPELS, 1789.—WAKEFIELD'S TRANSLATION OF N. T., 1791.—UNITARIAN.—DR. NEWCOME'S N. T., 1796.—SCARLETT'S VERSION, 1798.—FAVORS THE DOCTRINE OF UNIVERSALISM.—MCREA'S REVISION OF THE BIBLE, 1799.—IMPROVED VERSION OF THE N. T., 1808.—UNITARIAN.—BELLAMY'S NEW TRANSLATION, 1818-1821.—ALEXANDER CAMPBELL'S VERSION OF N. T., 1826.—NOAH WEBSTER'S "AMENDED BIBLE," 1833.—RODOLPHUS DICKINSON'S "ELEGANT TRANSLATION" OF THE N. T., 1833.—ITS FASHIONABLE LANGUAGE.—ALEXANDER'S REVISION OF THE PENTATEUCH, 1833.—INDELICATE WORDS AND PHRASES CORRECTED.—AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY REVISION, 1851.—A STANDARD COPY ADOPTED.—PUBLIC DISSATISFACTION.—STANDARD REVOKED, 1858.—EXAMPLES OF CHANGES PROPOSED.—CRITICAL REVISION OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, ETC., BY FIVE CLERGYMEN, 1857.—SAWYER'S N. T., 1858.—AMERICAN BIBLE UNION REVISION, 1850-1860.—REVISION BY CONVOCATION OF CANTERBURY.—BEGUN IN 1870.—ENGLISH OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT COMPANIES.—RULES ADOPTED.—SCHOLARSHIP AND CATHOLICITY OF THE ENGLISH REVISERS.—FORMATION OF AMERICAN COMPANIES, 1871.—CONSTITUTION ADOPTED.—CHANGES IN AMERICAN COMPANIES.—PROGRESS OF THE WORK.—THE REVISION INTERNATIONAL AND INTERDENOMINATIONAL.—THE UNANSWERABLE QUESTION.—PUBLICATION AND RECEPTION OF THE REVISED VERSION.—TITLE-PAGE AND PREFATORY MATTER.—TREATMENT OF DEBATABLE PASSAGES.—CORRECT TREATMENT OF GREEK TENSES.—IMPROVEMENTS FROM AN AMENDED GREEK TEXT.—TRANSLATION OF GREEK ARTICLES AND PREPOSITIONS.—IMPROVEMENTS FROM DISPLACING OBSOLETE WORDS.—LANGUAGE OF THE REVISED VERSION.—NEW WORDS INTRODUCED.—THE AMERICAN APPENDIX</p>	289
---	-----