



## CHAPTER VIII.

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### THE GREAT BIBLE.

WE have now reached the publication of the Great Bible, so called from its size. The way in which the work was prepared, and the parties who originally planned and executed it, remain matters of doubt. Some say Rogers took a prominent part in it. It seems, however, that Cromwell was the prime mover and patron of the undertaking; and that Coverdale, acting under his directions, was selected as editor, and Grafton as printer; and that it was commenced early in the year 1538. Paris was chosen as the place of printing, because the best paper and typography were to be procured there. A Royal license was obtained from the King of France (Francis I.) on condition that they did not print "private or unlawful opinions," and that all dues, obligations, &c., were properly discharged. The two Englishmen, with Regnault, the French printer, applied themselves assiduously to their work. On the 23rd June, 1538, they wrote to Cromwell informing him of the progress they were making in the enterprise, in which he was deeply interested:—"We be entered into *your*

work of the Bible, whereof (according to our most bounden duty) we have here sent unto your Lordship, and the second in paper, whereof all the rest shall be made." They also unfold their plan:— "We follow not only a standing text of the Hebrew, with the interpretation of the Chaldee and the Greek, but we set also in a private (separate) table the diversity of readings of all texts, with such annotations in another table as shall doubtless delucidate and clear the same; as well without any singularity of opinions, as all checkings and reproofs." Coverdale may at this time have acquired some knowledge of the Oriental languages, or he may have secured the services of scholars; but even without such assistance he might have effectively carried out his plan by consulting the "Complutensian Polyglott," which contains a Latin translation of the Chaldee Paraphrase, and the accurate and literal version of the Old Testament by Sebastian Münster, which was published at Basle in 1534-5. Before the printing of the volume was completed the license was withdrawn, and the sheets seized and condemned to the flames by the ecclesiastical authorities. This occurred on the 17th December, 1538. Many were actually burned, but a considerable number ("four great dry vats-full") which had been sold to a haberdasher "to lap caps in," were afterwards recovered. Happily, before the seizure portions had been sent to Cromwell through Bonner, the Bishop of Hereford, then the English Ambassador at Paris; and in a

short time the workmen, presses, type, and paper were brought over to London, where the Great Bible was published in April, 1539.

The book is a handsome folio, printed in black-letter, with this title:—"The Byble in Englysche, that is to saye the content of all the holy scripture bothe of the olde and newe testament, truly translated after the veryte of the Hebrue and Greke textes, by the dylygent studye of dyverse excellent learned men, expert in the forsayde tongues. Prynted by Richard Grafton and Edward Whitchurch. *Cum privilegio ad imprimendum solum.* 1539."

The title-page, designed by Hans Holbein, is artistic and interesting. At the top of the engraving is the Saviour in the clouds of heaven. Two scrolls contain His words: the one towards the right hand being, *Verbum meum quod egredietur de ore meo non revertetur ad me vacuum, sed faciet quæcunque volui* (Esa. lv., 11); and that towards the left being, *Inveni virum secundum cor meum, qui faciet omnes voluntates meas.* (Acts xiii., 22). Below the Lord Jesus is the King on his throne, with his crown and insignia of the Garter laid in the dust, and holding in each hand a book entitled, *Verbum Dei*. The King presents the book to Cranmer and some clergy on the right hand, and to Cromwell and some laymen on the left. To the former he says, *Hæc præcipe et doce* ("These things command and teach," 1 Tim., iv., 11); to the latter, *Quod justum est, judicate. Ita parvum audietis ut magnum* ("Judge righteously. Ye shall hear the small as well as

the great," Deut. i., 16-17); another heavy scroll is handed to Cromwell with the following inscription: *A me constitutum est decretum, ut in universo imperio et regno meo homines tremiscant et paveant Deum viventem* ("I make a decree, that in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble before the living God," Daniel vi., 26). Lower down, on the right, Cromwell is depicted again delivering the Word of God to the laity and addressing them in the words of Ps. xxxiv., 14, *Diuerto a malo et fac bonum, inquire pacem et perseguere eam* ("Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it"). On the other side is Cranmer, easily distinguished by his official costume and his coat-of-arms, giving the sacred volume to the eager clergy with the solemn injunction, *Pascite, qui in vobis est, gregem Dei* ("Feed the flock of God which is among you," 1 Peter, v., 2). In one corner stands a preacher, enforcing the duty of prayer and thanksgiving on behalf of Kings (1 Tim., ii., 1). The congregation shout in reply, some *Vivat Rex!* and some, including females, "God save the Kyngel!" Prisoners look out from grated windows, while the multitude outside salute them derisively with many a *Vivat Rex!* as a reward of their disloyalty. That the precious volume was regarded as a gift from God is clearly indicated by the colophon: *A Domino factum est istud* ("This is the Lord's doing").

The Great Bible is sometimes erroneously termed Cranmer's Bible. Cranmer's connection with the book began with the second

edition, whose preface he wrote, but the issuing of the first is due entirely to Cromwell. It has no notes, not even a dedication, and is based on the text of Matthew's Bible, or, in other words, is a revision of Coverdale's own version of 1535 and of Tyndale's. Certain documents, containing injunctions to the clergy, are preserved:—"Item, that ye shall provide on this side the Feast of ——— next coming, one boke of the whole Bible in the largest volume in English, and the same set up in some convenient place within the said church that ye have cure of, wherat your parishioners may most commodiously resort to the same and read it; the charges of which boke shall be equally borne between the parson and the parishioners aforesaid, that is to say, the one half by you, and the other half by them." This clearly refers to the Great Bible. Its pages are fully fifteen inches in length, and over nine in breadth.

The volume was enthusiastically welcomed by the people, and what Strype says of the Bible in 1538 may, with equal propriety, be applied to the reception accorded that of 1539. "It was wonderful to see with what joy this book of God was received, not only among the learned sort, and those that were noted for lovers of the Reformation, but generally all England over, among all the vulgar and common people; and with what greediness God's Word was read; and what resort to places where the reading of it was. Everybody that could bought the book, or busily read it, or got

others to read it to them, if they could not themselves; and divers more elderly people learned to read on purpose. And even little boys flocked among the rest to hear portions of the Holy Scripture read." The number of editions that were printed proves the accuracy of these statements. A second edition, printed in London, appeared in April, 1540, and on its title-page mention is made of Cranmer's prologue; a third edition was published in July, and a fourth in November of the same year. Three more were issued in 1541. These six editions all have Cranmer's prologue, but the third and fourth bear the names of Tunstal and Heath upon the title-page, who are said to have "overseen and perused" the translation at the King's command. The first edition consisted of 2,500 copies, and the impressions of the later editions were not likely to be fewer.

Many copies of the Great Bible have been preserved: the British Museum contains several editions, and St. John's College, Cambridge, has a splendid copy, printed on vellum and illuminated; another copy on vellum (April 1540), presented by Anthony Marler, a haberdasher in London, to Henry VIII., is to be found in the British Museum.

But the storm was lowering. Cromwell was gone, Cranmer had not the same influence over the King, and Henry soon displayed his enmity against the Bible. In 1543 Parliament passed an act forbidding the use of Tyndale's translation, and commanding that the annotations and preambles in all other Bibles should

be destroyed; nor was any one belonging to the class of apprentices, artificers, journeymen, servants, husbandmen, and labourers, to be permitted to read the Old or New Testament to themselves or to any other, privately or openly, on pain of one month's imprisonment.

Meanwhile, the King's life was fast ebbing. Shortly before his death he desired that Cranmer should be sent for; but before the Prelate arrived he was speechless, and squeezing Cranmer's hand he immediately expired, 28th of January, 1547. People now breathed more freely, and the Word had free course for a season.

On the Sabbath after the funeral young Edward VI. was crowned, amid courtly splendour, in the Abbey of Westminster. When the royal insignia were presented to him, and he saw the swords, the symbol of his being the head of three kingdoms, he asked for a fourth. To an inquiry what his Majesty meant, he replied, "The Bible. That book is the sword of the Spirit, and to be preferred before these swords. That ought, in all right, to govern us, who use them for the people's safety by God's appointment. Without that sword we are nothing, we can do nothing, we have no power; from that we are what we are this day; from that we receive whatsoever it is that we at this present do assume. He that rules without it is not to be called God's minister or a King. Under that we ought to live, to fight, to govern the people, and to perform all our affairs. From that alone we obtain all power and virtue,

grace, and salvation, and whatsoever we have of Divine strength." This augured well; the reading of the Bible was free to all, and it is computed that about fifty editions of the Scriptures issued from the press during Edward's short reign of six years and a-half, but no new translation was undertaken.

Edward died on the 6th July, 1553, and was succeeded by his elder sister Mary. One of her first acts was to prohibit the general use of the Scriptures, and the reading of them in the Churches. Her reign is a dark page in English history, full of bigotry and cruelty. The English Bible, even in effigy, could not now be tolerated. When Philip and Mary passed in procession through the metropolis, the citizens in their exuberance of joy and loyalty exhibited a picture of Henry VIII., with a sword in one hand, and in the other the Word of God, which he was giving to his son Edward. The unlucky artist was at once brought before Bishop Gardyner, the Chancellor, who rebuked him severely, calling him "villain and traitor," and ordered him to efface the book and paint a glove in its stead—in doing which, as the story goes, the terrified artist "wiped away a portion of the fingers withal." Perhaps nothing, next to the general circulation of the Bible, has tended ever since to strengthen the cause of Protestantism more than the history of the martyrs in Queen Mary's reign—their blood became the seed of the Church. As has been beautifully said—"Tyndale, who gave us our first New Testa-



ment from the Greek, was strangled for his work at Vilforde; Coverdale, who gave us our first printed Bible, narrowly escaped the stake by exile; Rogers, to whom we owe the newly-formed basis of our present Version, was the first victim of the Marian persecution; Cranmer, who has left us our Psalter, was at last blessed with a death of triumphant agony. The work was crowned by martyrdom, and the workmen laboured at it in the faith and with the love of martyrs."

