

CHAPTER V

THREE RIVAL VERSIONS

WITH the Accession of Edward VI in January 1547 a change for the better came over the fortunes of the English Bible. The restrictions placed upon the printing and reading of the Scriptures were at once removed, and in the first year of the new reign an Injunction was issued requiring every beneficed person to provide within three months a copy of the English Bible "of the largest volume"; and within twelve months a copy of the "Paraphrase on the Gospels" by Erasmus, these to be set up in some convenient place in the church where they might be read by the parishioners. This English version of the Latin paraphrase or commentary of Erasmus was "Enprinted at London in Flete-strete at the signe of the Sunne, by Edward Whitchurche the last day of Januarie 1548." Several translators were employed in its preparation, Miles Coverdale, John Olde, Nicholas Udall and others; and curious to relate, the Princess Mary, afterwards Queen Mary, herself

translated the greater part of the paraphrase upon St John's Gospel. As this work was required to be placed in the churches within a twelvemonth, several presses were engaged upon it, with the result that Dr W. Aldis Wright found no fewer than six varieties of the Paraphrase in existence. Among the incidents of the time it is mentioned that in 1548 the churchwardens of St Margaret's, Westminster, paid five shillings for the half-part of the work ; and in 1549 those of Wigtoft in Lincolnshire seven shillings for the whole, and for a chain to fasten it, fourpence. From the same printing office in Fleet Street there had been issued the previous year the earliest edition of the Scriptures in Edward's reign, the only issue in 1547. It bore the title, "The Newe Testament in Englyshe according to the translacion of the Great Byble." It was followed by many more. Short as Edward's reign was no fewer than forty editions either of the whole Bible or of the New Testament issued from the press.

During this reign also there was produced a fragment of a version of the New Testament containing the Gospel of Matthew and the first chapter of Mark, which may be mentioned in passing as one of the curiosities of the time. It was the work of Sir John Cheke, Professor of Greek in the University of Cambridge, who had been also tutor to the King when Prince Edward. Milton says he "taught Cambridge

and King Edward Greek." The manuscript, which has unfortunately lost a leaf, is preserved in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. It is in Cheke's beautiful handwriting, and though probably made in 1550 was not published till it was edited by the Rev. James Goodwin in 1843. Its special characteristic seems to have been an attempt to express the ideas of the original in home-born words and the language of the common people rather than in the semi-Latin then much in vogue. It may perhaps be described as an anticipation in the 16th century of what is known as the "Twentieth Century Bible" of our own times. One or two extracts may show the kind of thing aimed at: "When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a city of Jewry in King Herod's days, lo, then the wizards came from the East parts to Jerusalem, and asked where the King of Jews was that was new born"; "Come to me all that labour and be burdened and I will ease you. Take my yoke on you and learn of me, for I am mild and of a lowly heart. And ye shall find quietness for yourselves"; "And his disciples seeing him walking on the sea were troubled, saying that it was a phantasm, and they cried out for fear. Jesus bye and bye spake to them and said, Be of good cheer. It is I, fear not. Peter answered unto him, Sir, saith he, If it be thou, bid me come on the water unto thee. And he said, Come on. And Peter came down out of the boat and walked on the

waters to come to Jesus. And seeing the wind strong, was afeard, and when he began to sink he cried out."

With the death of Edward VI, and the Accession of Queen Mary, came change amounting to revolution. At once the public reading of the Scripture was prohibited, a proclamation of June 1555 denounced the writings of Tyndale, Frith, Cranmer and Coverdale, and during these five years there was neither Bible nor Testament published in the realm.

But Mary's policy of repression led indirectly to the production of that *Genevan* version of the Scriptures which Dr Westcott describes as the most important revision the English Bible underwent before the final settlement of the Received Text. This was the work of some of those Protestant exiles who fled from the fires of persecution in their own land to the friendly shelter of the Reformed Churches abroad. They were scattered in various cities, in Frankfort, Strasburg, Basle, Zurich and Geneva. It is with those who settled in Geneva we are now concerned. John Knox the Scottish reformer was there; Miles Coverdale; Thomas Cole, once Dean of Salisbury; Christopher Goodman, formerly Divinity Professor at Oxford; John Pullain, a translator of Ecclesiastes, Esther and other books of Scripture into English verse; Anthony Gilby, Thomas Sampson and William Whittingham. Sampson had been Dean

of Chichester in Edward's time and afterwards became Dean of Christ Church in Elizabeth's reign, and Whittingham was afterwards Dean of Durham.

William Whittingham was the first among these exiles to take action in the matter of Bible translation. Born at Chester in 1524, at 16 he entered Brasenose College, graduating B.A. in 1540 and M.A. in 1547-8, having been elected Fellow of All Souls in 1545.¹ In 1550 he went abroad for three years, spending his time chiefly at the University of Orleans, afterwards visiting the Universities of Germany and Geneva in 1552 and returning to England in 1553. Then came the time of exile when he went first to Frankfort and afterwards to Geneva, where he succeeded Knox as minister of the English congregation there. In 1557 he published, anonymously, a revised translation of the English New Testament. It is thus described: "The Newe Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Conferred diligently with the Greke, and best approved translations. With the arguments as wel before the chapters, as for every Boke. At Geneva: Printed by Conrad Badius. MDLVII." The text of this version is based upon Tyndale's, compared with the Great Bible, and influenced by Beza's Latin translation. It formed the ground-work of the New Testament printed in the complete Genevan Bible of 1560, but is distinct from it. It was the first Testament to be printed in Roman type and also the first

