

P R E F A C E.

THE present work may reasonably be thought to require a few words, in explanation of its contents and object.

I fear that it possesses few attractions for the general reader ; for it contains little more than a connected recital of mere *Facts*, upon a subject which no one hitherto has found sufficiently inviting to induce him to investigate it with exactness.

As it is likely that some persons may feel surprise, that I have chosen so dry a field of inquiry ; and others may be inclined to ask why, after going so far upon its surface, I have not gone farther : it may be well to premise, that the design of the book is not *controversial*, but *literary*. Although many controverted points necessarily come within its range, it will be seen that but few of them are dwelt upon with fulness of detail ; and this only in cases where some critical remarks seemed to be almost unavoidable. That task I leave to others. My chief object has been, to ascertain *facts* ;—to supply correct information ;—to collect and arrange materials, from which my readers may be enabled to draw their own conclusions, and to pursue the subject, if they choose, to the full extent which its importance may be thought to justify.—All, which I purpose to do here, is, to exhibit the present state of the Roman Catholic Bible in these countries ; and to trace the successive steps and stages by which it has been brought into that condition.

Perhaps I was led into these investigations, by observing the general absence of information on these points among all classes. Educated and even learned men, if their attention has never chanced to be specially directed to this subject, continually allow themselves to use such loose expressions as ‘ *The Douay Bible*’—or ‘ *The Rhe-mish Testament* ;’ and occasionally they make quotations from them

under those titles only ; as if they believed that all the copies of Holy Scripture, now circulating among Roman Catholics in England and Ireland, represented one and the same *Text*, and were accompanied by one and the same body of *Notes*.

I wish to remove that misconception, and to shew how wide any such notion is from the truth ; by laying before the public, as fully as the nature of my materials will permit, the actual condition of the great bulk of Roman Catholics in this empire in respect to their possession of a Bible ; and pointing out the material differences which exist between one edition and another—not only among the more ancient ones, which are now only found in few hands, but also among those which are in circulation at this day.

Possibly I may be blamed for fixing the commencement of these inquiries at so late a period as the year 1582 ; and may be reminded that, even at the time of the Reformation, several parts of Scripture, turned into English by Roman Catholics, were in existence and use : such as, selected portions of the Gospels, the Penitential Psalms, &c. But we need not attribute much weight to that statement, if meant for an argument to prove that the Holy Scriptures were then in general use among the people ; when we call to mind the bitterness with which the Bishops opposed *all* English versions, during the reign of king Henry VIII. and hunted down their authors, and punished them most cruelly whenever they fell into their hands. It is certain, that the first endeavour—such as it was—which Roman Catholic Divines made to provide the masses of their countrymen with an English version of the Word of God, must be assigned to the year in which the *Testament of Rhemes* was issued : and that volume, together with the *Douay Bible* of 1609, has formed the basis upon which all subsequent editions for general use have been constructed.

With respect to the execution of the work here offered to the public ;—although I am quite conscious that it is very far from being complete, it would be affectation to deny that it contains a large amount of information, to which the great body of the public has hitherto been a stranger. Before I began to make minute inquiries into this subject, I had no idea that the deficiency of acquaintance with its details was so general ; not only among Protestants, but Roman Catholics also, both Lay and Clerical. I have been obliged

to dig and ferret out particulars, one by one, from numerous obscure nooks and corners; and to connect the scattered particles with each other, in the best way I could, as opportunities offered. A proof of this will be seen in the work itself: where the descriptions of some important editions are thrown, out of their proper places, into the *Addenda* at the close of the volume; because I was unable to obtain a sight or any account of them, until after the previous sheets had been printed off.

From the result of all those researches, I feel that I am warranted in believing that there are few among my readers, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, to whom some portions of this book will not be new: such as, for instance, the account of the curious and important proceedings of the *Roman Catholic Bible Society*, about forty years ago—the very name and existence of which Society are unknown to nineteen persons out of twenty at this day. I trust, that the short accounts, of that and other such transactions, which I have occasionally given, will not be considered wholly devoid of interest, in the present state of the public mind upon great Religious questions. But, of course, their value must depend entirely on the faithfulness and accuracy of the statements.

My task, I repeat, has been, to collect *materials* for future use: to lay down a *foundation*, upon which others may build with safety, if ever they wish to discuss any such points as the following: viz.

1. Whether there is in existence at this moment any authorized standard Text of the Roman Catholic English Bible; or any such thing as an uniform interpretation of it?
2. Whether the several Editors have taken all necessary care, in so solemn and important a matter as the preparation of editions of Holy Scripture for the instruction of their flocks?
3. Whether the want of a New Version has not been long and loudly complained of by Roman Catholics, both Priests and Laymen: yet no steps have been taken by those in authority to provide a remedy for that want; but on the contrary, the individual efforts of learned men, such as Dr. Lingard and Bishop Kenrick, to remove the objection, have been but coldly received and virtually discouraged?
4. How far any recent edition is characterized by a more just criticism, and a more liberal and charitable spirit, than its predecessors?

5. Whether the formal '*Approbation*' of a Bishop, prefixed to an edition, conveys any real guarantee that the Translation in that edition is exact, and the Annotations sound and orthodox?
6. Whether each new version and new set of notes is not in fact *an exercise of private judgment*; and that on one of the highest and most momentous questions, the interpretation of God's Sacred Word?
7. Whether there is not a larger number of Bibles and Testaments circulating among the Roman Catholics of England and Ireland *now*, than at any former period? and how much of this is due to the exhortations of the present chief Authorities of their church, in either island?

No one can doubt the high importance of these questions, and others of the like kind, which are continually presenting themselves to men's minds: and it is plain that they cannot be fully examined and satisfactorily solved, without correct information as to the *facts* upon which the discussion of them must be founded.

I cannot close these few remarks without adding, that I beg to offer my cordial thanks to those kind friends, of every class and creed, who have supplied me with books or information; and the same also to that far greater number, who would willingly have rendered help but were unable to do so.—Let me hope that this first effort of its kind will be favourably received; that it will lead to further inquiries by abler hands; and may pave the way to future investigations on the great subject of the Study of Scripture; which, if they are carried on in a charitable and Christian spirit, will materially promote the Sacred cause of Truth.

H. C.

Thurles, Co. Tipperary, 23d Feb. 1855.