

Chapter VII

THE GREAT BIBLE OF 1539

CROMWELL, as we have seen, was successful in obtaining the licence of Henry VIII. for the circulation of the 1537 Bible. It is surprising that he was able to do so, when we bear in mind the fact that, although Rogers had toned down many of Tindale's references to the Romish Church, some still remained, and the noted Prologue to the Romans, a treatise that had been openly condemned and prohibited, was printed by Rogers in full. But even if he were ignorant of these facts when he laid the book before the king, Cromwell soon became acquainted with them and their probable influence. This affords at any rate a reasonable explanation of the way in which he pushed forward the Bible of 1539. Possibly because the 1,500 copies of Matthew's Bible were quickly sold, but more probably from fear that the facts of the case should come to the king's ears, or that they might lead to serious trouble, Cromwell determined to have an edition of the Bible free

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from these objections. To this end he appears to have enlisted Coverdale's services, practically as editor, for a series of letters are extant relating to the matter, written by Coverdale to his patron, Thomas Cromwell.

Permission to print this Bible was obtained from the French king, and the work was nearly completed at the Royal Press, in Paris, which was then famous for the style of its work; and yet, notwithstanding Cromwell's influence—he then being at his zenith—the enemies of the English Bible were able to get a decree empowering them to suppress and seize the work. Prior to this, and largely by the aid of Bishop Bonner, then ambassador at Paris, after the printing had been stopped, a large portion of the printed sheets had been sent to London. A quantity of the printed sheets that had been seized and sold by the officer of the Inquisition were afterwards re-purchased; and finally, Cromwell, determined not to be beaten, empowered Coverdale and Grafton, the London printer who had gone over specially to assist Coverdale, and who had a large financial risk in the enterprise, to bring over to London suitable presses, types, and workmen. This happened at the close of 1538, and by April, 1539, the needful printing in London was finished, and the book was complete. Henry VIII. issued a declaration 'to be read by all curates upon the publishing of the Bible in English,' enforcing the duty and

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right method of reading and studying the volume. Cromwell, as vicar-general, enjoined upon every incumbent 'that one book of the whole Bible of the largest volume in English, should be set up in some convenient place within the church,' the cost to be shared by pastor and parishioners



THOMAS CROMWELL.

and urged them to 'expressly provoke, stir, and exhort every person to read the same.'

While some of the descriptions of the eagerness with which the English Bible was welcomed and perused by the people generally may be too highly coloured, there is no doubt that it was eagerly welcomed by many, and that the reading,

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marking, learning, and inwardly digesting the Word of God—revealed for the first time to the rank and file of English men and women by Tindale's Testaments and Pentateuch, and by the Bibles of 1535, 1537, and 1539—developed the true force that brought about the English Reformation. A document published in 1539 states:—

‘Englishmen have now in hand in every church and place, and almost every man, the Holy Bible and New Testament in their mother tongue, instead of the old fabulous and fantastical books of the *Table Round*, *Lancelot du Lac*, etc., and such other, whose impure filth and vain fabulosity the light of God has abolished utterly.’

Strype, in his *Life of Cranmer*, says:—

‘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 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.’

This large folio, known as the Great Bible, is not inaptly styled ‘the whole Bible of the largest

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volume in English,' inasmuch as the page of type measures $13\frac{1}{4}$ by $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches. In it also appears for the first time the celebrated engraved title-page which is attributed to Holbein, and which enshrines a long chapter of contemporary history and thought. It occupies the whole page, with the exception of a small space in the centre for the printed title. At the top, the Saviour is represented in the clouds of heaven, and two labels contain His words in the Latin of the Vulgate—that on the left, 'So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please'; that on the right, 'I have found a man after Mine own heart, which shall fulfil all My will.' This latter is directed towards the king, who has laid aside his crown, and is kneeling, repeating Psalm cxix. 105: 'Thy word is a lamp to my feet.' This occupies about two inches of the top portion of the engraving, extending over its whole breadth. In the centre, directly beneath the figure of the Saviour, is another representation of Henry VIII. He is seated on his throne, with the royal arms and motto beneath his feet. With his right hand he is giving the Word of God to Cranmer, behind whom stand the bishops, with the words of 1 Tim. iv. 11: 'These things command and teach'; and with his left hand he is presenting a similar volume to Cromwell, behind whom stand the nobles, with the words of Deut. i.

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16, 17: 'Judge righteously . . . ye shall hear the small as well as the great.' Lower still, on the right hand of the central printed title, Cromwell is pictured again, his coat-of-arms at his feet, giving the book to laymen, with the words of Psalm xxxiv. 14: 'Depart from evil, and do good: seek peace, and pursue it.' On the left side stands Cranmer, with the mitre on his brow, and his coat-of-arms at his feet, giving the book to the clergy and saying, 'Feed the flock of God which is among you.' The whole of the lower third of the engraving is filled with figures representative of the life of the time. A preacher is expounding 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2. Around him is seated a company of men and women, exactly like the assemblies at St. Paul's Cross depicted in early engravings, crying out, *Vivat Rex!* and 'God save the king!' In the right hand lower corner, men and women, children, and even prisoners, are represented as uttering the same cries. The whole picture, in short, whether the work of Holbein or not, is a true reflex of the feelings and opinions of the time, and not only indicates the general thanksgiving for the boon of the pure Word of God, but also immortalises the two men to whom the English nation is much more deeply indebted than it has always realised—Thomas Cromwell and Archbishop Cranmer.

The centre of this elaborate wood engraving contains the following letterpress: 'The Bible in



FIRST TITLE-PAGE, GREAT BIBLE, 1539.

(Size of woodblock, 13½ by 9½ inches.)

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English that is to say the content of all the Holy Scripture both of the Old and New Testament truly translated after the verity of the Hebrew and Greek texts by the diligent study of divers excellent learned men expert in the foresaid tongues.' The colophon runs, 'The end of the New Testament and of the whole Bible, finished in April, Anno. M.CCCC.XXXIX., *a Domino factum est istud.*' Including the title there are six preliminary leaves, and the text is in five sections, Genesis to Deuteronomy, 84 leaves; Joshua to Job, separate title, 122 leaves; Psalms to Malachi, separate title, 133 leaves; Hagiographa, separate title in same border as first, 79 leaves; New Testament, separate title, 103 leaves.

The Great Bible of 1539 was followed by no less than *six* editions of practically the same book, issued in the brief space of time comprised between April, 1540, and December, 1541. These were printed in this rapid succession in order to meet the demand for the copies that had to be placed in the churches, and also to satisfy the general desire for them, so clearly indicated by the extracts given above. It has been calculated that no less than twenty thousand of these great folios were thus issued. These six editions are commonly described as Cranmer's Bible, not because he had any active share in the translation, but because he wrote an admirable introduction which is prefixed to them all, entitled, 'A Prologue

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or Preface made by the most reverend father in God, Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, Metropolitan and Primate of England.' This is a most characteristic production, exhibiting many of Cranmer's strong points, illustrating the spirit of the time, and worth the careful study of every student of the English Bible.

We have space for only the opening sentences:—

'For two sundry sorts of people, it seemeth much necessary that something in the entry of this book, by the way of a preface or prologue, whereby hereafter it may be both the better accepted of them, which hitherto could not well bear it; and also the better used of them which heretofore have misused it. For truly some there are that be too slow and need of the spur; some others seem too quick and need more of the bridle. Some lose their game by short shooting, some by over shooting. Some walk too much on the left hand, some too much on the right. In the former sort be all they who refuse to read, or to hear read, the Scripture in the vulgar tongue, much worse they that also let (hinder) or discourage the others from the reading or hearing thereof. In the latter sort be they which by their inordinate reading, indiscreet speaking, contentions, disputing, or otherwise, by their licentious living, slander or hinder the Word of God most of all other, whereof they would seem to be greatest furtherers. These two sorts, albeit they be most far unlike each other, yet they both deserve in effect like reproach. Neither can I well tell whether of them I may judge the more offender, him that doth

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obstinately refuse so godly and goodly knowledge ; or him that so ungodly and so ungodly doth abuse the same. And as touching the former I would marvel much that any man should be so mad as to refuse in darkness light, in hunger food, in cold fire, for the Word of God is light, "Thy Word is a lamp to my feet"; food, "Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word of God"; fire, "I came to send fire on the earth, and what will I if it be already kindled?" I would marvel, I say, at this, save that I consider how much custom and usage may do. So that if there were a people, as some write, which never saw the sun by reason that they be situated far toward the North Pole, and be inclosed and overshadowed with high mountains, it is credible and like enough that if by the power and will of God, the mountains should sink down, and give place, that the light of the sun might have entrance to them, some of them would be offended therewith.'

In the 1539 Bible the engraved title-page already described stands as the first title, and also before the Apocrypha ; in the six Cranmer Bibles it stands as both Old Testament and New Testament title. Cromwell was executed in July, 1540, and in the editions issued subsequent to that date the circle occupied by his coat-of-arms is left a blank.

The English printers, Grafton and Whitchurch, undertook the issue of the 1539 and six subsequent editions of this Bible, assisted by a wealthy citizen named Anthony Marler. The fixed price was twelve shillings bound, and ten

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shillings unbound. These sums represent in the money of to-day about £9 and £7 10s. respectively. Church records show that copies were sometimes sold at a lower figure—*e.g.*, at Ashburton there is the following entry: 'A.D. 1540-1. Paid vs. iiiid. for a new booke called a Bybyll. Paid viiid. for a chaine for fastenyng the saide booke.' Assuming this to be a bound copy, it cost less than half what the printers were authorised to charge.

Many interesting questions arise in connection with the text of these seven editions. There is now no room for doubt that Coverdale took the text of Matthew's Bible as the basis, and that his chief guide in the revision, the one to whom he owed most, was a new Latin version of the Old Testament, with the Hebrew Text, and a commentary taken mainly from Hebrew sources by Sebastian Münster, published in 1534-35. To this source may be traced nearly all the alterations introduced into Genesis to 2 Chronicles. That part of the Old Testament which was more especially Coverdale's work, *viz.*, Ezra to Malachi, exhibits much the larger number of alterations. The revision of the New Testament was the result chiefly of a more careful study of the Vulgate and of the Latin version of Erasmus. To the influence of the Vulgate were due such insertions as 'that *ye may rejoice, and that your joy may be full,*' in 1 John i. 4; and '*He that knowledgeth the Son*

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hath the Father also, ii. 23; but these, like the interpolation I John v. 7, are printed in smaller type, to mark their Latin origin. To the same source may be traced that very unfortunate rendering in John x. 16, 'one *fold*' instead of 'one flock.' A further revision of the text also took place between the publication of the 1539 Bible and the editions of April and November, 1540. For example, in the former, James i. 13 reads, 'For God cannot tempt unto evil, because He tempteth no man'; in the 1540 Bibles it stands, 'For as God cannot be tempted with evil, so neither He Himself tempteth any man,' a change due to the version of Erasmus.

The Book of Psalms, as it stands in the Great Bible, is of very special interest, since it is the translation which passed into the Prayer Book in Edward VI.'s time, and amid all subsequent changes and revisions has there maintained its ground. When the Prayer Book was last revised, so far back as 1662, the direction was given that the other lessons were to be taken from the Authorised Version, but the Psalms were not to be altered. The phraseology of Coverdale's version had become too familiar by long use to allow of alteration, and choirs found it, or thought they did, smoother and easier to sing. As elsewhere, in the Psalms insertions from the Vulgate are marked by being printed in smaller type in the 1539 Bible. Unfortunately this is not done in the Prayer Book, and few who use the latter are aware

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that it contains many whole sentences and phrases that form no part of the true text of the Psalms. Compare, for instance, Psalm xiv. in the Prayer Book and Authorised Version, and in the former three whole verses, and parts of two others, will be found which do not stand in the latter.

This series of seven large folio editions of the Bible came into existence at one of the most critical periods of English history; in their production and circulation were associated a group of very notable and very able men; and now the ambition of great collectors—a very difficult and costly one—is to secure fine and perfect copies of each, such as may be seen either at the British Museum, or at the library of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

From both the bibliographical and the textual points of view, the Great Bible and the six subsequent editions present difficult problems. No subsequent edition is an exact reprint of the 1539, and all alike exhibit indications of careful editorial revision. That published in April, 1540, was further revised by Coverdale; those of November, 1540, and of May, 1541 are nearer the 1539 text. Upon the title-page of the editions of November, 1540 and 1541, appear the words, 'overseen and perused at the commandment of the King's Highness by the right reverend fathers in God, Cuthbert, Bishop of Durham, and Nicolas, Bishop of Rochester.' There is no doubt, further, that each of these seven editions was set up in type

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independently; and yet they are so much alike that it is very common indeed to find copies of one edition containing leaves which belong to another. But those who wish to pursue this subject must consult the late Francis Fry's elaborate book, *A Description of the Great Bible*, folio, 1865.

Accession of
Edward VI.

The close of the reign of Henry VIII. was stormy and reactionary, and after the last edition of the Great Bible in December, 1541, no further editions were printed until Henry's death. Controversy was raging throughout the country. The Word of God in English was accessible to almost every one, and bitter Romanist antagonism had been stirred up by the reading of the Bible, and the suppression of the monasteries. Henry himself grew more and more arbitrary and tyrannical, while the Act of Supremacy on the one hand, and the Statute of the Six Articles on the other, brought both Roman Catholics and Protestants under the charge of treason and the penalty of death. With the accession of Edward VI. a better state of things began, and at once gave new influence and force to Cranmer and the Protestant party. The change immediately reacted upon Bible circulation. According to Dr. Eadie (*The English Bible*, vol. i. p. 423), 'In the reign of Edward numerous editions of former versions were published, amounting to thirty-five editions of the New Testament, and thirteen of the whole Bible.' None of these exerted any special influ-

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ence upon the English text, but they all helped to familiarise the mind of the common people with the words and promises and spirit of Scripture, and thus laid the foundation of the true English Reformation. Neither Henry's politic break with Rome, nor the fact that nobles, and prelates, and statesmen, tried to play with the spirit of reform, and to direct it for their own selfish and often base ends, enabled the nation to resist the reaction under Mary. The force which resisted all her passion, and craft, and power, mercilessly employed to thrust the nation's neck once more beneath the cruel yoke of Rome, was the knowledge of Scripture, and the belief in its saving power, which had sunk so deeply into the hearts of multitudes of her subjects. The reign of Edward had been a seedtime, the harvest was the noble army of martyrs, rich and poor, high and lowly, educated and illiterate, who chose to die rather than bow the knee again to the Pope of Rome.

It would be beside the purpose of this little book to do more than mention a few of these editions. In 1549, there were issued three *folio* Bibles; an exact reprint of Matthew's 1537, by Raynalde and Hyll, a book which has the distinction of being the worst printed of all the early English Bibles; an edition of Matthew's, revised by Edmund Becke, and printed by Day & Seres; and an edition of Cranmer's Bible, printed by Edmund Whitchurch. In 1550, there appeared a quarto volume—a new edition of Coverdale's (1535)

Editions of
Bible, 1547-
1553.

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Bible, which had been printed by Froschover, at Zurich, and which was re-issued in London with preliminary leaves, printed in England, first by Andrew Hester, and then in 1553, by Richard Jugge.

Editions of
New Testa-
ment, 1547-
1553.

Of the New Testaments issued between 1547 and 1553 we can mention only a few. Mr. Fry in his most valuable book, *The Editions of the New Testament, Tyndale's Version, 1525 to 1566*, describes no less than fifteen editions, printed in England. Of these, the most noteworthy are William Powell's quarto (1548), containing also the Latin version of Erasmus; one in octavo, printed by Thomas Gaultier, also with the Latin of Erasmus (1550); and the three handsome quarto editions, with many woodcuts, printed by Richard Jugge in 1552 and 1553. Upon the reverse of the title of the first of these editions is printed a royal warrant authorising the edition, and stating, 'Upon due examination of his (Richard Jugge's) charges and expenses we have estimated that the price of twenty-and-twopence for every book in papers (sheets) and unbound is a reasonable and convenient price for the same according. At Greenwich the X. of June, M.D.LII.' Reckoning money as fifteen times more valuable then than now, Jugge sold his Testaments unbound for twenty-seven shillings and sixpence.

The Marian
Persecution.

The reign of Mary Tudor was a season of reaction, and in her determined but fruitless effort

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to restore the Papacy in England, unrelenting war was waged against the English Bible. But the nation which had become permeated with the spirit of Tindale, and which had read and re-read and deeply studied the New Testament, nobly vindicated his expectation. He had been moved to translate the New Testament 'because,' to use his own words, 'I had perceived by experience how that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth except the Scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue.' This he had done, and in doing it he had raised up a barrier against which all the might and all the fanaticism of Mary Tudor and Reginald Pole were powerless.

Fascinating from this point of view as the details of Mary's reign are, we linger only upon one incident. As noted above, there is no reason to doubt what has been the steady tradition since 1536, that John Rogers as Tindale's literary executor saw through the press the splendid Bible of 1537. Eighteen years later, he was to pay dearly for his courage, and for the steadfastness with which he clung to the simple truth of Scripture. In 1548 he returned to England, after years of exile. On May 10, 1550, he became Vicar of St. Sepulchre's Church, the handsome building standing at the Newgate Street end of Holborn Viaduct, and known to the last and to this generation as the church which tolled for the executions in Newgate. On August 24, 1551, he became a

Rogers'
Martyrdom.

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prebendary of St. Paul's along with Grindal, afterward Archbishop of Canterbury, and Bradford, who, like himself, was a victim in the Marian persecution. He also held for a brief season a lectureship in divinity at St. Paul's. Life brings about strange changes, and among his fellow prebendaries was a certain Gabriel Dunne or Donne, infamous in history as having been concerned in the plot which led to Tindale's betrayal. Rogers, as one of the foremost popular champions of Reformed doctrine, was among the very first to feel the force of the Romanist reaction. Ordered in August, 1553, to keep to his house, he was next sent to Newgate under a gaoler, whom Foxe describes, his name being Alexander Andrew, as 'a right Alexander, a coppersmith indeed.' His trial is fully detailed in Foxe, and should be read by every one desiring to gain a correct idea of what the reformers taught, and what the Romish bishops of the sixteenth century condemned. From the chancellor, Stephen Gardiner, no mercy could be expected. He was finally condemned, together with Bishop Hooper, in the Lady Chapel of St. Saviour's, Southwark, an ancient part of that building, very much the same in appearance now as when Rogers defended himself there; and on February 4, 1555, in the presence of an immense concourse of onlookers, he was burnt in Smithfield—the first of the Marian martyrs.