

## CHAPTER IV

### THE COMPLUTENSIAN POLYGLOT BIBLE

[1502-1517]

XIMENES earned the undying fame of posterity as one of the most liberal benefactors and patrons of learning. It was after his appointment to the See of Toledo that he found himself in a position to gratify his love of letters, and to extend to others those facilities for acquiring learning, the limited opportunities for which he had himself made such good use of in his early life.

The revenues of his high office were fortunately enormous. At the close of the fifteenth century they exceeded 80,000 ducats, while it is said the gross amount reached to as much as 180,000.

He determined to devote the greater portion of this official income to the foundation of a school of Arts and Sciences which should be unrivalled among any similar institutions of the time. His mind, no doubt, had often turned to Alcalá, the little town where first he went to school.

Alcalá de Henares, "the castle on the river," the site of an old Arab fort, had for long been portion of the property belonging to the Episcopal See of Toledo. Its old Roman name of Complutum was given to it because it was the confluence, or meeting-place, of two rivers.

## COMPLUTENSIAN POLYGLOT BIBLE 25

It is interesting to note in passing that it was the birthplace of Queen Catherine of Aragon, the first wife of Henry VIII., and also of Cervantes.

It was here that Ximenes decided to found his University. Plans were prepared by Pedro Gumiel, a famous contemporary architect, and in 1500 Ximenes laid the foundation-stone of the first College of San Ildéfonso. In 1508 the first students took up their residence, and signal marks of royal and papal favour ensured its success from the beginning. The professors, forty-two in number, were men of the highest standing and undoubted scholarship. There were eight chairs of philosophy, six each for theology, canon law and grammar, and four each for medicine, Hebrew, Greek and rhetoric, besides chairs of anatomy, surgery, mathematics and moral philosophy.

Ximenes endowed the University with a revenue of 14,000 ducats, and we are told that by the end of the first year there were no fewer than three thousand students.

Ferdinand paid a visit to the University in 1514, and at a later date Francis I. of France, upon visiting Alcalá, is reported to have said: "The University of Paris, the pride of my kingdom, is the work of many Sovereigns, but your Ximenes alone has founded one like it." (*Vide* Plate, No. II.)

It was in congenial surroundings such as these that Ximenes found time to crown his career by his edition of the Bible known as the Complutensian Polyglot.

A word or two is necessary as to the state of the text of the Bible at this period. The invention of printing was barely half a century old. As a matter of fact, the first book printed in Spain is dated 1474. The old manuscript

copies of the Vulgate had become corrupted, and no printed text of the New Testament in its original language existed. As far as the Old Testament was concerned, it had been comparatively recently, viz., in 1488, that the first Hebrew version had been published at Soncino.

One of the obvious reasons why the Scriptures of the Old Testament had been printed in the original Hebrew earlier than the New Testament in Greek, was the fact that the Jews were resident all over Europe, and, being a numerous and wealthy people, they were able to command the money and skill necessary for the purpose.

The Greeks, on the other hand, were in an entirely different position. Turned out of Constantinople when it was captured by the Turks in 1453, a date practically identical with that of the invention of printing, they had neither the time nor the means to expend on the publication and distribution of printed copies of the New Testament in their own language. Most of the Greek exiles competent for such a task had been copyists or scribes, and no doubt innate conservatism encouraged them to ignore the new invention. In addition, there was a practical difficulty, that any Greek type that existed was of a remarkably clumsy and ineffective variety.

Under such circumstances the ignorance of the clergy on the subject of the sacred text was stupendous, and the necessity for some better provision being made in this respect must have been obvious to a man of the stamp of Ximenes. His views are well expressed in the following extract from his Preface to the Polyglot :

“ No translation can fully and exactly represent the sense of the original, at least in that language in which our

Saviour himself spoke. The MSS. of the Latin Vulgate differ so much one from another that one cannot help suspecting some alterations must have been made, principally through the ignorance and negligence of the copyists. It is necessary, therefore (as St Jerome and St Augustine desired), that we should go back to the origin of the sacred writings, and correct the books of the Old Testament by the Hebrew text, and those of the New Testament by the Greek text.

“ Every theologian should also be able to drink of that water which springeth up to eternal life, at the fountain-head itself. This is the reason, therefore, why we have ordered the Bible to be printed in the original language with different translations. . . . To accomplish this task we have been obliged to have recourse to the knowledge of the most able philologists, and to make researches in every direction for the best and most ancient Hebrew and Greek MSS. Our object is to revive the hitherto dormant study of the sacred Scriptures.”

Ximenes assumed responsibility for the general supervision of the book, but he was careful to secure the best available editorial assistance.

The chief members of his staff were Diego Lopez de Zuniga, commonly known as Stunica, whose controversy with Erasmus over his editorial duties will later on be alluded to, Antonio de Lebrija, Demetrius Ducas of Crete, who had been invited by Ximenes to occupy the Greek chair at Alcalá, Nunez de Guzman, another Alcalá professor, and three converted Jews, learned Hebraists, Alphonso, a doctor at Alcalá, Paul Coronel, a professor of theology at Salamanca, and Alphonso de Zámora, to whom

was entrusted the Grammar and Hebrew Dictionary which forms one of the volumes.

The book has been often described, the best and most recent account being found in the Historical Catalogue of Printed Bibles, issued by the British and Foreign Bible Society and edited by Mr Darlow and Dr Moule. The writer has used their description in collating his own and other copies of the book, and can pay tribute to the care and pains which characterise the whole of their most valuable catalogue.

The Polyglot consists of six folio volumes, and, commenced in 1502 in honour of the Prince who afterwards became the Emperor Charles V., was printed at Alcalá between the years 1514 and 1517.

The New Testament first appeared, its colophon being dated 10th January 1514. The next volume in chronological order is the Hebrew and Chaldaic Vocabulary of the Old Testament, the colophon to the Hebrew portion being dated 17th March 1514, and the Chaldean, 31st May 1514.

The four volumes of the Old Testament followed, the colophon in the last Old Testament volume being dated 10th July 1517—almost exactly four months prior to the death of Ximenes, which took place on the 8th November in that year.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew appears in the outside column, with Hebrew roots in the margin. The Latin Vulgate is in the middle and the Greek Septuagint (interlined with a Latin translation) in the inside column. The Pentateuch has in addition the Chaldee paraphrase (in Hebrew characters) at the foot of the page and the Chaldee roots in the margin. (*Vide* Plate, No. III.)