

ARTICLE VI.

LUTHER AS A BIBLE TRANSLATOR.

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY JAMES F. MORTON, A. M.

THE German Bible may be called the greatest and noblest of the precious gifts which God gave to the German people through Dr. Martin Luther. With good reason it has been asked, If among the blessings of the Reformation this one had been lacking, in what condition would the others have been left?

It is especially fitting, after all that has been said of Luther's other labors, that the people should be reminded of the great, imperishable treasure which they possess in the Bible which he bequeathed them. Before proceeding with my theme I would call attention to a writing which every evangelical theologian should read in studying Luther's life, but which is neither so well known nor so highly esteemed as it should be—I refer to the work of Dr. Georg Wilhelm Hopf, entitled, "An Estimate of Luther's Translation of the Bible into German, with reference both to earlier and more recent translations."

I may presuppose as well known in its outline and many of its details the history of the origin of Luther's Bible from the fruit of his involuntary leisure in the Wartburg, the New Testament of 1522, to the first complete Bible of 1534, and further to the last edition of 1545; and it is not my purpose on this occasion to enter into the particulars of that history. But it would not be according to Luther's wish if we were to speak of his services as a translator of the Bible without making mention of his faithful helpers. As early as January 13, 1522, he wrote from the

Wartburg to Amsdorf of his purpose: "It is a great work; and one in which we should all labor, for it pertains to the highest welfare of all;" and again, "I shall not be able to touch the Old Testament if you do not lay hold and help me." In his table talk he says of Jerome: "It would have been an advantage if, in his work of translating, he had associated with himself one or two learned men; the Holy Spirit would have given him clearer insight according to the promise of Christ: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' And an interpreter or translator should not be alone, for good and suitable words do not always occur to one person." In the preface to the Old Testament of 1523 he says: "In short, if we should all work together we would all have enough to do to bring the Bible to the light, some working upon the thought, others upon the language. For in this I have not worked alone, but have used every one whom I could obtain."

Melancthon especially was his faithful helper from the beginning. He reviewed Luther's work at the Wartburg before it went to press, and in respect to the antiquities, such as the coins and measures mentioned in the New Testament, he consulted with friendly scholars, particularly Joachim Camerarius, and the physician of Erfurt, Georg Stürz, and he helped Luther give the finishing touches to the whole New Testament. The impatience with which Luther hastened the publication appears not to have left him sufficient time for this work. At all events, there remained a large number of minor inaccuracies, little affecting the sense, in the restoration of the Greek text wherever the Latin corresponded closely with this, and these were not corrected till the fundamental revision of the New Testament, the results of which were contained in the greatly improved edition of 1530. This revision was also the common work of Luther and Melancthon; and the corrections were, in all probability, for the most part the work of the latter. Luther likewise published none of the canonical or

apocryphal writings of the Old Testament before Philip had reviewed his translation; and his help seemed to him so necessary that he suspended work on the prophets while Melancthon, on account of his attendance at the second Reichstag in Speier (1529), was prevented from assisting.

That the translation of the two Maccabees is not, as a whole, the work of Luther, but proceeded from Melancthon, is a mistake for which Chytræus is responsible. Luther requested by letter the counsel and assistance of Spalatin in respect to special German expressions, among which were the names of precious stones and of beasts. His chief helpers in ascertaining the original text of the Old Testament were, with Melancthon, Aurogallus, who, at his proposal, was called to Wittenberg as teacher of Hebrew, and in the translation of the prophets as well as in natural science, the accomplished Hebraist, Casper Cruciger, who had received an appointment to Wittenberg in 1528. These Hebraists aided him especially by a comparison of the so-called Chaldee paraphrases and rabbinical commentaries; for Luther's knowledge of these—as his "enarrationes in Genesin" show—was only second hand, almost wholly derived from Nicholas Lira, though occasionally from Jerome and St. Pagninus. Finally, it is known from Mathesius, that the fundamental revision of the translation of the whole Bible, which Luther began in 1539, and the results of which appeared in 1541, was carried forward in weekly conferences of an assembly which Luther called "a sanhedrin of the best men then living;" regular members of this sanhedrin, besides Melancthon, were Cruciger, and Aurogallus, who were especially intrusted with the Latin Bible. Dr. Johann Bugenhagen, Justus Jonas, and the corrector of the Lufft printing-house, Georg Röhrer, and now and then scholars from a distance took part in the deliberations, in particular Dr. Bernhardt Ziegler, of Leipsic, who often gave a wrong impulse to Luther's tendency to a christologizing exegesis, and Dr. Johann Forster, who about this time was appointed to Tübingen, whose opinion