

THE ROYAL "INJUNCTIONS" OF 1538  
AND  
THE "GREAT BIBLE," 1539-1541.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE years 1538 and 1539 mark the four hundredth anniversaries of two of the most memorable events in the history of our English Bible.

The first was the publication in September-October, 1538,<sup>1</sup> of the second set of Injunctions drawn up by Thomas, Lord Cromwell, Lord privy seal, and Vice-gerent to the King for all his jurisdictions ecclesiastical within the realm; and issued by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, under the authority of King Henry VIII, to the archdeacons of the province and their officials, in other words, to the clergy, requiring them to provide on this side the feast —<sup>2</sup> next coming, one book of the whole Bible of the largest volume, in English, to be set up in some convenient place within the church of which they had cure, so that their parishioners might most commodiously resort to the same and read it.

This set of Injunctions was followed in April of the following year (1539) by the publication of the "Great Bible" (the Bible of the largest volume), which together with the publication of the Injunctions, formed one of the most important epochs in the history of the Reformation in England.

Considerable attention is being directed in the press and elsewhere to these events, and it will not be out of place in these pages briefly to retrace the principal steps which led up to this great undertaking.

In the five years which followed the publication of Tindale's

<sup>1</sup> Gee and Harding, *Documents*, p. 275; and Wilkins, *Concilia*, iii, p. 815.

<sup>2</sup> Although Gee and Harding, and other authorities insert "Easter" in the space left open for the insertion of the Feast, Wilkins leaves it blank.

Revised New Testament of 1534, no fewer than four complete Bibles in English were placed within reach of the people of England: Coverdale's in 1535; the "Thomas Matthew Bible" in 1537; Taverner's in 1539, and the "Great Bible" also in 1539.

Each was the outcome of an effort to give to the English people a true account of the Word of God, on which so many current dogmas and practices in those days were said by churchmen to be founded. Each was the work of a reformer. Each was a material contribution to the Reformation, and between them they had made the Reformation in England complete.

But while each of these Bibles has for us a special interest, the "Great Bible" has most, since it was the culmination of all the work in English Bible-making that had been going on from the day when Tindale set about his translation of the New Testament.

The story of the translation of the Bible into English, and of its circulation by means of the printing press is one of the most heroic and fascinating chapters in our history.

The Bible for the English-speaking nations was largely the work of one heroic, simple-minded, scholarly man, William Tindale. He was followed by an army of workers, who devoted labour, thought, and scholarship to the improvement of his translation, but in justice to him, it must be said, they have done little more than polish up and improve his work.

It is true that we now know much more accurately than was possible in 1520 to 1525 what is the true text of the New Testament, for scholarship has developed in a multitude of ways. Nevertheless, it was given to William Tindale, under God's grace, to be the first great worker. He entered deeply into the abiding spirit of the Bible by close study and intimate knowledge of the original Greek and Hebrew texts before he began to translate. He sought to render the Bible into English that his fellow-countrymen might rejoice in the same liberty and salvation which Jesus Christ had revealed to him.

In this work the fact that king and church and all in authority were against him only made him the more determined to accomplish it at all costs, and we know at what supreme cost he carried out his self-imposed task.

The story of the birth and early years of William Tindale is involved in obscurity, and equally obscure is the story of the early life of Miles Coverdale, the next translator, to whom we are indebted for the first entire Bible to be printed in the English language, and who was also largely responsible for the production of the "Great Bible"

Miles Coverdale was born in 1488, and it is assumed that his surname is derived from the district of his birth, "Coverdale," in what is called Richmondshire, in the North Riding, so that, like Wiclif, he was a native of Yorkshire. (Plate 2.)

From childhood, like his great contemporary, Tindale, he was devoted to learning, and at an early age was sent to Cambridge, where he studied philosophy and theology. In 1514 he was admitted to priest's orders at Norwich, and entered the monastery of the Austin Friars at Cambridge, where he fell under the influence of Robert Barnes, well known in the early records of the Reformation.

Meetings of those who inclined to Protestantism were frequently held at a house in Cambridge near St. John's, called the "White Horse," derisively known as "Germany," because of the Lutheran opinions held there. Here Coverdale met many kindred spirits from the neighbouring colleges.

He also had acquaintances among the highest in the land and was a visitor at the house of Sir Thomas More, where he made a powerful friend in the person of Thomas Cromwell, then one of the dependents of Cardinal Wolsey, and afterwards his successor in the king's favour.

Meanwhile the way had been prepared for Coverdale's great work by the publication of the Greek New Testament of Erasmus, in 1516, containing the first published Greek text and a new Latin translation in parallel columns, one of the most important events in the progress of letters. When it appeared in Cambridge it was immediately proscribed by a number of the leading scholars of the day, and one college forbade it to be brought within its walls. Yet the book they condemned was the very instrument by which God intended to promote His own designs.

One student, having procured a copy of the Testament, was

so affected by it that it produced in him a great moral change. This was none other than Thomas Bilney, "Little Bilney," as he was called, Fellow of Trinity Hall, the future martyr of 1531, whose preaching was followed by great and powerful results, for, among others, Hugh Latimer and Robert Barnes owed their conversion to him.

Barnes, after proceeding through the schools at Cambridge, had entered the monastery of Austin Friars in 1514. Having then gone to Louvain, where he took the degree of Doctor of Theology, he was, upon his return in 1523, made prior and master of the monastery, and became one of the great restorers of learning at Cambridge. He had already introduced the study of the classics and was reading Terence, Plautus, and Cicero, but being brought to the knowledge of the truth, through Bilney, he proceeded to read openly with his scholars the Epistles of St. Paul.

Some time before this, Latimer, who also had been enlightened through Bilney's preaching, was proclaiming the truth with great decision and effect. Whether Latimer was actually in expectation of Tindale's New Testament does not appear, but he was powerfully preparing the way for it, by frequently dwelling upon the great abuse of locking up the Scriptures in an unknown tongue.

Nicolas West, Bishop of Ely, after hearing him, was professedly impressed, but ultimately prohibited him from preaching in any of the churches belonging to the University, or within his diocese. Happily the monastery of Austin Friars was exempt from episcopal jurisdiction, so the prior, Dr. Robert Barnes, boldly licensed Latimer to preach there, and, as a result, the place was unable to contain the crowds that assembled to hear him. At the same time Barnes having been invited to preach in the neighbouring parish at St. Edward's church resolved to comply.

This was on Christmas Eve, Sunday, the 24th of December, 1525. It was a memorable evening on account of its effects. Indeed, it was a crisis, for understanding now the way of truth more perfectly, and being alive to the state of things around him, and of Wolsey's extravagance, Barnes led the way in publicly