



THE BIBLE BY COVERDALE.



THE BIBLE FIRST PRINTED in the English language is known as the Version by Myles Coverdale, because the “Epistle unto the Kynges hyghnesse.” bears his name at the conclusion of it, thus,—“youre graces humble subiecte and daylye oratour, Myles Couerdale.” [See Plate 8, No. 7.] The laborious work of translating and printing the Bible was completed in the reign of Henry the Eighth.

There are many circumstances relating to the production of this interesting book of which we should like to have been informed: but after much research the information that has reached us is exceedingly scanty.

We know when the Volume was printed. It concludes with the Imprint, which is on the reverse of

the last leaf, thus,—“Prynted in the yeare of oure LORDE M.D.XXXV. and fynished the fourth daye of October.”

As to the Translator, perhaps no more is known than Coverdale himself has communicated to us. In the Dedication he says—“Considerynge now (most gracyous prynce) the inestimable treasure, frute & prosperite euerlastyng, that God geueth with his worde, and trustyng in his infynite goodnes that he woulde bryng my symple and rude laboure herin to good effecte, therefore as the holy goost moued other men to do the cost herof, so was I boldened in God, to laboure in the same.”

“I thought it my dutye and to belonge vnto my allegiaunce, whan I had translated this Bible, not onely to dedicate this translacyon vnto youre hyghnesse, but wholy to commytte it vnto the same.” “And as I do with all humblenes submitte myne vnderstondyng and my poore translacyon vnto the spirite of trueth in your grace, so make I this protestacyon (hauyng God to recorde in my conscience) that I haue nether wrested nor altered so moch as one worde for the mayntenaunce of any maner of secte: but haue with a cleare conscience purely & faythfully translated this out of fyue sundry interpreters, hauyng onely the manyfest trueth of the

scripture before myne eyes." In his Prologue to the reader he says, "Considerynge" "how weake I am to perfourme the office of translatoire, I was the more lothe to medle with this worke." Further on he says, "(acordyng as I was desyred) I toke the more vpon me to set forth this speciall translacyon." In several places he alludes to the work as his own, thus,—“And this maner haue I vsed in my translacyon, callyng it in some place pennaunce, that in another place I call repentaunce.” We have no information that he was assisted by any scholars of the day, whilst from the passages quoted it is clear that Coverdale intended that he should be regarded as the sole translator.

We do not know when Coverdale began the work of translating. In the Dedication to King Edward the Sixth, in the quarto edition, 1550, he says, “therefore was I boldened in God sixtene yeares agoo, not only to laboure faythfully in the same, but also in most humble wyse to dedicate this my pore translation to your graces moost noble father.” In the Prologue to the same edition, we read, “(accordinge as I was desyred. Anno, 1.5.34.) I toke the more vpon me, to set forth this specyall translacion.” These passages do not I think imply that he began the work of translating in the year

1534, although it has been argued from this statement that Coverdale translated and printed the Bible in eleven months. Can it mean more than that he commenced the printing necessary to the publication of it? Indeed it would have been impossible to have achieved so gigantic a work in the time mentioned. The Editor of the "Remains of Myles Coverdale," published by the Parker Society, p. ix., says, "It is probable that Coverdale was labouring by himself in retirement," "as we lose sight of him almost entirely after the year 1528 till 1535, when he published, on the fourth of October, his translation of the whole Bible; a work, on which it is probable that he had been employed for some years, although we have no evidence at what time he commenced it."

We have not been informed where Coverdale resided whilst he was engaged in the work of translation. The title and some preliminary matter were printed in the same type as the Bible and also in the English black letter, but why these were twice printed, or by whom, we do not know; nor has any Bibliographer yet been able to inform us with what title-page this most interesting book was first issued in this country.

It yet remains a mystery from what Press it was issued.

It is with the intention of clearing up the difficulty that has been felt relating to the titles, that I commence these Remarks, feeling sure that any information in addition to that already recorded, cannot be devoid of interest to all conversant with this branch of bibliography, and especially to those who are possessors of the First Bible in English. I propose also, to allude to a few questions which have been raised by some authors who have written on this subject.

The text is preceded by one gathering of eight leaves, of which the second, third, fourth, and fifth only have the signature, as copied, Plate 6. These eight leaves contain the Title,—the Dedication to King Henry the Eighth and “with your dearest and iust wyfe, and most vertuous Prynnesse, Quene Anne.”—“A prologue. Myles Couerdale Unto the Christen reader.”—“The bokes of the hole Byble,”—and “The first boke of Moses/ called Genesis what this boke conteyneth.” All copies or parts of this preliminary matter known to exist, with the exception of two copies of one title and one leaf, which will be described, are printed in black-letter type such as was used in England at this time. This is so far plain, but it has been difficult to decide with what title the Bible was published. Four copies of

the title-page have been known, two of which have the date 1535, and the other two that of 1536. One of those of 1535 is in the Bible belonging to the Earl of Leicester, Holkham Hall—the other is in the Library of the British Museum, but not quite perfect. These titles read thus,—“Biblia The Bible/ that is, the holy Scripture of the Olde and New Testament, faithfully and truly translated out of Douche and Latyn in to Englishe. M.D.XXXV.” [See Plate 1.] The letter-press of the title, with the list of the Books as far as Malachi, on the reverse, is from the same type as that with which the text is printed. One of the titles of 1536 is in the Bible belonging to the Earl of Jersey, and the other is in the Bible in the Library of Gloucester Cathedral. The letter-press of the titles of 1536 is English black-letter, and reads thus,—“Biblia The Byble: that is/ the holy Scrypture of the Olde and New Testament, faythfully translated in to Englyshe. M.D.XXXVI.” [See Plate 3.] Dibden, in his “Spenceriana,” vol. 1, p. 81, says, “The Earl of Northampton has a perfect copy:” but he does not allude to the title.

If the title of 1535, as described, is placed in a Bible with the Dedication, &c., printed in English black-letter, it is obvious that the first part of the

List of the Books occurs twice, namely, on the back of the title and on the reverse of the seventh leaf; but it cannot be supposed that the Volume was so issued, with the contents of one page in duplicate. Anderson, in his "Annals of The English Bible," (vol. I. p. 562,) gives "the Title and Collation" of the first Bible, and describes the title, [Plate 1.] omitting the List of the Books which is on the reverse of it; perhaps because he did not know how to account for such an error as the contents of a page repeated in the same volume. To avoid this error of a duplicate List of the Books, the title of 1536, which is blank on the reverse, has been considered by some writers to be the title with which the Bible was first issued, and because the letter-press is from the same type as the preliminary leaves one of which contains the List of the Books. But by receiving this title as the one which was issued in the Bible on its publication, a new difficulty arises. Why was the publication postponed, from the time when the printing was finished, October the fourth, 1535, to 1536, the date on the title in English type; which, if not issued until after the death of Queen Anne, was about eight months?

Lewis, in his History, is the first writer, as far as I have been able to trace, who has endeavoured to

explain this supposed delay of the publication. He describes Coverdale's Bible with the Dedication to the King and Queen Jane, and then the Imprint, the fourth of October, 1535; and adds, "This is a plain inconsistency with the Title or Preamble of the Dedication," "wherein, as has been before observed, *Coverdale* mentions the King's *dearest just wife* JANE, whereas it is certain, that the King was not married to Her till *May*, 20, 1536. more than half a Year after the Date of finishing this Bible. The only way I can think of to reconcile this Difference, is this; That, after this Bible's being finished at the Press in *October*, *Coverdale*, hearing from his Friends in *England*, that *Queen Anne* was declining at Court, thought it prudent to defer the Publication of it till he saw what Turn Affairs would take, and after the King's marrying *Queen Jane*, who was thought to favor the Reformation, then made the fore-mentioned Dedication to the King, or however altered the Title of it as it stands now, and reprinted it." (Lewis' History, folio, 1731, p. 25.) This suggestion has been adopted by subsequent writers and become current as if it was an established fact.

I may here also notice the opinions of Professor Walter and Chr. Anderson, who adopt the same mode of accounting for the supposed delay.