

REIGN OF ELIZABETH.

MDLVIII.—MDCIII

A REIGN, HOWEVER POWERFUL IN EVERY OTHER DEPARTMENT, HAVING NO ACTUAL CONTROL OVER THE CHOICE OR PREFERENCE OF THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND, WITH REGARD TO THE SACRED SCRIPTURES IN THEIR NATIVE TONGUE, AND THUS PRESENTING THE ONLY EXCEPTION TO UNLIMITED SWAY.

THE second daughter and only surviving child of Henry VIII., or the last branch of the Tudor family, now ascended the throne, at the age of twenty-five. Born with the finest natural capacity, the education of Elizabeth, followed by the discipline through which she had passed, enabled her to hold the sceptre with a firmer grasp than that of any of her family who had preceded her; and throughout the long period of above forty-four years, England had no occasion to complain for want of a *strong government*. The preservation of the Queen to the present hour was very remarkable, and it proves, in the most striking manner, that a nation can no more judge of what may contribute to its stability, than any single man can tell what is good for him all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow. Thus, the English people, when Mary was proclaimed, had drowned with joy the voice of the heralds; but their hearts revolted at the very prospect of her marriage to a Spanish prince, and the step once taken was never forgiven. Yet that prince must come into the country, and enjoying, as he did, entire sway over his English Queen, thus prove one instrument, and in no inferior degree, of preserving her sister from the block. The life of no heir to a throne was ever worth less than that of Elizabeth at one period; and had Mary only remained single, with Stephen Gardiner for her adviser, humanly speaking, her sister might have ended her days on the scaffold. One providential purpose for which Philip had come to England being answered, he may live abroad, and another day, with his Armada, seem to be bent on the ruin of the princess he had saved; but she will outlive him, as well as every storm that shall be raised against her.

The first months of this able monarch were distinguished by caution, a caution which extended to her treatment of the Sacred Volume. It is true that when presented with an elegant English Bible, on her first progress through London, she kissed it, and said that she would oftentimes read that holy book; but that did not imply her approbation of its being printed and circulated freely. Even at her coronation, when there was to be an opening of the prison doors to them that were bound, and one besought her to set free four or five others who had long been shut up, meaning the four Evangelists and the Apostle Paul, she replied with more shrewdness than grace, "That it were better first to inquire of themselves whether they would be released or no."

There was now to be no Parliament or Convocation for three years, but at last, and without therefore having consulted either the one or the other, about midsummer or the autumn of this year we hear something respecting the Scriptures; and by virtue of Elizabeth's authority, certain injunctions were issued. Among these were the following, left with every parish visited:—

"To provide within three months after this visitation, at the charges of the parish, one book of *the whole Bible* of the largest volume in English, and within one twelve months the paraphrases of Erasmus, also in English, and the same to be set up in some convenient place within the said Church, where the parishioners may most conveniently resort and read the same. All parsons under the degree of A.M. shall buy for their own use the New Testament in Latin and English with paraphrases, within three months. Inquiry was to be made whether any Parsons, Vicars, or Curates, did discourage any person from reading any part of the Bible, either in Latin or English."

No intimation was given here, or anywhere else, as to how or where *such* volumes were to be found, and hence it has been inferred by Lewis, that under the late reign they had *not* been destroyed or burnt to any very great extent. At the same time, it may be observed that this was nothing more than a *royal* injunction; buried too among not fewer than fifty others, some of which are strange enough; and if the effects resembled those which resulted from *Henry's* voice, then there would, in many instances, be a reluctant, in others, only a tardy compliance.

As for the preparation of more copies, Elizabeth said not one word, while the printing press, as we shall see presently, far from approaching its freedom in the days of Edward, has become

more fettered than it had ever been, since the art was first introduced into England!

All this, however, will only render the progress in printing of the Sacred Volume still more remarkable. This was a cause in which neither the reigning Prince nor the Privy Council, the Parliament or Convocation, had ever been much consulted, and *never* with a view to its essential progress. It had commenced contrary to the will of all these parties, and as certainly proceeded without taking orders from them. For the progress therefore, at this crisis, as we were accustomed to do in the days of Elizabeth's father, we must now look abroad. From *thence* the Queen requires to be *put on her way*, and in a manner not unlike to Henry's reception and sanction of the Bible at first, in 1537.

While Elizabeth was yet in jeopardy of her life, and under the guardianship of Sir Thomas Pope, we have already seen that an edition of the New Testament had been printed at Geneva,—that copies were finding their way into England, in despite of all opposition,—and that an edition of the entire Scriptures was already commenced, in the same city. The exiles themselves inform us *when* this was begun. It was when “the time was dangerous, and the persecution, in England, sharp and furious.” The fact is, that no sooner had the New Testament left the press, than Whittingham, with one or two others, were preparing for their larger undertaking, and, at the latest, by January 1558 they had commenced. These men tell us that “they thought they could bestow their labours and study in nothing more acceptable to God, and comfortable to His Church;” and they add,—“God knoweth with what fear and trembling we have been for the space of *two years and more, day and night*, occupied herein.” The space referred to, therefore, was from January 1558 to the 10th of April, 1560, when the last sheet was put to press.

Considering the high character of this version, and the number of editions through which it passed, it would have been gratifying could we have fixed, with more positive certainty, on the individuals to whom the nation stood indebted. They were most probably not more than *three* in number, or four at the most; but whether it arose from modesty or motives of

prudence, we are left to find out the real parties. The revision has been often, it is true, and very loosely ascribed, to *six*, and even *nine*, individuals, as though engaged in one body:—viz. William Whittingham, Anthony Gilby, Miles Coverdale, Thomas Sampson, Christopher Goodman, Thomas Cole, John Knox, John Bodleigh, and John Pullain. This, however, is doing nothing else than numbering up certain men possessed of learning, who happened to be then living in Geneva. It requires but a little investigation to reduce the number to one-third, and then, we presume, the great burden, if not the entire responsibility, will appear to have fallen upon three of these scholars. It is true that all these men, with many others, were intimately and affectionately connected with each other. They were members of the *same* Christian church, and a church, be it observed, which as a *body* felt deeply interested in this edition of the Sacred Volume. The entire expense not only of this Bible, but of an edition of the Psalms by itself, was defrayed by “such as were of most ability in that congregation.” There was no application to their native country, no solicitation of one farthing from without. Amidst the storm that raged against the truth, they had been driven into a corner, and thus the Church was employed. In the fulness of their hearts, the sound *learning* of certain members, and the pecuniary *substance* of others, being devoted to the cause of their common Saviour, nothing could be a finer exhibition of Christian zeal for the highest interests of their native land. Thus, as the first translation of the Sacred Word, commenced in 1524, had sprung from the devoted zeal of a solitary Christian *exile*, whose heart had bled with pity for his country; so the next thorough revision of the entire Sacred Text must come from the bosom of a small Christian community, also in *exile*, “for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

The accession of Queen Elizabeth, however, in November 1558, naturally filled this entire circle with joy, and the men we have named, as well as others, were as naturally separated; but then this was with the *exception* of those who had devoted themselves to the revision and printing of the Bible. The good news had reached Geneva in December, and at that moment, we are informed, that the *greater part* of the book was *not* finished;

but "Whittingham, with *one or two* more, did tarry at Geneva a year and a half after Queen Elizabeth came to the Crown, *being resolved to go through with the work.*"¹ Le Long has affirmed that "the chief and most learned" of the men already mentioned, were Coverdale, Whittingham, and Gilby; but Coverdale, now seventy years of age, cannot be traced as at Geneva sooner than December 1558, and it is certain that he returned in 1559; how early we cannot tell. He was preaching at Paul's Cross on the 12th of November. In short, *Knox* had left Geneva as early as January 1559; *Goodman* followed him to Scotland, where we find him in September; while it is as certain that *Coverdale and Cole, Pullain and Bodleigh*, returned to England in the same year. The only three left, therefore, were Whittingham, Gilby, and Sampson, and with their names *only* the translation should have been associated; since the men who completed "the greater part," must have been those by whom it had been begun. Many of their brethren, indeed, they tell us, "*put them on this work by their earnest desire and exhortation;*" while others encouraged them "not to spare *any charge* for the furtherance of such a benefit and favour of God toward His Church."

Although we cannot now notice every edition here, but refer to our list, yet as the *only* English Bible distinctly pointed out in any patent, from Elizabeth downwards, and especially as the basis of so many editions for above eighty years to come, this demands some farther notice.

Title.—"THE BIBLE AND HOLY SCRIPTURES conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament. Translated according to the Elbrue and Greke, and conferred with the best translations in divers langages. With moste profitable annotations upon all the harde places, and other thinges of great importance as may appeare in the Epistle to the Reader." Beneath is a wood-cut, of the Israelites passing through the Red Sea. "At Geneva. Printed by Rouland Hall, MDLX." *Collation.*—After a dedication to the Queen, and an Epistle to the Readers, about to be noticed, we have the text from Genesis to 2nd Maccabees, fol. i., 474. "The Newe Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ," &c., with the same wood-cut and imprint as before. "The Holy Gospel," &c., fol. ii., cxxii. A table of interpretation of proper names—of principal things—the years from Adam to Christ—and the years from Paul's conversion. There is no Colophon. The Sacred text is in Roman, the contents of chapters in Italic type. A full page contains 63 lines.

Not at all aware, perhaps, of the cautious expediency by which the Queen of England was now guided, they subjoined a dedication to her Majesty, remarkably free from that fulsome adulation, which had been far too common, and expressing with great frankness their zeal for further progress in the cause of truth and righteousness. But there was a *second* address or "Epistle," still more worthy of notice. In what they had done, the translators now fixed an eye of sympathy and love, not upon *England* alone, but, taking a nobler flight, upon all those to whom the English language was *vernacular*. Such was the happy effect of *adversity* and *travel*; the one softening, the other enlarging their minds. Their epistle of explanation, therefore, as to this version, is addressed to no particular party; but—"TO OUR BELOVED IN THE LORD; THE BRETHREN OF ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, AND IRELAND." A most judicious title, and if there must be any Epistle to the Christian Reader at all, it would have been well for the interests of the United Kingdom had the words been preserved *inviolate* from that day to this. Amidst all that has occurred since, it is the *only* one to which no objection worth notice, could, or can, be brought; to say nothing of its being so akin to the simple majesty of the Divine Record, and to that only light in which God has regarded the entire number of His people, in this highly favoured country, all along.

The last sheet of this Bible having been committed to the press on the 10th of April, 1560, Whittingham, Gilby, and Sampson returned home immediately; but of all the men already mentioned, there was one, who had not only fostered the translation when proceeding at Geneva, but was specially interested in its circulation throughout England, immediately afterwards, and he must not now be passed over. Bodleigh or Bodley is a name that one should have imagined would not have escaped notice, as it has generally done.²

² John Bodley, Esq., a native of Exeter, was one of the many exiles for conscience' sake, in Mary's reign. He wandered over a part of Germany, and having at last settled at Geneva, he joined the English Church there. His son Thomas, afterwards the founder of the famous Bodleian Library at Oxford, here received his education under the best teachers. On returning to England, he entered Magdalene College, and, at the age of twenty-one, was reading Greek