

P R E F A C E .

THE following pages have been written to tell the story of the English Bible, and it is a story of singular interest to all who speak the English tongue. No pains have been spared to present the narrative in its truth, and to disentangle it from conflicting statements and traditional errors.

Many thanks are due to those who have gone before me. Mr. Lewis, in his "Complete History of the several Translations of the Holy Bible and New Testament into English," published in 1731, pointed the way. Yet, so little interest was the public supposed to feel in such a work, that his first edition consisted only of 140 copies in folio ; and the presentiment was verified, for the sale was so very slow that the second edition, in octavo, did not appear till eight years afterwards. His book has many merits ; its defects may be ascribed to the scantier knowledge of his time ; but its blunders have led some noted historians far astray. Other writings on the same special theme, as those of

Johnson, Newcome, Whittaker, Walter, Conant, and the "Brief Account" prefixed to Bagster's "Hexapla," though they are of varying value, are not without their use.

But the publication of Christopher Anderson's "Annals of the English Bible," in 1845, formed an epoch; for the work was the fruit of independent investigation, and its author brought to light some new facts about Tyndale, and discovered some unsuspected editions of his New Testament. Mr. Anderson's original purpose had been to compile a biography of the martyred translator, and had that purpose not been partially abandoned, or rather supplemented, his volumes might have possessed more compactness and symmetry. His "Annals," however, are wholly external in character, for he never attempts to give any critical estimate of Tyndale's version, either of its English style, its fidelity to the original Greek, or its nearer or remoter relation to Luther and the Vulgate. The work, indeed, grew under his hand to a great size, for it is filled to overflowing with extraneous or collateral matter, and every page might have been printed in three parallel columns, headed in succession—"History of the English Nation," "History of the English Church," "History of the English Bible." Now and then the good man is swayed by prejudice, as when he avers that, from principle, Tyndale would not, and did not, translate any portion of the Apocrypha, though the evidence to the contrary was lying before his eyes,

in the "Epistles" for Church Service, taken from Esther, Wisdom, and Ecclesiasticus, attached to his famous revised edition of 1534. So jealous was he for Tyndale's fame and honour that he studiously, and on every occasion, depreciates Coverdale, who, though he was not endowed with Tyndale's high nobility of nature, yet possessed eminent qualities, and did a good secondary work when no one else thought of attempting it. I have endeavoured to weigh the merits of each translator, or company of translators, with open impartiality.

Special and grateful reference cannot but be made to Canon Westcott's very able, accurate, and scholarly "General View of the History of the English Bible," 1868; to Prebendary Scrivener's careful and thorough "Introduction" to the Quarto Paragraph Bible, Cambridge, 1873; to some papers—too few and too brief—by Dr. Moulton in the "Bible Educator"; and to several volumes of minute and patient labour, in the form of elaborate collations and fac-simile reproduction, by the esteemed and obliging Mr. Francis Fry, of Bristol.

I have tried to trace the English Bible down from Anglo-Saxon times, and have added a very few remarks on the changes which passed over the old language in those distant centuries. Wycliffe has been often portrayed as a Reformer, but, as it was more to my purpose, I have sketched him as a Translator, divined his motives, and thrown into

relief the fresh and graphic English of his wonderful version. The reader will find brief biographies of the men who engaged, at different periods, in the work of translation—a work sometimes perilous, and always very responsible; and that work is candidly judged in itself, as well as in its connection with previous, and its influence upon subsequent, versions. The introduction into Scotland of the various editions, and their effect on that kingdom, have not been overlooked. Considerable space is devoted to our present Bible, usually, though not with strict accuracy, called “The Authorized Version,” and I have entered into some points of its history as a printed volume after its publication in 1611.

The old spelling is given where it is characteristic; and as the book is not meant for scholars only, but also for persons of ordinary education and intelligence, Latin and Greek terms are, for the most part, printed at the bottom of the pages. Errors are unavoidable in such a multifarious work, but it is hoped that none of them are unpardonable. No verses are marked in Tyndale, Coverdale, and the Great Bible, and the attempt to facilitate reference by numbering them according to the Authorized Version may have led to some discrepancies.

In fine, some chapters in the concluding portion of the second volume discuss the subject of Revision, showing that there is a general necessity for it, and that no one needs either to be startled by it, or to be

suspicious about its results; for through successive revisions our Bible has come to be what it is, as a faithful and popular translation. May the rich and suggestive History that has wreathed itself round our Book of books stir up a profounder thankfulness to the Giver of all good, and may its own truths live in the hearts of all who read it!

I tender my best thanks to my friend the Rev. William Young, Parkhead, for looking over the sheets, and especially for compiling the accurate and complete Index.

6 THORNVILLE TERRACE, HILLHEAD,
GLASGOW, *March*, 1876.