

Baptists and the Bible.

III. WHAT THEY HAVE DONE WITH THE BIBLE.

A FEW people, when they have a treasure, hoard it in secret and seldom let other eyes gaze upon it. The Tower of London has a jewel-house where crowns, orb, sceptres, and other royal emblems lie, seldom used by the owner, but always to be seen. The people of England recently subscribed thousands of pounds to buy a number of vellum sheets, brought over in a brown-paper parcel. They were sorted and tidied, then placed in the hall of the British Museum where the people flocked to behold. They had no beauty, no pictures; the writing could not be read even by a good schoolboy; the language is Greek, yet even a Greek merchant has been known to fling up his hands in despair and say it is far too old for him to understand. To-day that Bible has been cleaned and worthily bound into two volumes, available for all to admire, for scholars to study.

That Bible from Sinai is nearly unique; two other ancient copies have been multiplied so that students in other centres may see exactly what was read in the churches of great capitals 1,600 years ago. For treasures need to be circulated if they are to be of use. If tons of gold are withdrawn from use and buried in fortresses, the country that owns the gold does not escape poverty and distress. Bibles are fine gold; the word of God is better than rubies; but if known only to a few people, the multitudes may famish. Bibles are to be multiplied and distributed. In this, Baptists have taken an honourable part, as may be shown with illustrations from England alone.

The copyright of the Authorised Version was vested in the King's Printer. Booksellers were at the mercy of him, and of the two Universities, to obtain any Bibles for sale. Yet in the Interregnum there were unusual opportunities: Henry Hills, who began as printer to the army, became printer to the Commonwealth. So this London Baptist and his son were able to issue twenty-five editions of the Bible within a generation, paying the King's Printer and Oxford for permission, after the Restoration. Another Baptist continued the good work, starting in September 1668.

"Mr. Guy, being out of his Apprenticeship, set up his Trade, in the little Corner-House betwixt Cornhill and Lombard Street, with a Stock of about two hundred Pounds. At which Time, the English Bibles printed in this Kingdom being very bad, both in the letter and Paper, occasioned divers of the Booksellers

of this City to encourage the Printing thereof in Holland, with curious Types, and fine Paper; and imported vast numbers of the same, to their no small advantage. Mr. Guy, soon coming acquainted with this profitable Commerce, became a large Dealer therein. . . . Our Founder contracted with the University of Oxford, for their privilege to print Bibles; and having furnished himself with Types from Holland, carried on a very great Trade in Bibles for divers years, to his very great advantage." Thomas Guy thus won the first of his three fortunes, with which he endowed St. Thomas's Hospital close by his home in Maze Pond, and Christ's Hospital in the city; then established Guy's Hospital, which in two senses is founded on the Bible.

Another conspicuous leader was Joseph Hughes of Battersea. In the eighteenth century there was a Naval and Military Bible Society, taking up the plan of the Commonwealth to provide a Bible or extracts to every combatant. Otherwise the S.P.C.K. was the only Society which had tried to circulate the Bible, and its work was intermittent. It was found that the Welsh were badly supplied. Vavasor Powell had been concerned in one Testament, Henry Hills in a Bible, his assigns in two more. In 1769 Thomas Llewelyn, of the Particular Baptist Fund, promoted an edition of 20,000 without apocrypha or prayer-book; also a Testament ten years later. In 1790 David Jones, pastor of Pontypool, printed six thousand at Trefecca at his own expense, with notes of his own; and the example was followed by Titus Lewis at Carmarthen in 1802. But the supply was far short of the demand. A pathetic story came to the Religious Tract Society of a little girl unable to find a copy anywhere. Joseph Hughes proposed that a society be formed for the sole purpose of selling Bibles, under cost. The British and Foreign Bible Society was due to this Baptist, who became its first secretary. The traditions were kept up by Joseph Harris, Gomer of Swansea, and by John Jenkins of Hengoed, who sold in parts. John Williams, Philologus, of Rhosllanerchrugog, made a new version, added notes, and printed at Llynlleifiad; two other editions came out at Carnarvon. This example was followed in 1894, when William Edwards of Pontypool issued the first part of another version.

Thus Baptists have furthered the popular circulation of the Bible, as translators, annotators, publishers, booksellers, founder of a Society for its cheap sale. One other touch was added by Spurgeon, who promoted Colporteurs, to carry stocks of Bibles and other books to villages and places where bookshops were unknown. In all such enterprises, many more examples might be drawn from America.

The editing of the Bible was for centuries neglected, and

was a most mechanical reproduction. Doubtless reverence and conservatism were reinforced by legal restraint. Nevertheless, it is unnatural that an order of books which is 1,600 years old, a selection which is 400 years old, a style of printing which exalts sentences into paragraphs, numbers them, and places in narrow double columns, should have a monopoly.

The ice of centuries was broken in 1877 by an edition in paragraphs, with new summaries and a variety of fresh helps to study; three of the four revisers were Gotch of Bristol, Davies of Regent's Park, Green of Rawdon. A Twentieth Century Testament showed other new features. Weymouth not only made a completely new version of the Testament, but prefixed a page to show the probable order of time in which the books were written. Nine years ago, T. R. Glover helped edit a Shorter Bible, omitting most of the Jewish laws, duplicate narratives in the Old Testament, while retaining every passage that appeals specially to the scholarly, the devout, the literary. This appeared in size and style of an ordinary book, without headings, numbers, references, which may suit students, but irritate ordinary readers. (The fact that it costs 7/6, while the Bible Society can publish unabridged at 1/0, shows the great service rendered by the latter.) Even more helpful for the young is the Children's Bible, by the same editor; this selection begins with the most interesting and important stories about and by Jesus; only afterwards come stories told to Him when a boy. There is much more to be done yet in the translation, selection, arrangement and general editing of the Bible; Baptists may well continue to keep in the van, especially for day-schools and Sunday-schools.

What else have they done with it? The Bible has been turned to its intended use, presenting it to nations as a most valuable guide, first to Christ, then to an understanding of His will. Many tribes have been taught to prize it, to study it, to better the translations for their own people, to print it, to buy it, to circulate it more widely, to use it for the nurture of their life.

One thing at least remains, in which Baptists hardly claim to have done anything important. The teaching of the Bible is wide as well as deep, yet on many live important questions we do not try to understand and apply it. Consider some ancient and constant problems, like lending, fighting.

Usury was denounced, as it might well be at 48% a year, often exacted by Roman capitalists; yet our Lord contemplated a servant opening a deposit account at interest with a banker. In the Middle Ages great attention was given to this problem; a plain law was stated as Christian, with all manner of exceptions and evasions. The Reformation threw all overboard, and ignored the subject. Ought we not to try to understand what is really

Christlike? Ought a man to start a fellow church member in business with a free loan, trusting his honesty and ability, ready to bear a total loss? and where should he draw the line?

We have our railways built at great cost, whose owners have borrowed large sums on which they can barely pay the interest: directors and managers paid heavily to conduct their business cannot earn much for the owners: other workers with far lower wages ask for such rates as will leave the owners nothing, will leave the creditors little or nothing. What Christian principles are involved? It is absurd to ask ministers to solve such problems; their work is of another kind. But it does involve urging Christians who are expert on such points to look at the problem in a new way; to set first the kingdom of God, and trust that all else will be made plain.

From property pass to persons. The question of war or pacifism seems eternal. Neither our Lord nor Peter told a centurion to resign, yet both taught non-resistance. The early Church was clear; Christians would not enlist, converted soldiers would die rather than fight. When Church and State allied, this uncompromising attitude was abandoned. No serious recent attention has been given to this tremendous issue. Commissions are appointed to ask about improving the machinery of the Church; bewildered bishops make spasmodic utterances. But after the Great War, after aggression by one Christian nation on another, after civil war in a third, no commission is appointed to think on this perennial question.

Baptists are no better and no worse than others. But if we ask what we have done with the Bible, we cannot say that we are earnestly trying to apply its principles to the great difficulties of social life. What we are doing is to recognize that such problems exist, to state them, to gather experts and ask for guidance, to report at length that all may study.

W. T. WHITLEY.

JOHN KIPPAX was mentioned at our annual meeting as possibly concerned with the early story of Cloughfold. The facts about him were published three years ago by A. G. Matthews in his *Calamy Revised*. He was Curate of Newchurch in Rossendale 1657, Curate of Haslingden 1658, ordained deacon at York 21 December 1662, and remained at Haslingden till death; buried at Colne 27 December 1679. Therefore his career is quite irrelevant to the Rossendale Baptists.