

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

THE  
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA,  
No. LVIII.  
AND  
BIBLICAL REPOSITORY.  
No. CX.

---

APRIL, 1858.

---

ARTICLE I.

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE.

THE history of the English Bible has a two-fold interest. It is associated with the history of the English Church and with that of the English language and literature. In one aspect it is therefore a religious, in another a literary, history.

A peculiar and unique connection existed between the English Reformation and the translation and circulation of the Scriptures in the vulgar tongue of England. In no other country can the Reformation be said to have been so intimately associated with the Word of God. On the continent the great question which severed the Protestant Churches from the Church of Rome, was the doctrine of justification by Faith. At the perversions of this doctrine by the Papal Church, Luther aimed his theses. It was because he substituted the righteousness of Christ in the place of indulgences and penance and saintly intercessions, that the thunders of the Vatican were hurled at the Monk of Wittemberg. In England, however, the great question,—paramount even to the supremacy of the English king in matters ecclesiastical,—was the translation and circulation

of the Scriptures. The history of the English prisoners and martyrs for the Faith, is the history of the translators and the readers of the Word of God in their native tongue. The Englishman who, in the 14th century, — nearly 200 years before Luther, — provoked the wrath of the Pope and called forth the persecuting zeal of papal Bishops, was a Bible translator. The Christian scholar whom Henry VIII. drove to the continent and there finally allowed to be burned at the stake, was a Bible translator. The first man for whom the fires of Smithfield were kindled by the “Bloody Mary,” was a Bible translator. The time would fail us to tell of the multitudes who for the sole crime of printing, or possessing, or perusing an English Bible, “had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.” When Great Babylon shall come in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath, not the least of her crimes will be found to be her persecutions of the translators and the readers of the English Bible.

The relation between the language and literature of England, and the translation of the Scriptures, though different from that between the English Reformation and the English Bible, is scarcely less intimate. One of the earliest uses to which the written speech of our Saxon ancestors was put, was Bible translation. English prose has but one work earlier than the first English Bible. The gradual progress and improvement of our noble tongue may be studied with advantage in the successive versions made by British Christians; and it may be safely said that no other book has so determined the spirit and affected the style of English literature; has so served as an enduring monument and standard of the purity and the power of the English language, as the version made by order of King James, the authorized version of our daily use.

The history of these successive translations, viewed in its two-fold aspect, literary and religious, we propose to present to our readers.

As early as the second century of the Christian Era, Chris-

tian merchants brought with them to the shores of Britain the knowledge of the gospel, and seeking, it may be, goodly pearls, for which its waters were then famous, gave to the pagan Kelts the pearl of greatest price. In the fourth century Patrick evangelized the island which has named him her patron saint. The sixth century witnessed the labors of Columba and the foundation of the monastery of Iona among the Hebrides; and near the close of the same century, in the year 596, Augustine was sent to England by Pope Gregory to preach to the Angles the good tidings which had been proclaimed by those angels, to whom, in respect of their beauty, he had likened these insular barbarians. The labors of this Romish missionary were successful, and churches and convents and monasteries rose all over the island, to testify to the zeal with which the Saxons adopted the faith which he preached.

During this period the few Christians of the Western Church who read the Scriptures, read them in manuscript in the Latin version, made in the fourth century by Jerome, and known as the Vulgate. Few if any Hebrew or Greek manuscripts had yet found their way west of Constantinople; and, had they been possessed, they would have been but sealed books to the scholars of the British Church. These Latin MSS. existed only in the libraries of monasteries. Priests and monks alone had access to them; and on Sabbaths and feast-days doled out to the common people such meagre knowledge of the Word of life as they were either able or disposed to convey to them. Although restrained by no prohibition or fear of penalty, no one as yet thought of translating the Scriptures into the vernacular tongue.

To the Mæso-Goths, a people inhabiting the province of Mæsia, south of the Danube, belongs the honor of possessing the first translation made for the benefit of the laity of Western Europe. It was the work of Ulphilas, a Gothic Bishop, in the fourth century. But the practical spirit, the sterling good sense and the desire for popular enlightenment which characterized their Saxon brethren, our ances-

tors, soon enabled them to claim the second place in this goodly series of Bible translators. The Mæso-Goths and the Anglo-Saxons, separated from one another by but a short interval, stand for centuries alone as the possessors of a popular version of the Scriptures.

The first efforts made by the Anglo-Saxons in this department of translation, were made in the seventh century, and like the rude beginnings of every national literature, were poetical. So singular and so unlooked for were these attempts, that the superstitious piety of that early age invented a miracle to account for them. An unlettered cowherd of the monastery of Whitby, so says the devout legend, mortified at his inability to imitate or to equal the lyrical performances of his fellow servants, retired to his couch in the Abbey grange. A heavenly visitant appeared to him in his troubled dreams, bade him sing, and silencing his confession of want of skill, gave him as his theme the origin of Created Things. At once the poetical inspiration fell upon him; his tongue was loosed; the task was accomplished; and remembered and recorded on his waking, gained for him the reputation of an inspired poet.

Nor did his labors stop here. Educated by the monks and admitted into their fraternity, Cædmon devoted himself to a popular paraphrase of the Old and the New Testament. Fragments of the work in its rude Saxon verse have come down to us. The monkish paraphrast has been indebted for his materials as much to his imagination as to the Scriptures. His conceptions and even his language, however, remind us not a little of the "Paradise Lost" of Milton. We know not which to admire the more, the boldness of the imagery which he employs, or the useful practical spirit which prompted him thus to popularize the facts and the doctrines of the hidden and unknown Scriptures.

But the strong common sense of our Saxon forefathers, the spirit which led their scholars to record useful knowledge in laborious prose while other nations were producing naught but national heroic legends and warlike songs, and

made them sacrifice the honor of original composition to the desire of communicating to their countrymen in their own tongue the wisdom of earlier ages, both demanded and prompted something more authentic and instructive than a poetical paraphrase.

The Saxon Church in the eighth century was not destitute of learned men fitted to translate correctly the Word of God. Then lived Bede, the monk of Wearmouth, whom the church and the world alike honor as a historian, a commentator, a Christian; but he has no better title to the epithet "venerable," which since the tenth century has been prefixed to his name, than his having been the first translator of any portion of the New Testament into the native tongue of his countrymen. With a spirit kindred to that of the beloved disciple, he selected John's Gospel, and consecrated to its translation the closing hours of his life. The evening shadows of the day of the Feast of the Ascension were gathering around him, as with failing strength, dictating to his scribe, he hastened towards the completion of the task which was to be his last. "It is now done," said the youth, as with faltering tones the last verse was dictated. "It is done," said the dying scholar; and with the words of the "Gloria Patri" upon his lips, he went from his work to his reward.

The feeble light of ecclesiastical tradition shines upon the labors of other less noted translators of portions of the Bible in this early period. English libraries, and the collections of English antiquaries contain many MSS. attesting the scholarship, the piety, and the zeal for the diffusion of religious knowledge possessed by these Saxon Ecclesiastics. The golden bosses and precious stones of the binding of the Durham Book, in which, in 680, Eadfrid, bishop of Lindisfarne, had copied Jerome's version of the four Gospels, have long since disappeared; but the richly illuminated parchment on which, in the 10th century, Aldred added an interlinear translation, may still be seen in the Cottonian Library of the British Museum; while the Bodleian Library of Oxford is enriched with the translation of the four Gos-

pels, known as the Rushworth gloss, at the close of which Owen, one of the translators, asks in return for what he considers a good and worthy labor, to be remembered in the prayers of his readers. The pious Alfred, whom even critical history consents to call the best king who ever swayed the sceptre of England, sought to give the Divine sanction to his code of laws, by prefixing to it a translation of the Decalogue and its immediate context; and added to his other valued translations a version of a part of the Book of Psalms. Ælfric, the Archbishop of Canterbury, evinced his desire to feed the church of God, over which he had been made an overseer, by making a translation of seven of the Books of the Old Testament, to which is given the name of the Heptateuch. Other versions, e. g., one of the four Gospels, now the standard text of the Anglo-Saxon Testament, made just before the conquest; and two or three others in the Anglo-Norman dialect, made a little later — have survived even the names and the fame of their authors. The century which followed the Norman invasion saw no new attempt at translation. Romish bishops and priests occupied the sees and the livings of the Saxon Church. The conquering race thought more of wealth and power than of popular instruction; and the conquered, bowing beneath the foreign yoke, had no leisure or inclination to increase or even to preserve their stock of religious knowledge. The invidious distinctions between the two nations were, however, gradually effaced. The Saxon tongue firmly fixed in the affections of the people, and possessing an undiminished vitality, in daily contact with the Norman French, underwent those changes which have made it English. The restoration of quiet and confidence to the realm was marked by a renewal of the attempts at translation. Again, as in the first instance, poetry led the way; and the *Ormulum*, a metrical Saxon paraphrase of the Gospels and the Acts, so called from its author, Ormin or Orme, and belonging probably to the 12th century, together with an anonymous paraphrase of the Old and the New Testament, bearing the homely but significant title "*Sowlehele*," made before

the 13th, indicates the attainments and the religious zeal of the ecclesiastics of that period.

Our limits forbid us to dwell upon the other poetical versions belonging to the 13th century. The name of Richard Rolle, the Hermit of Hampole, is associated with a prose translation of the Psalms, and a metrical version of a part of Job, of a part of the Psalms and the Lord's Prayer. A few other translations and paraphrases of Gospels and Epistles, for the names of whose authors we search in vain, complete the list of versions made before the middle of the 14th century.

We have dwelt thus at length upon the labors of our Saxon forefathers for several reasons. The Saxon tongue is but English in its oldest form; we felt, therefore, that we must present the history of the Saxon Bible translation if we would open to our readers the first page in the history of the English versions. We wished moreover to show how early in their history the race to which we belong displayed that earnest zeal for popular instruction and Christian culture which has made them a blessing to the very ends of the earth. Already did Bede and Aldhelm and Ælfric possess the spirit which gave Wiclif and Tyndale and Coverdale no rest till Englishmen had an English Bible, and sent Morrison to China, and Carey to India, and Judson to Burmah, to do for their pagan people what had been already done by other hands for their own countrymen. Nor was this all. We wished to contrast with a later state of things the religious freedom which prevailed in the Saxon Church.

No papal decree as yet prohibited either the translation or the reading of the Scriptures by the people. The remote and insular position of the British Church withdrew them from the heaviest yoke and burden of the Papacy. The doors of the Lollards' tower were not yet closed upon prisoners for the faith, and Smithfield as yet witnessed no agonies of burning martyrs.

Nevertheless no complete translation of the Scriptures had yet been produced. English scholarship and laborious-

ness and Christian zeal had not yet been equal to so great a toil. It was reserved for the 14th century to give birth to so noble and so large an undertaking.

That century may be said to have witnessed the dawn of the English Reformation. It certainly beheld the rising of its "Morning Star." From that period until the bond which bound the English to the Romish Church was finally severed, there existed men on British soil, who, in the purity of their lives, and the boldness of their speech, *protested* against the corrupt faith and practices of Popery.

The instrumentality which God employed in communicating to them and perpetuating in them right religious impulses, was the life and labors of John Wiclif. Of these labors the most important was the translation into English of the entire Scriptures. The career of this parish priest of Lutterworth, and teacher of Divinity in Oxford, was an uninterrupted struggle against the exactions and the corruptions of the papal see.

Now he exposed the emptiness of its claims on the revenues of the English Church and State; then he denied in no measured terms the infallibility and the temporal authority of the successor of St. Peter. Now he stripped from the mendicant friars the cloak of affected poverty and humility with which they concealed their avarice and their crimes; then he sent forth priests — "poor priests" as they were worthily called, who should preach truth in place of error, and occupy in the esteem and affections of the people the position usurped by the vicious Franciscans and Dominicans.

The University of Oxford silenced his voice within her precincts. The ecclesiastical authorities of the realm bade him retract his errors. The king and the nobility at length withheld from him their support. The Pope even summoned him to Rome, and threatened him with temporal and eternal woes. But, nevertheless, he made the walls of the Church of Lutterworth resound with his denunciations of Papal errors, and none the less filled all England with his brief writings against the vices and the errors of the times.

At length recognizing the fact that the written word of God is the end of all controversy, and that by reading it for themselves the people must judge of the correctness of his views, and the falsity of those of his opponents, he took advantage of a lull in the storm raised against him, and between the years 1378–81 translated the entire Scriptures into the language of the people of England, thus giving them the first version of the whole Bible into the English tongue.

Wiclif's philological attainments did not allow him to translate from the Hebrew and Greek originals. He could only avail himself of the Latin vulgate, itself a translation, and one of tolerable correctness. But in this his version, still extant, and now printed, with Latinisms occasioned by its literalness, with antiquated diction and uncouth spelling, showing that the language had scarcely cast aside all its earlier Saxon forms, did Englishmen read in their own tongues the wonderful works of God. We wish that our limits allowed us to dwell upon the mention of this venerable translation, to turn over the interesting pages on which, 500 years ago, this earnest scholar labored, and point out the peculiarities of expression in such sentences as the following, from the well known parable of the Prodigal Son: "And he turned again into hym self; and said, how many hirid men in my fadre's hous had plente of loaves, and I perisch thorough hungir." But other topics require us to hasten on. Wiclif's translation was almost his last earthly work. He was stricken with paralysis while ministering to his own parishioners, and in 1384 rested from his labors. The Church which had sought to hinder those labors during his life, sought to destroy their influence after his death. Diligent search was made for copies of his translation, which affectionate Christian zeal had already multiplied; but the destructive spirit of the persecutor could not overtake the productive speed of the copyist. The number of MSS. of this version which have escaped the flames proves the wide extent of its circulation. Secreted with a carefulness, measured by the estimation in which they were held, these

precious pages guided and cheered lonely Christians in the midst of the surrounding darkness. The Church which left Wiclif no rest while living, sought to disturb his rest when dead. By a decree of the Council of Constance, 1415,—the Council which in violation of its word sentenced John Huss to the stake—Wiclif's bones were disinterred and burned, and their ashes thrown into the Speed, a stream which flowed by Lutterworth. "Forthwith," says an English Christian poet,

"that ancient voice which streams can hear  
Thus speaks — (that voice which walks upon the wind,  
Though seldom heard by busy human kind);  
As thou these ashes, little brook, wilt bear  
Into the Avon — Avon to the tide  
Of Severn — Severn to the narrow seas —  
Into main ocean they — this deed accurst,  
An emblem yields to friends and enemies,  
How the bold teacher's doctrine, sanctified  
By truth, shall spread throughout the world dispersed."

Nearly a century and a half elapsed after the death of Wiclif, before a new translation of the Scriptures was attempted. The years which intervened between 1384 and 1526, many of them years of foreign conquests and defeats, of civil wars and bloodshed, in which the state was distracted and impoverished by the contests waged around a usurped throne, helped to swell the sad records of religious persecution. The Lollards, or followers of Wiclif, were sought out and punished. As it was supposed that no one would read English unless he read the Bible, this rare accomplishment was made the ground of ecclesiastical citation. A poor woman was burned because there was found in her sleeve a parchment on which were written in English the ten commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Creed. Even as late as 1519, the learned Dean Colet, the founder of St. Paul's school in London, was suspected of heresy because he expounded the Scriptures and translated the Lord's Prayer; he escaped persecution only through the intervention of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

But the time was coming when the Word of God could be no longer bound. For the last time the curate paid his entire annual stipend for a Bible. Already in 1452 the printing press began to make readers independent of the slow and scanty and costly products of the labors of the copyist. Superstition and error truly expressed their dread of this mighty auxiliary of reformation when they attributed the invention of printing to the devil. "We must stop this printing," said they, "or it will stop us."

The multiplication of copies of the original Scriptures at once led the way to a new translation of them into English. The author of this was William Tyndale, a graduate of the University of Oxford, and afterwards a regular priest of the Romish Church. How the light of truth first shone into his mind, we know not; nor have we space to dwell on the happy results of his preaching at Cambridge, or his bold confessions of the truth in the west of England, where he was a tutor in the household of Sir John Welch. In 1522 he formed the project of translating the Bible into his native tongue. "I defy the Pope and all his laws," said he to a learned Romish divine, "and ere many years, I will cause the boy that driveth a plough to know more of the Scriptures than you do." A man who openly declared such sentiments and such intentions could not remain in safety on English soil. So after seeking in vain an asylum in London, he crossed the Channel and escaped beyond the immediate control of Henry VIII., the "Defender of the Faith."

Now commenced his "poure apostle's life," as a friend and fellow laborer of his calls it,— a life of hardship, of toil, of study, of hair-breadth escapes from the emissaries of his persecuting sovereign.

In 1526 he printed his translation of the New Testament, the first translation into English from the original Greek.

It was issued first in octavo, soon after in quarto. Finding its way at once into England, it awakened persecution. The Bishop of London prohibited its circulation, and ordered

every copy of it to be surrendered within thirty days. He preached against it at St. Paul's Cross, a noted preaching place, declaring that it contained two thousand errors of translation, and then kindled a bonfire before his pulpit and burned such copies of the offensive book as he had been able to seize. Sir Thomas More, the scholar and wit, wrote against it; and then he and Bishop Tonstall went to Antwerp and bought every copy they could secure. Here, however, they overleaped themselves. The love of gain even helped the cause of truth. The printers found that they could make money, whoever bought the books, persecuting bishops or pious laymen. Rival and surreptitious editions, ignorantly corrupted, it is true, were therefore issued, and copies were rapidly multiplied. In the meantime Tyndale, assisted by Myles Coverdale, a countryman of kindred spirit, was going on with the translation of the Old Testament from the Hebrew. When the books of the Pentateuch were completed they were published, not all however at the same place. So wandering was the life which Tyndale was forced to lead, so hazardous was it to let his place of residence be known, that he printed these books at different presses, and sent them forth separately to the world.

Renewed prohibitions of the translation and circulation of the Scriptures in England prevented for the time the publication of any other of the Old Testament books, except the prophecy of Jonah. The work of translation, however, went on in secret, and advanced as far as the end of Chronicles. At the same time Tyndale was revising his New Testament, living in concealment either within the city of Antwerp or somewhere in its vicinity. The emissaries of Henry VIII. were all the while seeking to entice him back to England. Letters of theirs to their master may still be read, describing their failures. One speaks of Tyndale's astonishing learning, another tells how the water stood in Tyndale's eyes when he heard of Henry's offer of leniency to those who would amend, and reveals his declaration of willingness to suffer torture if the king would only permit a simple version made by any one soever, to be circulated in his realm. In

1534 Tyndale's revised New Testament appeared. Inaccuracies of translation in the former edition had been corrected. How correct it was may be inferred from the fact that, after the successive revisions of which our present translation is the result, "many of Tyndale's correct and happy renderings are left to adorn it." In point of perspicuity and noble simplicity, propriety of idiom and purity of style, it has been said that no English version has yet surpassed it. The year distinguished by the publication of this revised Testament was the last of Tyndale's freedom. By the craft of the agents of Henry, who was now more enraged at his opposition to his divorce than at his translations, he was seized and imprisoned in the dominions of the emperor, on a charge of heresy. Two years he lay a captive in Vilvoord, near Brussels, perhaps going on with the chosen work of his life. On Friday, the 6th of October, 1536, with the connivance of his own sovereign, he was led forth to die. But as he was fastened to the stake, ere his voice was silenced, the heroic martyr with a fervent zeal cried aloud: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." He was then, according to a partially humane order, first strangled and then burned.

"His blood was shed

In confirmation of the noblest claim —

*Our claim to feed upon immortal truth,*

*To walk with God, to be divinely free,*

*To soar, and to anticipate the skies."*

The martyr's prayer was heard. Great changes had taken place in England even during those two years of his captivity. The King, irritated at the pope's opposition to his matrimonial projects, had renounced his allegiance to the Romish Church, and had declared himself head of the Church of England. The translation and circulation of the Scriptures was now freely spoken of, and yet the first translator of the Greek New Testament into English, by a strange inconsistency, was a prisoner on the continent under sentence of death. In 1534 the convocation of the English clergy voted that all prohibited books be called

in, and that the King cause a new translation to be made by competent men, "that the laity do not contend concerning the Catholic faith or the Scriptures."

Encouraged by the favor expressed in this decree, although obeying no command, either regal or ecclesiastical, Myles Coverdale in 1534, just after the seizure of his fellow laborer Tyndale, began a new translation, and with an unequalled diligence and promptness such as the circumstances demanded, completed it in eleven months. It was printed somewhere on the continent, and was dedicated to the King and Queen of England. Its circulation in England was for a while hindered by the delay of the Bishops to whom it had been submitted for approval.

Queen Anne had been in the mean time beheaded by the King's will, and succeeded by Jane Seymour. The Queen Anne of the dedication must therefore be exchanged for Queen Jane. In 1536, the very year of Tyndale's martyrdom, this version found its way into use, — not authorized but simply permitted by the King, — the first translation of the *whole* Bible from the *Original* which Englishmen had yet possessed. Varied and extensive learning, careful examination of other versions, and above all, earnest love for the truth, had presided over the work of translation and had given a pledge of its correctness. Two reprints of this version in the following year, 1537, show how extensively it was circulated. The chief honor to which it is entitled is that of being the first translation of the entire Bible from the original tongues. In point of precision, in respect of euphony, indeed in regard of fearlessly correct rendering of the sacred text, Tyndale's New Testament and fragments of the Old are far superior to it. The martyr never translated "repent" "amend yourselves," and "repentance" "penance;" he never led his countrymen to believe that "there is joy before the angels of God over one syner that doeth penance." Had he done so, his version might not have been still prohibited while Coverdale's was permitted to enter the realm. Coverdale's version was in fact somewhat a matter of expediency. It was introduced as the only one that

could at that time make its way through the weakened barriers which popery was striving to defend.

But the proscribed translation of Tyndale was destined yet to gain access to the English mind, and to be perhaps unwittingly approved by kingly authority. Before his imprisonment Tyndale had held many a conversation with an English chaplain resident in Antwerp. These interviews had resulted in the latter's adoption of the opinions of the former. To him Tyndale in captivity intrusted his unfinished MSS. The trust was received and sacredly fulfilled. In 1536 Tyndale was burned; in 1537, his translation of the New Testament and his versions of the Old, both printed and unprinted, — two-thirds of the whole Scriptures, — together with the remaining one-third translated by the editor, appeared in a handsome folio, — a loving tribute to the martyr's memory. This editor was John Rogers, destined to be the proto-martyr of the reign of Queen Mary. The name of Tyndale, though rightfully belonging to this version, would have ensured its rejection. In place of it appears the perhaps fictitious name of 'Thomas Matthew; and this Bible, printed on the continent and "set forth in England with the King's most gracious license," in 1537, though chiefly the work of Tyndale, is known as Matthew's Bible. The King of England's eyes were opening, though he knew it not.

Matthew's Bible had some notes and comments condemning certain papal errors. It therefore was received with little favor by many of the unreformed and half-reformed clergy of England. To satisfy these, a version without note or comment was demanded. Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury, the primate of the English Church, therefore obtained the royal permission to publish one. Rogers's or Matthew's Old Testament and Tyndale's New were made the basis of this version, which was a revised rather than a new one, — only the Psalms and a few other portions being entirely re-wrought. It was translated, we are told on the title page, "after the verity of the Hebrew and Greek texts, by the diligent study of diverse excellent learned men, ex-

pert in the foresaid tongues." The products of the Parisian press were then most highly esteemed for their typographical correctness and elegance. In Paris, therefore, amidst hindrances and dangers from zealous inquisitors and papal magistrates, the printing of Cranmer's Bible was begun; Coverdale correcting the proofs and forwarding the sheets as they were completed, to Cromwell, his friend and patron, secretary to the King. The work was yet unfinished when, terrified by a decree of the Inquisitor General, the printers fled, leaving 2500 copies, their press and types, at the mercy of their persecutors. Some of the books were burned; some were sold for wrapping paper. The workmen, however, after a while took courage and returned, gathered up the remains of their implements and the remnant of their edition, crossed the Channel and completed the work in England. From the sumptuous style of the edition, this Bible is called "the Great Bible."

It continued to be the authorized version for thirty years. We must pass over the remainder of Henry VIII.'s reign and that of Protestant and pious Edward VI., before whom an English Bible was carried at his coronation; neither of these produced another new translation. We cannot pause to describe the efforts made by Bishops with Romish tendencies, to hinder the circulation of the existing versions; nor can we detail the whole number and variety of the editions printed and circulated before the sceptre passed from Edward's hands into those of his cruel successor. It is computed that, exclusive of prohibited copies, 26,000 Bibles were at this time in the hands of those who read and valued them in England.

Upon the accession of Queen Mary, and the consequent prohibition of Protestant preaching and the circulation of the Scriptures, many of the English reformers sought a refuge on the continent. Frankfort, Strasburg, Basle, Geneva and Zurich are hallowed in the affections of Christian men, as the sanctuaries which gave them shelter. A common experience of suffering had not, however, produced among them absolute unity of sentiment.

Their common hatred of Romish formalism could not prevent the rise of bitter dissensions among them respecting the use of the service book and of ecclesiastical habits. A few of the more rigid opponents of these separated themselves from their brethren in Frankfort, and removed to Geneva. The number was swelled by the accession of those who in neighboring cities held similar opinions.

It was by the members of the congregation thus gathered together, that the next English translation of the Scriptures was made. The New Testament was printed in 1557, and from the city whence it emanated was called the "Genevan version." The translation was entirely new and had been undertaken by the English refugees with a view of enlisting the Biblical knowledge of continental reformers, and using their own enlarged acquaintance with the original tongues, to improve on the versions already in use. The translators numbered among them Coverdale, now a veteran in this field, and Wm. Whittingham, the author of some metrical versions of the Psalms in the famous collection of Sternhold and Hopkins. The Scotch reformer, John Knox, was certainly concerned in the work, though probably not as an active translator; and John Bodleigh, the father of the founder of the great library at Oxford, has the honor of having his name connected with it, if not as a translator, at least as a licensed proprietor of it in the reign of Elizabeth. The translation of the Old Testament was not yet completed, when in 1558 the death of Mary and the accession of Elizabeth invited the exiles home. A few of them lingered on the continent to finish in confident hope the work which had been begun with trembling and in fear. The whole volume, the New Testament now differing slightly from the original Genevan, was printed in 1560, and with a truly catholic spirit was addressed to "the beloved in the Lord, the brethren of England, Scotland and Ireland."

As an original version, not the work of one or two, but of a company of devout scholars, it differed from some of the previous versions. By the aid of italic supplements, though at the expense of brevity and literalness, it rendered the

meaning of the Word more intelligible. It first introduced into English printing the now almost universal practice of separating the text into short paragraphs, to mark that distinction of verses, which by the use of notes in the margin had been made in the Greek Testament. On every page it presented brief notes, explaining the text, setting forth the doctrines of the gospel, and showing a decidedly polemic bearing towards popery. By these notes it gained for itself a long and an extensive popularity. It was widely used for years after the publication of our common version, and is even now occasionally met with at the cottage firesides of England of Scotland.

One of the first formal indications of Queen Elizabeth's approval of the free circulation of the Scriptures, was the requirement that they be publicly read in the parish churches on the Sabbath. At the time of her accession, the Genevan version was not yet printed and circulated in England. Cranmer's version, the "Great Bible," which had been employed for a similar purpose in the reigns of Henry VIII. and Edward VI., was therefore the translation authorized by this ordinance. Had the whole Genevan version been already introduced into England, the non-conforming sentiments of its translators would have failed to commend it to the ecclesiastical dignitaries of the realm. The more critical study of the Hebrew and the Greek, however, soon detected inaccuracies in Cranmer's Bible. It was proposed, on account of these, to condemn it altogether.

Meantime the Genevan Bible had reached England and was already in daily use in many private families. In order to satisfy the objectors to the faithfulness of Cranmer's version, and at the same time to offer to the public an authorized and approved version to compete with the Genevan, the primate, Matthew Parker, proposed another and a new translation. Instead of imitating his predecessor, who had published with little alteration the best version then in use; instead of following the Genevan exiles, by committing the work to men who though good scholars had no high ecclesiastical rank, he entrusted the work to some fifteen Bishops,

whose character and office were expected to give weight to the new translation. Hence came the name by which it is generally known: "the Bishop's Bible." It was printed in 1568, and as presented to the Queen, with its 143 engravings of maps, portraits, and coats of arms, it was the most splendid copy of the Word of God yet issued from the press. Its title was simply: "the Holie Bible." Beneath the portrait of the Queen, which, surrounded by the national arms, graced the title-page, appeared in Latin the rich and significant motto,—the spirit of which had prompted and guided the series of versions to which this now belonged, — "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

For forty-three years was this Bible publicly read in the churches; yet in all that time it did not supplant the Genevan in the household and the closet. It is inferior to it as a translation, and for us possesses a greater interest than its predecessors only because it was the basis of that version which we daily read.

The history of that version we proceed to consider. But before reaching that we find another translation lying in our path, — in our path yet not altogether in it. It is there inasmuch as it is an English translation; it is beside it inasmuch as it is not a Protestant but a Romish one. The Saxon Church was indeed in communion with Rome when Bede faltered out the closing words of John's gospel; and the English in like manner, when Wiclif performed so unfilial an act as to give to her laity an intelligible Bible. The world had not yet witnessed the birth of Protestantism. Wiclif's translation, however, heralded the Reformation. With his begins the series of Protestant translations. The version which we propose to notice was occasioned by them, although not numbered with them. It is not a link in that chain. It is not a member of that goodly company. It is a rival, not an associate; it exists because they exist. Were they to disappear, it would vanish and its absence would be unfelt by even its professed friends.

This translation appeared in circumstances similar to those

in which the "Genevan" originated. That was made by and for English Protestant refugees in the reign of Mary; this by and for English Romish refugees in the reign of Elizabeth. As that has marginal notes defending the doctrines of the Reformed Church, so this has notes defending those of the papal.

The Romish clergy found, as the insurgents in the reign of Edward VI. declared, that they could not refute heretics while the Bible was read in English. This English Bible they had in vain attempted to suppress; the next best thing was to circulate a version of their own, of which they should be the sole interpreters. They could not restrict Bible circulation to the generally unintelligible Vulgate; their only refuge was to translate from that version, with all its errors, in a style which, nearly resembling the Latin, should be to the ignorant as sacred as it was obscure. The sword of the Spirit may well be thought harmless so far as man can rob it of its power, when it is sheathed in such words as "impudicity," "ebrieties," "commessations," "longanimity" and "promerited."

The New Testament of this version was printed at Rheims in France in 1582, and is called the Rhemish Testament. The Old Testament, delayed in its publication by the poverty of the English papal refugees, appeared at Douay in the same part of the kingdom, in 1609-10. The two together are known as the "Douay Bible," the only English Bible the Romanist is permitted to use.

When, upon the death of Elizabeth in 1603, her "awkward and learned" Scotch cousin, James I., ascended the English throne, the non-conforming party of England had strong hopes of favor from a monarch who had been reared under Presbyterian influence. A petition signed by about 1000 ministers, and thence called the Millenary petition, met him on his arrival in his new kingdom. It begged for reformation in the matters of the church service, the ministry, their livings and maintenance, and the system of ecclesiastical discipline. Although the University of Oxford answered this petition, the conceited and pedantic King longed

to meddle with the affair, and therefore issued a proclamation dated October 24, 1603, "touching a meeting for the hearing and for the determining things pretended to be amiss in the church."

This meeting was held on the 14th, 16th and 18th of January, 1604, in the drawing room of Hampton Court, and is thence called the "Hampton Court Conference."

Sixty years, with all their sudden and often evil changes, had now passed since within these stately walls Henry VIII. had studied the canon law to justify to himself his divorce from Katharine of Arragon; since here Anne Boleyn had revelled in all the luxury offered her by her fickle husband; since here Jane Seymour had been delivered by a natural death from all the perils which surrounded a wife of Henry; since here, in her turn, Anne of Cleves had awaited her divorce, Katharine Howard had spent a brief holiday, and Katharine Parr had given her hand to the adulterous monarch whom she was destined to survive. A new scene was now to be enacted here by the successor of the Tudors. On New Year's day of this year Shakspeare's company performed before the King in the great hall of the palace. On the 14th of the same month, James I. in his privy chamber prepared a drama of another sort, in which he was to be the chief actor. With the Lords of the Council, the Bishops and the church dignitaries of the realm, he met the delegates of the Millenary petitioners, Dr. John Reynolds and Dr. Thomas Sparks of Oxford, Mr. Chadderton and Mr. Knewstubs of Cambridge.

"The King sits as Moderator," says a lively modern writer; "His notion of moderation is not altogether uncommon, — to have all the talk to himself, and to abuse every one who ventured to hint a difference of opinion. Little did he allow the Divinity Professors to say; and when he was exhausted with his own harangues, he exclaimed that, if they had disputed so lamely in a college, he would have had them up, and flogged them for dunces; and that, if that was all they could say, he would have them all conform, or hurry them out of the land, or do worse for them."

• “‘I peppered them soundly,’ said the conceited pedant; and he shuffled about in his padded trunk hose, and chuckled and winked as the Bishop of London went down on his knees and protested that his heart melted with joy, and acknowledged God’s singular mercy in giving them such a king.” A dismal prospect this for non-conformity! But this conference, though it did little if anything for the cause of the non-conformists, did more than afford James an opportunity to display his self-conceit and his arrogance. For, on the second day of the conference Dr. Reynolds, President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, the chief speaker on the part of the petitioners, moved his majesty that, inasmuch as the existing translations were manifestly incorrect, there might be a new translation of the Bible. To this proposal Bancroft, Bishop of London, replied that, if every man’s humor should be followed, there would be no end of translating. The king, however, assented to the proposal, saying that he had never yet seen a good English version, though of all he had seen “the worst was the Genevan,”—the one it will be remembered which was now most popular, but one whose notes showed no favor to the King’s favorite doctrine of the royal supremacy. He proposed that a translation should be made by learned men in both universities, that it should then be revised by the bishop, laid before the Privy Council, and last of all ratified by the authority of his own kingly scholarship.

It will be recollected that at this time two versions were in use, the “Bishops,” preferred by the Church party, the “Genevan,” used by the non-conformist. While Reynolds’ proposal seems to have aimed at supplanting the former, James’s evidently aimed to supplant the latter. From these mutual jealousies came forth the decree for a new translation, which was to be published without note or comment.

On the 22d of July, 1604, the king wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury (Bancroft, translated from the see of London), stating that he had appointed fifty-four learned men for this work, and making provision for their support and compensation during its prosecution. These men were

in some instances nominated by the universities, and then appointed by the king; and in others selected directly by him for their known accomplishments and scholarship.

The kingdom could not have presented a nobler array of oriental, classical, and theological learning than that offered by this company of translators.

Dr. Launcelot Andrews, Dean of Westminster, and afterwards bishop of Chichester, the most celebrated preacher and the sternest defender of High Church doctrines in the reign of James, brought to the work his brilliant talents and sincere devotion. Adrian de Saravia, previously Divinity Professor at Leyden, a celebrated linguist, lent the aid of his profound knowledge of the original tongues. Dr. Lafield contributed his skill in architecture, to the details of the structure of the tabernacle and the temple. Cambridge and Oxford both offered to the work their Regius Professors of Hebrew and of Greek. There were Doctors of Divinity, learned dignitaries of the principal sees of the English Church, whole libraries of Biblical learning, and men of equal scholarship and as unquestionable piety, from the ranks of the non-conformists.

Though fifty-four persons are, in James's letter, said to have been appointed, the names of but forty-seven appear in the list of actual translators. The remaining seven were probably the bishops who were to revise the whole work. The translators met in three companies; the appointees of each university within their respective precincts; those of the king at Westminster. Each of these companies was again divided; so that there were six sections in all.

In July, 1604, their instructions were given to them. The substance of these was as follows: Inasmuch as they proposed only to make a *good* version *better*, the Bishops' Bible was to be taken as the basis of translation, and altered as little as possible. The preferences of the Puritan Churches for the superior Genevan version were, therefore, neither consulted nor indulged. Little, if any, alteration, was to be permitted in the division of chapters, or in proper names; and no change in the ecclesiastical phraseology, Church,

“bishops,” “deacons,” etc. All non-conforming tendencies were thus guarded against. The authority of the Fathers, the analogy of Faith, and the opinions of learned men in the land, were to be sought for the determination of doubtful or obscure readings. No marginal notes were to torture the sense of the text; and brief explanations of difficult Hebrew and Greek words, with references to parallel passages alone were to find a place beside the simple version. The following translations were to be used in preference to the Bishops when they agreed better with the original — and in the following order of precedence: Tyndale’s, Matthew’s, Coverdale’s, Cranmer’s, — the Genevan. “Every particular man of each company,” so ran the phrase, was “to take the same chapter or chapters, and having translated or amended them severally by himself, when he thought good, all to meet together to confer what they had done, and to agree, for their part, what should stand;” i. e., in each company there would be from seven to ten independent versions, out of which would emerge one revised or re-translated text. “As one company despatched any one book in this manner they should send it to the rest to be considered of seriously and judiciously. If any company, on the review of the book so sent, should doubt or differ upon any place, to send them word thereof, note the places, and therewithal send their reasons; to which, if they consented not, the difference to be compounded at a general meeting of the chief persons of each company, at the end of the work.” Every part of the Bible would thus be examined at least fourteen times distinctly, many parts fifteen times, and some seventeen. We can scarcely conceive of a plan which would secure a more faithful and thorough version. In 1607, the translators were diligently at work. Their delay in beginning is accounted for, first, by the death of one of the chief scholars of their number, Livelie, Hebrew Professor at Cambridge; and, secondly, by the lack of funds — which neither Church nor State freely contributed, and which the patentee of the edition, Robert Barker, at last largely supplied.

In 1611 this Bible was printed in a large black letter folio,

with this title, "The Holy Bible, containing the Old Testament and the New; newly translated out of the original tongues, and with the former translations diligently compared and revised, by his majesty's special commandment. Appointed to be read in the Churches." It was preceded by a dedication to the king, and a preface, showing the reasons for a new version, answering objections, describing the labors of the translators, explaining certain things peculiar to the translation, and concluding with an address to the gentle reader.

Thus introduced and commended to the public, the present version commenced its career. It is commonly called the *authorized* version, but the only authority for its circulation is found in the proceedings of the conference at Hampton Court, before James's coronation. No royal act or decree of Parliament made it the exclusively approved version. No decision of the convocation gave it the monopoly of the popular favor. The Genevan version in some ten editions was published for seven or eight years after 1611, and that too without prohibition. The appointment mentioned in the title referred only to the public assemblies of the people. The acknowledged superiority of the new version is the sole ground of its subsequent almost universal use.

We have now traced the course of events by which we became possessed of this admirable translation of the Scriptures. We have seen Wiclif battling with monkish corruption and papal error, and then from the retirement of Lutterworth sending forth to his unenlightened countrymen a defence of his opinions and a formidable weapon of controversy in his English version of the Bible. We have seen Tynedale, a refugee from England, leading, on the continent, in privation and peril, a "poure apostle's life," while he redeemed that glorious pledge made by him to the Romish Doctor, that he would cause the plough-boy to excel him in knowledge of the Scriptures. We have seen the fulfilment of his martyr's prayer,—“Lord, open the King of England's eyes,”—in the permitted publication and royal dedication of the subsequent translation of the entire Bible by his coadjutor,

Miles Coverdale; in the royal license of Matthew's Bible; a reprint of his own and Coverdale's versions, and yet more in the printing under the authority of the English primate and with a preface and commendation from his hand, of the great Bible of Cranmer. We have seen the fruit of the labors and studies of the persecuted refugees of Geneva, and that of the zeal of the exiled Romanists of Rheims and Douay. We have seen how Episcopal dignity was borrowed to give weight to the project of Cranmer's successor, Parker; and finally we have seen as the ripened fruit of these years of varied culture, of storm and sunshine, gathering up into itself all that was worthy in less mature products, and possessing a richness and a beauty peculiar to itself and paralleled by no other, the version made by the order of King James.

We may pause for a moment before concluding, to notice its excellence. With the spiritual power and divine authority which it possesses in common with all other versions and with its inspired originals, we are not now concerned. Its diction and its correctness are what here invite remark. No one can be at all familiar with this version without being aware of the matchless simplicity, beauty, and purity of its diction.

The *English Bible* — it is peculiarly *English*. A curious and yet instructive analysis has been made of its style, in connection with the styles of fourteen eminent English writers, from Spencer to Johnson. That of our translation is by far the purest of them all; one-twenty-ninth only of its words are of other than English origin; while one-third of Gibbon's, and one-fourth of Johnson's, originally came from abroad. Conveying to us the most important truths, and designed to instruct the illiterate and uncultivated as well as the scholar, it employs those words and those classes of words which are in earliest, fondest and most frequent use. It shuns or rather knows not the language of philosophy and science, but uses those words which find a ready response in every English heart. Herein appears the wisdom of God in ordering its *preparation* at the period in which it was

made. Our language was at that time settled. Before then its character was fluctuating; it then assumed a fixed form. Since then it has undergone some changes, and received some additions, which, though not rendering it less intelligible to scholars, have made it deviate somewhat from the simplicity and clearness and speciality of the popular speech. Had the Bible been translated at any other time, it would have been like some of the earlier versions, clothed in the forms of an obsolete tongue; or perhaps, like some modern paraphrases, decked out in the less simple and universally familiar garb of a Latin and French philosophical style. But it is translated in the tongue "that Shakspeare spake," a tongue which must ever be intelligible so long as the English people remain English.

It is to be observed, moreover, that the language of the Bible, its style, seems now irrecoverable. It is as though the speech consecrated by that noble use refused to be profaned by being employed to express either the wisdom or the folly of a later age. All the outcry against the faithfulness and the correctness of this version avails little. Increasing Biblical knowledge has indeed thrown brighter light on many passages, but it has not shown that grave and essential errors of translation exist.

The scholar can resort to the original, and if need be communicate to others the results of his studies; but it would throw the Christian world into inextricable confusion, it would destroy the universality of much of our existing literature almost as effectually as in the Dream in the Eclipse of Faith it was destroyed by the Bible's becoming a blank; it would annihilate the common dialect of the English and American Christian world, to substitute a new for our beloved old version of the Scriptures.

We may confidently hope that the Providence of God will never permit such a measure to be carried out. We may expect that the English Bible, which has comforted so many Christian, and converted so many unchristian, hearts, which has enlightened and guided so many erring intellects, which has been the rhetorical no less than the spiritual

teacher of such authors as Bunyan and Baxter and Addison and Wordsworth, will still teach and gladden and guide their successors to the end of time. And now we know of no fitter words with which to close this Article than those of one who, once familiar with this noble version, now in his alienation from the faith and the church of which it is the bulwark, thus in words of lamentation and unwilling praise bears witness to its power. "Who will not say that the uncommon beauty and marvellous English of the Protestant Bible is not one of the great strong holds of heresy in this country? It lives on the ear like a music that can never be forgotten, like the sound of church bells, which the convert hardly knows how he can forego. Its felicities often seem to be almost things rather than mere words. It is part of the national mind and the anchor of national seriousness. \* \* \* The memory of the dead passes into it. The potent traditions of childhood are stereotyped in its verses. The power of all the griefs and trials of a man is hidden beneath its words. It is the representation of his best moments, and all that there has been about him of soft and gentle and pure and penitent and good speaks to him forever out of his English Bible. \* \* \* It is his sacred thing which doubt has never dimmed and controversy never soiled. In the length and breadth of the land there is not a Protestant with one spark of religiousness about him, whose spiritual biography is not in his Saxon Bible."