

THE CHURCH AND THE BIBLE

EDITIONS OF THE SCRIPTURE IN VERNACULAR

By WILLIAM CANON BARRY, D.D.

Lying before me is a page in facsimile of the first book ever printed from movable types. The book itself bears no date, but it was created, as we may truly say, by Gutenberg at Mayence in Germany, and sent out before the year 1456. What, then, was this first printed book? It is known as the 'forty-two line,' or the Mazarin Bible; and it is nothing else than the Latin Vulgate, the official text of Holy Scripture approved by the Roman Church, and used by Catholics for at least nine hundred years previous to its appearance as the beginning of printed literature. All educated persons in the fifteenth century read Latin as a matter of course. A printed Latin Bible was, therefore, the most public and ready to hand of all forms in which the Sacred Scriptures could be given. So soon as movable types were invented, the Church hastened to put within reach of her children the treasures of Holy Writ in this new shape. The first volume printed with a date is the Latin Book of Psalms, at Mayence, 1457. The first whole Bible dated comes from the same city, 1462. Venetian presses began their work on Scripture in 1475, and sent out twenty-two complete editions of the Vulgate in not many years. Half a dozen large, or folio, editions were published before a single Latin classic had been committed to the printers' hands. By the year 1500 no fewer than ninety-eight distinct and full editions of the Church's Bible in its Latin text had come forth, 'besides twelve others which contained the Glossa Ordinaria, or the Postils of Lyranus.'

Hebrew and Greek Originals.

But what of translations which those might read to whom Latin was either an unknown or a difficult tongue? I will deal with them in a moment. First, however, take note that Church authorities welcomed or even themselves brought out editions of Holy Writ in the original Hebrew and Greek, with which learned men might compare the Latin. Thus from 1477 onwards the whole Hebrew text was printed by Italian Jews; and in 1517 the Rabbinic Bible, issued in four volumes at Venice, was dedicated by its editor, Felix Pratensis, to Pope Leo X. The famous Greek text, called the Septuagint, was printed in his remarkable Polyglot by Cardinal Ximenes in 1514; but the first published Greek New Testament is due to Erasmus, a priest, and appeared in 1517. Catholic ecclesiastics were evidently not afraid of scholarship as regards the inspired volumes, on which they spent their zeal, their resources, and their labor.

First Printed German Texts.

Now let us look at what was done for the people at large. The name which casts a shadow upon this enquiry, as we all know, is that of Luther. Luther was born in 1483, and died in 1546. Take, then, the Fatherland, to which, as the story once went, this man first gave a knowledge of the divine volume. Well, we possess the original German Bible printed in 1466, seventeen years before the miner's son of Eisenach saw the light. Twenty editions of the whole Scriptures followed down to 1520—the year in which Luther was condemned by Leo X.—these in Upper Germany; and four besides in Lower Germany. No fewer than ninety Plenaria containing the Sunday Epistles and Gospels, with fourteen editions of the Psalms in the vernacular, must be added. Luther's New Testament appeared in 1522, his entire Bible not until 1534. From a collation of his work with earlier German renderings it is certain that he made use of them, and so was not the pioneer whom Protestants take him to be. In 1534, in fact, as many as thirty editions of the whole Scriptures, or of portions of them, were issued by Catholics in Luther's native tongue. Since then, the German Bible of Dietsberger, and more recently that of Allioli, have kept the faithful acquainted with Holy Writ under orthodox approbation. These facts and dates speak for themselves. Luther was by no means first in the field of translators. And the very forms of these early versions, largely in miniature and pocket editions, indicate how wide-spread was their use.

Other Bibles in the Vernacular.

Outside Germany the same work of translation, which had begun before printing was invented, went on apace. At Delft the Old Testament in Dutch came out in 1477; the French New Testament is dated Lyons, also of that year. The Spanish Scriptures, translated about 1405 by Boniface, brother of St. Vincent Ferrer the Dominican, were printed in 1478, and republished with licence of the Inquisition in 1515. The standard French by Lefevre, who was not entirely sound in the Faith, underwent revision at Louvain by Catholic divines, and passed through fifty editions down to the year 1700. In 1471 two versions of the Bible in Italian were printed at Venice; eleven full editions, with imprimatur of the Holy Office, are counted previous to 1567. Of the Bohemian and other outlying versions I will only make mention. But I may add that a printer of Nuremberg had set up a warehouse in London for the sale of the Latin Vulgate in 1480. Caxton's 'Golden Legend,' 1483, contained nearly the whole

of the Pentateuch and a large portion of the Gospels. Yet no English Bible was printed until the New Testament of William Tyndale made its appearance in 1525. Why was this? And how came there to be such an exception to the rule which elsewhere provoked Churchmen to scatter the Bible broadcast?

Why No English Printed Bible?

We may give the answer in one word, and that word 'Wycliffe.' A hundred years before Luther was born the English nation had been fever-stricken by a great movement towards anarchy and communism, of which the Oxford graduate, Wycliffe, had expounded the principles, drawing them, as he said, from Holy Scripture itself. London had fallen into the hands of a mob of fanatics; the Archbishop of Canterbury was murdered; and public order seemed to be on the brink of dissolution. The Bible in English translated by these 'Lollards' was thus made an apology for sedition, theft, and slaughter; it was wickedly wrested from its true meaning to become the Great Charter of crime. We cannot marvel, then, if a few years later, in a convocation held at Oxford (1408), Archbishop Arundel enacted that 'no man should hereafter by his own authority translate any text of the Scripture into English'; and that none should read the versions 'lately composed in the time of John Wycliffe or since,' until the said translation 'was approved by the Ordinary or a Provincial Council.'

Old English Bibles.

On this subject the latest comment will be found in the new *Encyclopædia Britannica*. The writer, Canon Hensley Henson, stands at the opposite pole to Catholicism; but he is thoroughly well-informed; and he says: 'It would appear, however, as if at first at all events the persecution was directed not so much against the Biblical text itself as against the Lollard interpretations which accompanied it.' And again: 'It must be allowed that an enactment of this kind,' meaning Archbishop Arundel's decree, 'was not without justification. The Lollards, for instance, did not hesitate to introduce into certain copies of the pious and orthodox Commentary on the Psalms by the hermit of Hampole (Richard Rolle) interpolations of their own of the most virulently controversial kind, and although the text of their Biblical versions was faithful and true, the General Prologue of the Later Version was interlarded with controversial matter.' Nevertheless, Canon Hensley Henson goes on to remark, 'For all this, manuscripts of Purvey's Revision were copied and recopied during this (the fifteenth) century, the text itself being evidently approved by the ecclesiastical authorities, when in the hands of the right people, and if unaccompanied by controversial matter.' It is certain that manuscript copies of an English Bible were in possession of such orthodox Catholics as Thomas of Woodstock, Henry VI., Humphrey Duke of Gloucester, and the Brigittine nuns of Syon House. English Bibles were bequeathed by will, and given to churches or convents. From these things it has been argued, as above by Canon Henson, that authority tolerated the use of a version made by Lollards—and no extant Bibles do, in fact, show heretical taints in their text—or else, as by Abbot Gasquet, that there was an acknowledged Catholic translation. We are bound, at all events, to accept the remarkable witness of Sir Thomas More in his Dialogue. 'I myself have seen and can show you,' says the martyr, 'Bibles fair and old written in English, which have been known and seen by the Bishop of the diocese, and left in the hands of lay men and women whom he knew to be good and Catholic people.' More himself was decidedly in favor of vernacular translations; but 'the New Testament newly-forged by Tyndale, altered and changed in matters of great weight,' deserved, in his opinion, to be prohibited. Cranmer and Foxe, the martyrologist, both allude to translations of the whole body of Scripture, 'as well before John Wycliffe was born as since,' observes Foxe. At any rate, West-Saxon and Lindisfarne Gospels, not to speak of other documents known to history, are sufficient to prove that all along the centuries, as far back as the time of Venerable Bede, if any man desired to render Holy Scripture into his mother-tongue he was at liberty to do so.

Abuses of Scripture Reading by Heretics.

But surely at no time could the Catholic Church allow, in principle or in practice, the contention of Protestants that the Bible alone is the rule of faith, or that individual Christians must get their religion by reading its pages. Moreover, if the Church held, as she does hold, that Scripture is the written Word of God, she was bound to protect it from heretical and profane handling. As I have quoted one Protestant, Canon Henson, in defence of the Oxford Synod which dealt with Wycliffe translations, I will quote another, the late J. A. Froude, in illustration of Sir Thomas More. First, as regards Tyndale's version, Froude remarks, 'The offence was less in the rendering of the words than in the side-notes, prefaces, and commentaries,' yet even the 'words' had many of them to be corrected by and by, and always in deference to Catholic criticism, so that the Authorised Version of 1611, which is now being glorified, bears upon it large traces of the Rheims New Testament where Tyndale is supplanted. Again, as Froude tells us, 'In 1539 appeared Taverner's Bible, with a summary at the commencement 'of things contained in Holy Scripture,' in which Protestantism of

"Drunken at e'en, drouthy in the mornin'."—the best substitute for Glenlivet is Hondai-Lanka Tea.

"If ye brew weel, ye'll drink the better." Hondai-Lanka Tea well brewed is fit drink for princes.