

TREASURY of OLD BIBLES

*Rare Manuscripts 800 Years
Old Are Daily Passed By
An Unheeding People*

Written for the "Record" by
J. R. HASTINGS

THE Bible, the world's best seller, was written by authors who wanted no royalties.

In the Middle Ages, it was beautifully copied in Latin by the hands of monks, the ordinary letters in sepia ink made from cuttlefish, but the capitals a wonder of art in scarlet and brilliant blue and beaten gold. They worked for the love of it.

It was first printed and read in the English mother tongue by men who risked their lives in doing it.

But in 1538, Henry the Eighth ordered a copy of Miles Coverdale's English version of the Bible to be chained to a pillar or desk in every church or cathedral, free for all to read.

Four Hundred Years

To-day, 400 years later, all over the world English-speaking people celebrate this victory, and from 2YA on Sunday afternoon, June 5, the Bishop of Wellington reads a talk on "The Bible in England" for the NBS.

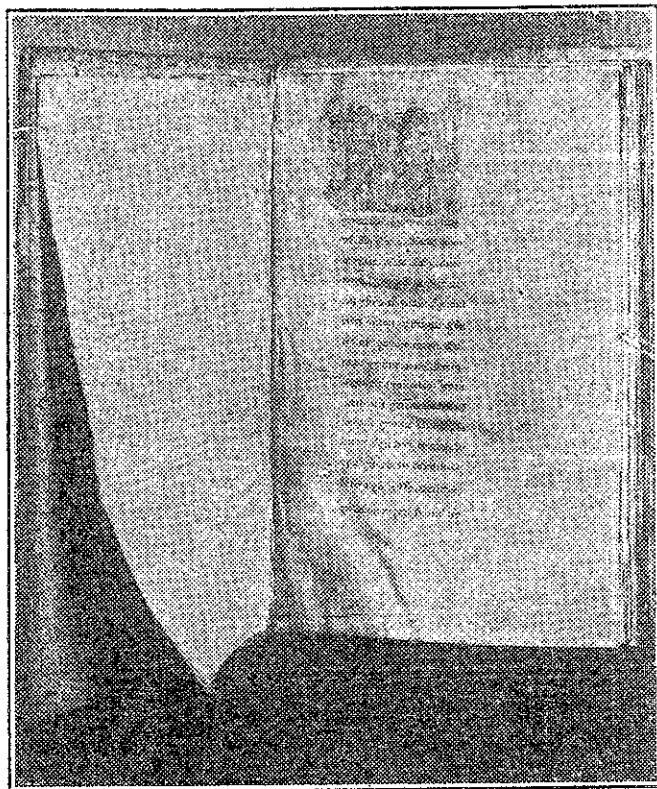
In the Bible House of Wellington, among other rare treasures, lies a copy of the Miles Coverdale Bible.

IT may be hard to realise that New Zealand is famed overseas for something other than its All Blacks, but footballers are far from the minds of museum authorities in far-flung corners of the earth when they discuss the famous collection of manuscript prayer books and Bibles, housed in Wellington.

Daily hundreds of people hurry by the New Zealand Branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society's building near the Wellington waterfront without dreaming that, within its walls, is one of the most artistic collections in existence.

Perhaps the passers-by are not to be blamed for their ignorance of this fact. It is in other lands that the real value of this collection is estimated.

OVERSEAS interests have tried to buy these relics of a bygone age, but have never succeeded. The Rev. J. Calder, who zealously guards these art treasures, watches over them with a paternal eye. He sees in them not



OUT OF THE DIM PAST.

... Copy of St. Matthew, in the Wellington Bible House, written by a monk in 1120 A.D.

a lot of old faded manuscripts, but a collection representing every eventful era in English history.

Like others interested in this collection he regrets but one thing—if these works written painstakingly by monks in mediaeval monasteries could only talk! What stories they would have to tell!

THE man responsible for assembling this collection was Mr. A. Clemas, of Masterton, who made a life's task of searching the world for manuscripts worthy of preserving for all time. His father and grandfather had collected before him. His agents in various parts of the world were commissioned to purchase books on his behalf. As the years went by he built up a collection that is to-day the envy of museums in every part of the world. Not long ago he disposed of his collection to the British and Foreign Bible Society's New Zealand branch, where it can be shown to the public.

Book of Hours

ONE of the most beautiful among the many manuscripts in the collection is a five-hundred-year-old French Book of Hours, in an excellent condition despite its great age. This work of art is written in a bold, clear handwriting on 162 leaves of vellum, and is decorated by 12 beautifully-executed full-page miniatures in colours and burnished gold painted on with a brush.

It is doubtful if any artist of to-day could produce such work. There is almost a touch of the wonder of Nature in the lovely miniatures, adorned with birds and flowers, exquisitely drawn, shining with the gold of the sunset and the blue of the sky.

IF books could talk there is at least one exhibit in this collection that would throw interesting light on the reign of that much-discussed monarch, Henry VIII. The volume is a book of the Psalms, written in Latin by some monk way back in the fifteenth century.

His clear handwriting graces over two hundred leaves of thin vellum. This particular old book has an eventful history. At one time in the possession of a member (Contd. on p 39.)



—S. P. Andrew, photo.

REV. J. CALDER

... Guards his treasures with a paternal eye.