

**FIFTEENTH CENTURY
BIBLES. A STUDY
IN BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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Fifteenth Century Bibles. A Study in Bibliography by Wendell Prime

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STUDY IN BIBLIOGRAPHY

BY

WENDELL PRIME



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To the Reader :

Many who have a genuine regard for old and good books have not made the acquaintance of those books which are both the oldest and best of printed volumes. This study of the Bibles of the Fifteenth Century includes the oldest of printed books, and only those which are included in the class called INCUNABULA, namely, books printed during the first half-century of the art, 1450-1500, A. D. Thus the history of the printed Bible is the history of the invention and progress of the art of printing.

Wendell Prime.



CHAPTER I.



The Biblical Kingdom.

THE FIRST BOOK IS THE BIBLE. It is the first complete book which was printed with movable types. It is the first book in the number of its editions, copies and translations. In this respect it exceeds every other book so immensely that there is no other book with which it may be compared. Considered entirely apart from its contents, character and claims, it is easily the first book, standing alone among books of all languages, nations and ages.

The first book printed with movable types was printed by John Gutenberg at Mentz, Germany, between 1450 and 1456 A. D. This claim to be the Alpha of all printed books, as it is daily the Omega of all printed books, has been disputed with all possible ingenuity and erudition. But no other volume, up to the present hour, has found any recognition as its predecessor. Holland

was given to the municipal library of Cologne which contained 400 copies.

The Pilgrim's Progress,

by John Bunyan, probably ranks next to the "Imitation" in the number of its editions, translations and copies. The first part was first printed in London, 1678, a copy of which is in the Lenox Library. In the Bunyan collection in this library there are 278 editions of the first part, 196 of the second part, and 73 of the third part.

Don Quixote,

by Cervantes, is probably the third most popular book ever printed. Its first part was first printed at Madrid, 1605, and its second part was first printed in the same place 1612. It has been translated into all European languages, including Turkish and Greek, and several times in all the leading languages. About 300 editions are known, only one-third of which were printed in Spain.

It is not probable that there is a fourth book in any language which approaches any one of these three mentioned, in the number of its copies, translations and editions. Whatever may be the circulation of these or any other world-famous books, none has been or is so successful as to alter the relative position of the Bible in the world of printing, for its editions are numbered by the tens of thousands, and its translations by the

hundreds. Practically, its editions are innumerable because it has been printed in so vast a variety of forms. These different forms and issues could not be estimated with any approach to accuracy unless several persons in every generation were devoted to this one bibliographical endeavor. Doubtless the majority of these editions have in their number of copies averaged larger than the ordinary editions of other books, and this adds greatly to its relative supremacy.

In this numerical comparison the Koran is not forgotten. Though it is read or heard by the millions of Islam, its character and usage remove it from the category in which the Bible is considered. It is among reading, printing, progressive nations that the Bible is the first book, the "Book of Books," every year more and more without a rival. This Biblical conquest seems more marvelous when we consider that it has been achieved, in spite of the deadly hostility of what was known throughout the world as Christianity, when printing was invented.



1894



CHAPTER II.



The Biblical Conflict.

MUCH is written, especially by scientists, about the conflict between science and religion.

Science ought not to complain. Its conflict is a mere lover's quarrel compared with the conflict of the Bible with religion. This entire book, closely printed, would not suffice for a record of the bulls, canons, edicts, confiscations, imprisonments, tortures, stranglings, burnings and other ecclesiastical demonstrations to suppress and exterminate the Bible, its translators, editors, printers, publishers, disseminators and readers. Pagan Rome was not more ferocious in her endeavor to obliterate the Gospel than papal Rome in her attempt to exterminate the Scriptures.

This conflict of the printed Bible was inevitable in view of the position occupied by the Church of Rome