

**BOOK-LORE: A MAGAZINE
DEVOTED TO OLD TIME
LITERATURE. VOL. II, JUNE,
1885,- NOVEMBER, 1885**

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BOOK-LORE.

BOOK-LORE:

A Magazine devoted to Old Time Literature.



*All ye who, in these later days,
Love books of days gone by,
Come mount these stairs, shut out the
world,
And from its troubles fly.*

VOL. II.

JUNE, 1885—NOVEMBER, 1885.

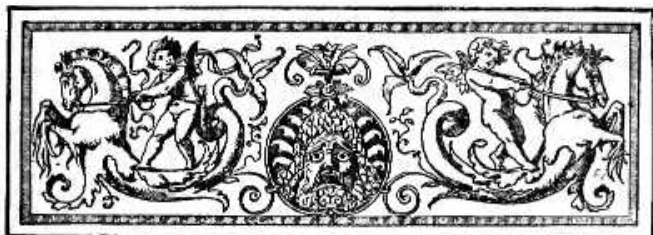
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BOOK LORE.



"THE GREAT BIBLE," A.D. 1539.

BY NICHOLAS POCOCK.



HERE is perhaps no part of the bibliography of the English translations of the Bible in which more mistakes have been made than in the description of the different issues of Cromwell's and Cranmer's Bibles, roughly classed together under the head of the "Great Bible." Every writer has alluded to the mistakes of his predecessors; and none, with the exception of Mr. Francis Fry, have been entirely successful in avoiding errors of one kind or another. We shall not allude to these mistakes, except so far as may be necessary for the elucidation of our description of the eight books to which the term has been commonly applied. The sequel will show that it is not a matter for wonder that many of these errors should have been fallen into. Each writer has contributed something to their history; but no one had taken the trouble to ascertain exactly the variations as to the setting up of the type of every leaf of every one of seven of these editions, to prove the identity of each edition, till the appearance of Mr. Fry's elaborate work entitled *A Description of the Great Bible, 1539, and the Six Editions of Cranmer's Bible, 1540 and 1541, printed by Grafton and Whitchurch*, which was published in 1865.

It was owing to his confusing the Great Bible of 1539 with the edition which followed it in April 1540, commonly called Cranmer's, that the accomplished editor of the *State Papers of the Reign of Henry VIII.* was induced to antedate by a whole year a letter addressed by Cranmer to Cromwell on the subject of his prologue to the forthcoming volume, and to suggest that Rymer had assigned a wrong date to the proclamation of November 14th, 1539. More

JUNE, 1885.

recent writers have avoided this mistake, but have failed to notice with much exactness the relation in which these different editions stand one to another. We have implied that it was not surprising that writers on this subject should have fallen into error; for, in point of fact, it is very rarely indeed that a perfect copy of any of these editions is met with; and the consequence has been that collectors and booksellers have made up copies by mixing the leaves of one edition with those of another, many of them in all probability not knowing that there was any difference in the readings of two pages of which the initial words and the catch-words agreed. And not only has this been done by modern collectors, but there is good reason to suppose that many of the original copies were made up in this way.

Of the eight Bibles we have alluded to, seven are of the size of Cromwell's edition of 1539, and so are in some sense entitled to the appellation of *Great Bible*, a term first used to indicate the large size of these books compared with the small folios that preceded them. They are at least an inch wider and two inches taller than the Coverdales of 1535 and 1537. With the first of these editions, which differs materially from the other six, Cranmer, as far as is known, had nothing whatever to do. It was finished, as is stated on the last leaf, in April 1539, and was followed by a New Testament in 8vo, of the same date and version, of which, probably, there is only one perfect copy in existence—namely, in the library at Wolferbüttel, entirely, we believe, unknown to bibliographers—and another copy imperfect in the British Museum. This was followed by a small 4to of the New Testament dated 1540, of which only two copies exist, and which probably appeared early in that year, and by another imprint of the whole Bible in a small folio size, with the same text slightly altered and improved, but varying only by a word or two at a time from the Great Bible. This edition, also, in spite of its smaller dimensions, has been called an edition of the Great Bible, chiefly, it may be supposed, because the text has been so little interfered with. The real Great Bible of 1539 is full of misprints and faults of the compositors. These have, for the most part, been amended in the small folio of 1540, which was printed by Petyt and Redman for Berthelet, and must be one of the books alluded to in the letter of Cranmer to Cromwell which we mentioned above.

All these volumes are substantially the same version, though numerous misprints, omissions, and other errors of the Great Bible of 1539, which was the first of them that appeared in print, are corrected in the smaller folio. And it seems tolerably plain that they were issued without any concert with the editor of the edition which came out in the following year with Cranmer's Preface, and dated on its colophon April 1540. A remarkable evidence of this exists in the 'Almanacke' of this edition being computed for twenty-nine years onward, while that of the Cranmer Bible of April 1540 is only for nineteen years. And yet some supervision was exercised in printing Berthelet's small folio, which curiously enough is also dated April 1540, as a few improvements have been here and

there introduced into it—very rarely, however, except in cases where it was almost unavoidable, agreeing with Cranmer's edition of April 1540. And here we may notice that Dr. Westcott, in his brief notice of this edition of Petyt and Redman's printing, is not quite so accurate as usual. He says that it "presents some variations from Cromwell's Bible, but they appear to be due rather to the printers than to any special revision." It is true that numerous errors of press have been corrected, but such alterations as the following, which may be found in abundance, must be attributed to a more or less careful revision of the text—*e.g.* in Proverbs, xix. D, the Great Bible has :—

A slouthfull body shuteth his hande in hys bosome so that he can not put it to his mouth;

whereas Berthelet's edition has :—

A slouthfull bodye hydeth his hande in his bosome and disdayneth to put it to his mouthe.

Such alterations as this are surely not mere printers' corrections. A remarkable characteristic feature of this small folio volume, unnoticed by bibliographers, is the enumeration of chapters being in Italian, sometimes shortened, sometimes at length, thus :—*Capitolo Primo, Capi. I.* Dr. Eadie has omitted to notice this Bible, possibly taking for granted that its contents were precisely the same as those of the Great Bible which preceded it. We dismiss this Bible with the remark that its only title to the appellation of *Great Bible*, which it has been called by bibliographers, consists in its being of the same version slightly improved. We have made an extensive comparison of its readings throughout with Cromwell's of 1539 and Cranmer's of 1540, and find that it almost always agrees with the former, and very rarely, when it differs from it, adopts the reading of the latter, except where an independent reviser would have been likely to do so. The best instance we can give of want of concert between the editors of Berthelet's small folio of 1539 and Cranmer's large one of 1540 occurs in Isaiah xxxviii. B, where the Great Bible had by mistake printed "*in my best age*" in error for "*in my least age*," and where Berthelet's editor, knowing that it must be a mistake, printed the words by conjecture "*in my best age*," the true reading intended being that adopted by Cranmer's of 1540, "*in my least age*."

As regards the two large folios of 1539 and 1540, we have said that writers have fallen into many mistakes about them, and that the confusion of leaves of the one edition with those of the other will easily account for those mistakes. We have had the advantage of comparing an undoubtedly genuine copy of each of these volumes; and we find that there are only three cases in which a leaf could not be transferred from one edition to the other without the change being detected, the leaves being so printed that the catch-word in every case—these three leaves only excepted—matches the first word of the following page. This being so, it is scarcely possible to avoid the conclusion

that this arrangement was intentional, for the express purpose of substituting leaves of the later edition in the earlier; and the conclusion is fortified by the fact that, though the last column of one leaf matches the first column of the next leaf, this is by no means the case with the other columns, the beginnings and endings of which differ on an average at least once in the four columns wherever the reader opens the volume. Whatever may be the true account of this, it seems almost certain that copies of these two editions, as well as of three others which were issued in July 1540, in May 1541, and in December 1541, were mixed the very first time they were bound together in a volume. It is possible that the numerous misprints and omissions of the edition of 1539 may have induced the booksellers to print subsequent editions, in order to supply defective leaves or sheets in that edition; or perhaps it may be thought a more probable account of the matter that several sheets of the first impression were actually lost under the circumstances which obliged the printers to decamp from Paris in the midst of their occupation, and finish the printing of the volume in London. In confirmation of this latter hypothesis we may mention that Mr. Fry informs us that, "if a copy of 1539 has any portion of the April 1540 edition in it, it will generally be found to be folios 92 and 93 of the New Testament." We have taken the trouble to collate these two leaves throughout in the two editions, and find that there is no difference in the readings intended to be printed, that the first edition is here exceptionally free from errors of press, having only four in the eight columns, whilst the leaves which were substituted for them from the April 1540 in Cranmer's own copy have six or seven errors of press. It may be interesting to the reader to know that though these leaves are interchangeable, and no difference would be detected except by a comparison instituted for that purpose, yet there will be found on these four pages certainly not less than three hundred variations, any ten or twenty of which would be sufficient to establish that they were of a different set-up. Certain it is, that in all the five editions there is the agreement in the beginnings and ends of leaves; and Mr. Fry informs us that he has collated one perfect copy of this Bible, which consists of portions of six different editions; whilst there is, on the other hand, the equally extraordinary fact, testified to by the same collator, that of the seven editions every leaf of each is different, with only fourteen exceptions. In some portions of the work the alterations in the text are very considerable, as we shall have occasion to observe hereafter; and yet in these very parts the pages of the later edition have been printed off from those of the former in such a way as to make almost every leaf match. So thoroughly has this been done, that in many cases manifest errors have been continued in the later edition; the frequent omission of the catch-words in 1539 being noticeable also in April 1540, though in many cases these errors have been corrected in the later edition—which, however, is very far from being free from errors of press. And there is one instance in which, in the middle of a sentence which was considerably altered, at the end of one leaf and the commencement of the next,