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The Bible
The Book of Mankind

BY

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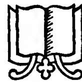

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The Bible, the Book of Mankind

ADOLF HARNACK, in repelling the proposal that the faculties of Theology in the German Universities should cease to be faculties of distinctively Christian Theology, and become faculties of Theology in general—without special reference to any particular religion—points out that Christianity's place is not so much among as above the other religions. He that does not know it, says he, knows none; and he who knows it in its historical development knows all. Chief among the characteristics by which it elevates itself above other religions, he emphasises this one: that Christianity has the Bible—the book of the ancient world, the book of the Middle Ages, and (though not perhaps in the market-place) the book of these new days of ours. What does Homer matter, he asks; what the Vedas; what the Koran, in comparison with the Bible? And how inexhaustible it is! Every succeeding period discovers new aspects of it, and every new search into its depths raises the inward life of Christendom to a higher level. What Harnack means is perhaps expressed in somewhat crisper phrase by Martin Kaehler, when he declares that history has written in shining letters on the forefront of the Bible, "This is mankind's book." Other books may belong to a people, an age, a stage of human development; this book belongs to all peoples, all ages and all stages of growth, whether of the individual or of the race—unifying them all and welding them into one vitalized and vitalizing whole. The Bible is, by way of eminence, the book of humanity.

The Bible did not begin, indeed, as a world-book. The Jewish Bible was the book of a people, and was written in the tongue of a people. An earnest of what was to come was given, it is true, when this book of a people began in the third century before Christ to clothe itself in a world-language. The rendering of the Hebrew Bible into Greek has an immense significance in the history of civilization, as the first important attempt in the region of Mediterranean culture to translate from one language into another. It thus became at once a symbol and an instrument of the unification of the peoples. Of far more importance was it, however, in the development of religion among men. Its meaning here was nothing less than this—that the diffusion of the Jewish people through the earth should not spell loss to the religion of revelation, but its entrance as leaven into the world. The Jews, scattered among the nations, might lose their language, but not their religion. Their religion, on the contrary, was to go with them, and through them was to work upon men of every race and of every clime. The Greek version of the Old Testament thus became a bond which held the Jewish diaspora firmly to the religion of revelation, and as well a powerful ferment in the life of the peoples into contact with whom it was brought. Thus it prepared the way for Christianity.

It did not as yet, however, become a world-book. That the Old Testament could not become without the New. It was only by being taken up into that Evangel which was "to course and range through all the world," that it could become a portion of the Bible of mankind. So long as the Kingdom of God was like a pent-in stream, the book of that Kingdom must needs be the book of a race, the race chosen of God to be his people during those days of mere conservation. Its passage into a world-language could at most dig the canal through which the universal gospel might afterwards flow out to water the earth. This the Greek Old Testament did. For, if the Greek language did something for it, it in turn did much for the Greek language. It taught it to speak the great things of God. It was only, however, when the barriers were broken down, and the stream rushed forth to overspread the world, the Spirit of the Lord driving it, that the book in which was embodied the Word of the Kingdom could become veritably a world-book. It was no accident that the Christian Bible was a Greek Bible. Greek was at the time the *lingua franca* of the civilized world, and the universal gospel naturally clothed itself in this world-tongue. But even the *lingua franca* of the civilized world did not suffice the Bible. It was the world, not the civilized world, which was "the field" in which the seed of the Kingdom was sown and, within the civilized world, the whole body of the people, not that "upper crust" which had found it convenient to communicate with one another in a common speech. The gospel penetrated through every stratum and spread outward from land to land. As it worked its way thus intensively and extensively, the book in which it was enshrined became ever more and more obviously the world's book.

We can observe its progress toward this result from the earliest years of the gospel proclamation. Wherever the gospel went, there the book is found; not as an exotic treasure, however precious, but as a leaven buried in the very substance of humanity and working through the whole lump. Wherever it went, it went as the people's book; energizing at the bases of the people's life and lifting the whole mass upward into new intellectual, ethical, spiritual vitality. And wherever it went, it established itself as at only a new frontier station whence it ever pushed yet farther beyond. In the West it became a Latin book. Not at Rome, indeed; for Rome was in those early days of Christianity a Greek city, and the Roman Church a Greek Church nourishing itself on the Greek Bible: its very Bishops commonly bore Greek names and when Latin names occur among them they are disguised in Greek forms (Xystus). But in the outlying provinces, North Africa first, where Latin was the speech of the people; and where, in the form in which the people spoke it, it became the speech of this book of the people. Out from these beginnings it made its way to dominate a whole civilization for a millennium and a half. In the East it became a Syriac book, and the service which the

Latin Bible rendered in the West, the Syriac Bible rendered to another civilization in the East. The extent of the influence of the Syriac Bible was bounded only by the limits of the Eastern world. Copies of it have come down to us from Egypt, from Malabar, from China itself. "A whole series of peoples," we are told, "received from the Syrians writing, the alphabet, and the Scriptures." In the South it became a Coptic book, perhaps first breaking effectively down the barriers of the cumbrous old script which confined the possession of letters to a cast, and giving to Egypt, mother of letters, an alphabet which even the meanest might read. In the North it made its way if more slowly yet with equal sureness, to the unlettered hordes which swarmed beyond the bounds of civilization: to the Goths and the Georgians, the Armenians and the Slavs, creating for its use in each case an alphabet and written speech.

It was thus that the Bible began to make itself the book of the world a millennium and a half ago; not waiting for civilization to prepare the road for it, but itself breaking the path for civilization; knowing no difference between cultivated and uncultivated, but seizing upon all alike and lifting all alike to its own level. From that day to this, with whatever slackenings in the rate of its progress, or even interruptions of it, it has advanced on the same lines. As the world grew ever bigger it has grown with equal ceaselessness ever more expansive; until to-day it is not the Bible of the Mediterranean basin or of the Eurasian world, but of the whole round globe. It may sound cold and unsignificant to say that it has now been rendered into all the chief languages of mankind. It may perhaps have more meaning to us to say that it may be read to-day in more than five hundred human tongues. Perhaps, however, it will be most intelligible if we say that the Bible is accessible to-day to three-quarters of the human race in its own mother speech. It is only natural that, in the presence of this stupendous fact of the transfusion of the Bible into the languages of the earth, men should think of the miracle of Pentecost and see that miracle projecting itself through the ages. Tennyson strikes a note to which all our hearts respond when he places on the lips of his Wycliffite hero the apostrophe :

> "Heaven-sweet Evangel, ever-living word,
> Who whilome spakest to the South in Greek
> About the soft Mediterranean shores,
> And then in Latin to the Latin crowd,
> As good need was—thou hast come to talk our isle.
> Hereafter thou, fulfilling Pentecost,
> Must learn to use the tongues of all the world."

After five hundred years we look not forward but back upon this great achievement. The miracle has been accomplished, and now it is but a slight exaggeration to say that every man may hear the mighty things of God in his own language in which he was born.

It goes without saying that the diffusion of the Bible throughout the

world might be a matter of little moment—scarcely more than an interesting fact in literary history—if, on becoming, above all other books, the book of the peoples, it did not at the same time become everywhere, above all other books, the book of the people. It has already repeatedly been made incidentally plain, however, that the Bible has been everywhere, above everything else, the people's book. This is the significance, for example, of the particular form in which the Latin Bible came into existence. The Latin Bible was, in its origin, nothing so little as a literary performance. It was simply the Greek Bible transfused by the Latin-speaking people into whose hands it came into their own everyday speech for their own familiar use. So redolent of the soil was it that it was a sad stumbling-block to the cultured. *Ex ungue leonem:* the world has never known a book so distinctively a people's book as the Bible has been since its origin. In this sense Christians have been from the first, above all other people who have lived in the world, the people of a book. The book and the people have been bound so closely together that we hardly know whether it were juster to say that where Christianity has gone there the Bible has gone, or that where the Bible has gone there Christianity has gone. In the first age of the Church, pre-eminently, the Christian and his book were inseparable. The Bible was not so much the book of the Church as the book of the Christian; and from the cradle to the grave every Christian was expected to keep it in his hand and in his heart, to live in and by it. The writings of the Fathers are crowded with exhortations, both formal and incidental, to diligent Bible-reading on the part of all. The reason given is most significant. Those who were taught by others were taught of men; those who took the Bible for their teacher were taught of God. They were "*theodidactoi*," God-taught, listening immediately to him speaking in his Word. "The deepest and ultimate reason why every Christian should read the Bible,"—so Harnack expounds the sentiment of the first Christian ages—"lies in this, that, just as everyone should speak to God as often as possible, so also everyone should *listen* to God as often as possible. *Oratio* and *lectio* belong together; so we read in countless passages from the later Fathers, but Cyprian had already said it quite clearly. He wrote to Donatus (c. 15): 'Be assiduous in both prayer and reading; in the one you speak to God, in the other God speaks to you.'"

No doubt, it was as possible then as it is now to honor the Bible in appearance rather than in fact. As we may find to-day great "family Bibles" encumbering the "parlor-tables" of households little interested in their contents, so we read of sumptuous Bibles then, written in gold letters on purple vellum and glittering with gems, which were kept for show rather than for use. But this very practice among the wealthy is a speaking evidence of the value universally placed upon the book. It was the family-book above every other. Husbands and wives read it daily

together and Tertullian knows no stronger argument against mixed marriages than that in their case this cherished pleasure must be foregone. The children were introduced to the Bible from the tenderest age. They learned their letters by picking them out from its pages. They were practiced in putting syllables together on the Bible names, the Genealogies in the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke supplying (one would think most umpromising) material for this exercise. They formed their first sentences by combining words into Bible phrases. As they clung about their mothers' necks, we are told, amid the kisses they snatched, they snatched also the music of the Psalms from their lips. Every little girl of seven was expected to have already made a beginning of learning the Psalms by heart; and, as she grew to maturity she should lay up progressively in her heart the words of the Books of Solomon, the Gospels, the Apostles and the Prophets. Little boys, too, traveling through the years, should travel equally through the Sacred Books. We hear again and again of men who knew the whole Bible by heart. There were, for example, the deacon Valens of Jerusalem, and the blind Egyptian, John, of whom Eusebius tells us. "He possessed," says the historian of the latter, "whole books of the Holy Scripture, not on tables of stone, as the divine Apostle says, nor on skins of beasts, or on paper which moth and time can devour, but—in his heart, so that, as from a rich literary treasure, he could, even as he would, repeat now passages from the Law and the Prophets, now from the historical books, now from the Gospels and Apostolical Epistles." Memory, however, was not to be solely depended upon: the Bible was not to be studied once for all and then neglected. It must be the Christian man's constant companion through life. It was to be read continually, read day by day, and year after year; visited unceasingly as a fresh fountain from which to quaff living water. To this extent Christians were the people of a book; and to this extent the book was the people's book.

There was nothing, however, esoteric in this devotion of the Christians to their Bible. The Bible was not so conceived as the Christians' book that they desired to keep it to themselves. Rather, reading it themselves thus diligently, they wished everyone else to read it, too. Finding it the source of life for themselves they ardently desired that others also should drink at its inexhaustible fountains. The missionary value of the Bible was well understood. Its translation into other languages, Augustine, for example, looks upon as essentially a missionary act: God had given it originally in Greek only as an *ad interim* provision—the Greek Bible was merely the central reservoir whence it should flow out in translation to all the world. And nothing was closer to the hearts of Christians than that the heathen among whom they lived should be induced to read the Bible. We are told that "Trypho is the first Jew and Celsus the first Greek whom we know to have read the Gospels."

But this only means that they are the first Jew and the first Greek that we happen to know of, who read the Scriptures and remained unconvinced. How many in the meantime had read and believed! As the same writer reminds us, "Aristides, the earliest of the Apologists, exhorts his heathen readers, after reading his own work, to take into their hands and to read the Holy Scriptures themselves (XVI.). This appeal to the Holy Scriptures runs through all the Apologies, from the earliest to the latest, and shows that their authors were united in the belief that the regular way to become a convinced Christian was to read the Holy Scriptures. In this way Justin (*Dial.* 7) and Tatian (*Orat.* 29) and Theophilus (*Ad Autol.* i. 14) expressly say that they themselves became Christians." And again, for a little later time: "The Church was ever most anxious that the Bible should be open and accessible even to the heathen; for she had again and again learned by experience that the Bible was her best missionary. The conversions of Hilary (*de Trinitate*, i. 5. 10) and Victorinus (Augustine, *Confess.* VIII., 2.4) in Rome were notable examples; these men had been led to the Church by the Holy Scriptures." We cannot avoid perceiving that in the first age of Christianity the Bible was, and was understood to be, the seed of the Church.

We do not, however, half appreciate the significance of the position taken by the Bible from the first as the book of the people, until we remind ourselves of some of the difficulties it required to surmount in establishing itself in this position. These first days of the Church were not the days of the printing-press, with its rapid and cheap multiplication of books. Nor were they the days of universal education. We may well wonder where the Bibles came from to be read by the people, and where the people came from able to read the Bibles. The triumph of the Bible over these difficulties—a triumph which has been repeated until it has become a matter of course—marks the introduction of the Bible into the world as easily the greatest event that has ever occurred in the history of the diffusion of literature, and just as easily the most powerful educative force which has ever entered humanity.

We lack materials for tracing in detail the processes by which the requisite supply of Bibles was produced. We can only note with wonder the fact that the miracle was wrought. The publishing trade was highly developed and most efficient, and no doubt it knew how to take advantage of so great a demand. In the fourth century we see the publishers "taking up" popular Christian books with the most businesslike avidity, and "pushing" them with a vigor which the most energetic modern publisher could scarcely surpass. There has even come down to us from the middle of the fourth century a "list" of a "Bible House," containing information designed to protect the purchaser from the wiles of too enterprising book-sellers. Pious persons gave themselves to the work of copying the Scriptures and this came to be the chief occupation of ascet-

ics. Good men had Bibles made for them to present to the needy. We are told, for example, of Eusebius' friend Pamphilus, the great Christian bibliophile of his day, that he kept a store of Bibles by him which he gave to those who desired them; and that "not only to men, but also to women whom he saw to be given to reading." No doubt, especially in the earliest days of the faith, many zealous believers wrote out the Bible, or parts of it, with their own hands that they might possess copies of their own. Papyrus sheets have come down to us from the early fourth century, painfully traced out in an unpracticed hand, which may be a fragment of such a personally made Bible, though Messrs. Grenfell and Hunt think them rather a school-boy's exercise—which would give them almost as much significance.

However the Bibles were supplied, they were supplied; and to this miracle the even greater one was added of the creation of a reading public for them. It is too little to say, as Harnack says, that by the universal zeal for Bible-reading "a powerful stimulus was given to the extension of the art of reading," and so, in an age of decaying education, the Church "became the great elementary school-mistress of the Greeks and Romans." The Church not only stayed the downward progress of education and increased the number of readers, but, by its demand that the Bible should be read by all ranks and classes and sexes and ages, introduced the principle of universal education into the world and advanced far toward making it a realized fact. The service of the Bible to the Greek and Roman people—the people as such, the "submerged masses," as we say—was, therefore, hardly less than that which it rendered to the outlying barbarians, to whom it for the first time gave letters and a written tongue. It made them literate. Thus the Bible became the mother of truly popular education. Has there ever been a greater revolution wrought in the intellectual history of the race?

It is true that the conquest thus begun was not pushed steadily to its end; the ground gained was not even retained without interruption. After awhile a great misfortune befell the Church. It lost its Bible-reading public. Happier in this than the East, the West needed at first but a single version. It made no Punic Bible, nor an Iberian or a Celtic Bible; and the reason was that, bound together in the common use of the Latin tongue, the needs of all the Western peoples were met by the Latin Bible. But hardly had it fully possessed the field than the irruption of the barbarians swept away its literate public. Then began a long period of schism, between the Church and the people; a Latin Church and an ever increasingly non-Latin people. Little was done to close the constantly widening gulf. Rather, new theories, running directly athwart all previous Christian feeling and practice, were invented to justify it. The people could not be trusted with the Scriptures. The uncouth speech of the people was incapable of receiving and reproducing

their sacred contents. The Latin language was holy, and its sounds fell with sacramental effect upon the ear. We appropriately call these somber years the Dark Ages.

We are told nowadays, it is true, that there never were any Dark Ages. We rejoice that it is possible to paint them darker than they were. It is very largely a matter of point of sight. Christendom has never known a time, let us thank God for it, when the Bible was out of mind; when its teaching was not widely diffused and was not powerfully operative in the lives of men. There were schools in the Dark Ages, and the Bible was in a very true sense the text-book of these schools. There were libraries—in the capitals, in the universities, in the monasteries—and the Bible was to be had in these libraries. There were *scriptoria*, and the Bible was diligently copied in these *scriptoria*. A beginning was made already in the eighth century of translating the Bible into the vernacular languages, and by the end of the Middle Ages it was accessible to Frenchmen and Germans, Englishmen and Bohemians, Spaniards and Italians and Poles in their own tongues. Nearly two hundred manuscripts of the German Bible and almost as many of the English from this later period remain to-day to attest the wideness of their use. Printing came in the midst of the fifteenth century and W. A. Copinger catalogues a hundred and forty-four editions of the Latin Bible for its first half century; and for the sixteenth century no fewer than four hundred and thirty-eight.

But how many there were to whom all these Bibles were sealed books! How closely confined their use was to a class—the clerics, a few nobles, and in the later Middle Ages the rising middle-class of burghers! At a time when a German monarch almost passed for a cleric because he could read, we may imagine how it stood with the laity. And at a time when Bonaventura vainly applied the test of reading to a candidate for a Bishopric we may cherish doubts even of the mass of the clergy. The libraries of the late Middle Ages were well stocked with Bibles, and they were accessible to the student on very liberal terms; gifts of Bibles were even made to libraries for the express purpose of being loaned to needy students—a striking evidence, this, of the scarcity of Bibles. But we learn from the old catalogues of libraries published by S. Becker, for example, that "a royal foundation like St. Vaudrille, about the year 800, did not possess a complete Bible, and Boniface had to be satisfied with parts." The manuals of Biblical instruction used in the schools were nearly as bad as they could be: Luther calls them in that language, more vigorous than elegant, in which he was wont to release his indignation, "the nonsensical, good-for-nothing, pernicious monkish books, Catholicon, Græcista, Florista, and such-like asses-dung." The famous "Mammotrectus" is a fair example. Composed by a Minorite at the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century, it held its place in the schools until the end of the sixteenth. When the art of printing came in, such was

the demand for it that it passed through at least thirty-four editions in the fifteenth century and was still being printed in 1596. Its author piously represents himself as pouring out the results of his studies as the Magdalen poured out the oil, on the feet of his Master. Employing another Biblical illustration, Sixtus of Sienna, less unctuously but with more descriptive force, declares that "like the poor widow who out of her want cast two pennies into the treasury of the temple, this brother brought to the temple of the Lord, in the poverty of his understanding—all that he had."

When this was the nature of the provision that was made for the literate, we may fancy the condition of the illiterate, that is to say, of the whole mass of the people. Keep the eye fixed on the literate classes and we may wonder whether the Dark Ages were quite as dark as we have been accustomed to think them. It is true that the Bible lay at the very foundation of the entire social structure of the Middle Ages. It is true that it was everywhere in the background; and that it was working powerfully in the whole life of the times. It is true that it was everywhere accessible to those able to use it. Shift the eye to the masses and a very different picture meets it. No doubt the Bible was not without its influence on the masses, too. But pervasive and powerful as that influence was, it was indirect, by percolation from above. The people had no direct contact with the Bible. It had become an esoteric book of which they knew only by hearsay. Their inability to read cut them off absolutely from all immediate approach to it; and the employment of Latin in the church services deprived them even of the opportunity to hear portions of it in the lessons. A very few even of the literate, indeed, could ever hope to possess Bibles of their own. The size of mediæval Bibles was immense. They were veritable libraries, deserving literally the current name by which they were known, Bibliotheca; consisting of four or five—in one instance of fourteen—great folio volumes. The cost of the production of these great books was naturally very great, and the price they commanded was prohibitive to any but very wealthy purchasers. If we understand S. Berger's account rightly, it was in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century a very cheap Bible indeed—such as could only rarely be had—which cost as little as seventy-five dollars of our money; the common price ran up to about three hundred dollars. We know of such values as five to nine hundred dollars being placed on them or actually paid for them; and even such as eighteen hundred to two thousand dollars in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Bibles were left in wills as precious bequests; they were put in pawn for the performance of important services; they were given as security for large debts. "One sees," remarks Berger, "from these prices, what we otherwise were aware of, that a country priest could not dream of possessing a Bible." The Bible had become the peculiar property not merely of the literate few, but of the few literate who were rich. The poor man could not have a Bible, and com-

monly lived and died without ever having seen one. The Bible had become to the people only a tradition.

The vernacular versions, whether of the Scriptures or of the church-offices, which were from time to time attempted or executed throughout the Middle Ages, were not intended for the "people" but for the imperfectly educated among the "religious." They were often, indeed, meant particularly for the use of nuns, who, as women, had not received a Latin training. As the author of a late fourteenth or early fifteenth century metrical version of the "Rule of St. Benet" quite simply explains:

> "Monks and else all learned men
> In Latin may it lightly ken,
> And wit thereby how they shall work
> To servé God and holy kirk.
> But to women to make it couth (known)
> That learn no Latin in their youth,
> In English it is ordered here
> So that they may it lightly lere."

And it was only with great hesitation that even "the religious" were put in possession of vernacular versions. There was the fear that they might misuse them. They might, for example, ease the penances which were imposed on them, by saying the Psalms or Matins which they were required to repeat, in English, say, instead of in Latin. The author of the fifteenth century "Chastisyng of Goddes Children" warns his readers that when "a man's confessor giveth him in penance to say his Psalter without any other words, and he go forth and say it in English and not in Latin, as it was ordained, this man, I ween, doth not his penance." There was the graver danger that, the English being substituted for the Latin, the sacramental effect which was held to attach to the mere hearing of the Latin words should be lost. The author of the fifteenth century "Miroure of our Ladye" counsels his readers to use his Englishing only as interpretative of the Latin. The English might be kept before the eye at "Mattyns," and the "minde fed therewith," as the Latin sounded on the ear, the listener thus "going forth with the reader clause by clause." But it is added: "This looking on the English while the Latin is read, is to be understood of them that have said their matins or read their legend before. For else I would not counsel them to leave the hearing of the Latin for entendaunce of the English." The hearing of the un-understood Latin was more beneficial than the "feeding of the mind" with the English! Behind all this lay a profound reverence for the Latin language itself as a sacred language, begotten of its long employment in the Church services; and an equal reverence for the Latin Bible as sharing the inspiration of the Hebrew and Greek: coupled with contempt for the vernacular speech as essentially vulgar and incapable of serving worthily as the vehicle of divine truth. Even in the Constitution prefixed by Sixtus V. to his unfortunate edition of the Vulgate, 1590, we hear of the

eternal God giving his Word to his Church in the three chief languages, Hebrew, Greek and Latin. The matter is put quite plainly by the author of the tractate on the "Chastisyng of Goddes Children," which has already been alluded to. "Many men reproveth to hear the Psalter or Matins or the Gospel in English, or the Bible, because they may not be translated into no vulgar word by the word as it standeth without great circumlocution after the feeling of the first writers which translated that into Latin by the teaching of the Holy Ghost." Here the Latin Bible is conceived as inspired, and as establishing a standard for the expression of divine truth for all time. It was an article of current faith that it passed the wit of man "for to show in any manner vulgar the terms of divinity." This is argued at length in the decree of Archbishop Berthold of Mainz (1485–6) repressing the making of unauthorized versions in German. "It ought to be allowed," he reasons, "that the indigence of our idiom is wholly inadequate, and that it would be necessary that they"—the translators—"should invent unknown words out of their own heads; or, if they made use of old ones, should corrupt the sense of the truth, so that we fear a great peril with regard to the sacred books. For who will give to the rude and unlearned man, and to the female sex, into whose hands copies of the sacred books might fall, to draw out the true sense?" . . . These last words uncover, however, the most deeply lying reason why vernacular versions of Scripture were only hesitatingly put forward. It was feared that they might fall into the hands of the people; and it was profoundly believed that the people could not be trusted with them. The Scriptures were decidedly not for "lewed men." On this the Church authorities were even violently insistent; and they were prepared to go all lengths to prevent them from falling into the hands of "lewed men." The author of the pre-Wyckliffite English version published by Miss Paues—a version made at the request and for the use of an inmate of some religious house—does his work with a clear understanding that he was incurring personal peril by doing it. "Brother," he writes, "I know well that I am held by Christ's law to perform thine asking; but, nevertheless, we be now so far fallen away from Christ's law, that if I would answer to thine askings, I must in case undergo the death." It was the head and front of Wycliffe's offending that, as Henry Knighton put it, he made the gospel vulgar, casting the pearl of the gospel before swine, and so turned "the jewel of the clerics" into "the sport of the lay people." Geiler of Kaisersberg (fifteenth century) expresses in an epigram the whole mediæval conception, when he declared that we should no more put the Scriptures into the hands of the people than we should put the knife into the hands of children to cut their own bread: they will infallibly injure themselves with it.

The Bible was, thus, as far as possible from being the book of the people in the Middle Ages. What was characteristic of the Middle Ages

was precisely that the people had lost their Bible. Efforts were made, to be sure, as the night passed on toward the dawn, to recover it; efforts which were more or less completely blocked. There was the movement associated with the name of Peter Waldo, which, beginning in the south-east of France, spread southward to Italy and northward into Germany. There was another movement originating in northern France, and extending into Flanders and Holland and beyond. There was the Wyckliffite movement in England, which was transported into Bohemia. Some odd phenomena attended these movements. The Waldensian was simply stamped out as far as it could be stamped out. The German was winked at until it almost ceased to appear illicit. In England the people were uncompromisingly denied the vernacular Bible; but it so far supplanted the Latin Bible in the hands of the clergy and the great that, as Henry Bradshaw has shown, the Latin Bible almost ceased to be copied in fifteenth century England—a fact strangely misinterpreted by Cardinal Gasquet. It is a sad history; but it ran its course. And, after awhile, the Reformation came and the people got back their Bible. For precisely what the Reformation means from this point of view is the recovery of the Bible for the people. And with the recovery of the Bible for the people there was recovered also for them the power of reading the Bible. The same history was repeated in every Protestant land which was wrought out fifteen hundred years before, when the Bible was first put into the hands of the people. The people's Bible proved itself afresh the greatest force making for popular education ever introduced into the world. Wherever the people's Bible went there popular education went. The people became again a reading people, and the Bible vindicated to itself anew the title of the people's book.

Let us not underestimate what this carries with it. It is not merely that under pressure of the necessity of reading the Bible the people have learned to read, incalculably great as this benefit is. It is also that the Bible, being read, has brought an immense educative force to bear upon the people. It would be impossible to overstate the part the Bible has thus played in the education of the world. Lessing's famous representation of revelation as the divine education of the human race has had its realization in an unintended sense in the work which the Bible has accomplished as the great school-book of humanity. Children learning their "letters" from the Biblical page—this has been a widespread custom from the earliest Christian ages—are but symbols of the millions upon millions to whom the Bible has been their first text-book in letters, in civilization, in morals, as well as in religion. Think of the degraded peoples to whom the Bible, a gift of Christian love, has brought their sole intimate knowledge of conditions of human existence superior to their own savagery. Think of old, inferior civilizations—China, India—to which the Bible has brought the elevating contact with a higher moral

and spiritual culture which was needed to enable them to rise above themselves. We do not need to go to these lower civilizations. Think of the untold multitudes in even the most cultured lands to whom these vivid pages alone have brought the vision of a life far removed from the humdrum routine of their village streets, bridging the gulf of ages and alien custom and opening an outlook into a different world. The elevating and expanding effect of the reading of the Bible upon backward peoples and isolated communities is above computation. The cultural influence of the Bible is not exhausted, however, in such effects. What does German letters owe to the Bible? it has been asked. And the answer returned is, It owes to the Bible its very existence. That he might give to the Germanic peoples a Bible Ulfila gave them an alphabet and written speech in the fourth century. And in regiving the German people a Bible Luther gave them a common literary vehicle in the sixteenth century. "The German language," remarks Ernst von Dobschütz, "is moulded by this Bible. . . . In Luther's time the dialects still prevailed. . . . It is unquestionably due to Luther's Bible that the Germans have one language for all literary purposes." If so much must be allowed to the Bible of a single people, what shall we say of the Bible of a whole civilization, like the Latin Bible? Its impress upon the speech of the whole Western world is ineffaceable. Of course no really historical understanding of the modern Romance languages can be obtained without reckoning with it. It has colored the modes of expression in the German stock also. Far beyond supplying to Western speech a series of vocables, however, it has stamped upon the Western mind a conceptual language which has determined its whole spiritual physiognomy. This conceptual language has penetrated the entirety of Western culture, and thus the Latin Bible has wrought powerfully toward the unification of the Western world into a cultural whole.

We approach here the greatest achievement of the Bible as the people's book. Because it is pre-eminently the book of the people, it is the greatest unifying force in the world, binding all the peoples together as the people of the book. Consider how the Bible, as it becomes the book of people after people, assimilates the peoples to one another in modes of expression, thought, conception, feeling, until they are virtually moulded into one people, of common mind and heart. The Bible comes to a new people; this alien book—how alien it is to those who first come to know it!—is first received, then assimilated, and in the end, having become its heart's treasure, assimilates it to itself. Wherever a new language is thus trained to speak the things of God, a new tongue has been created to train in turn all who speak it in "the language of Canaan." A new people, whatever its outward forms of speech, has learned the language of heaven. Each hears the same mighty things of God in his own tongue. Thus a new common humanity has grown up throughout the world. The

process is the same everywhere. First the Bible is put into a new language, precisely to the end that a new people shall learn to think and feel as Christians should think and feel. Then, having learned to think and feel as Christians should, this new people learns also to speak as Christians should. Thus, in the end, a common language in all that goes to make the inner essence of language, girdles the world. If you find yourself, says Martin Kaehler, in a foreign land, weary with the effort to understand its strange speech, go into the Church and listen to the sermon and the prayers, and see how readily they slip into your consciousness. You are listening to the mother speech of the Book! However different the mere forms of speech may be, one essential language is employed by all who are grounded in the book. "The Bible capable of translation into every tongue, and already translated into the language of every stock and of every family of peoples, has actually proved its formative power over the higher speech of ideas of a humanity destined for unity." This book, the book of the peoples and the book of the people, is necessarily the book of humanity. In and through it, humanity realizes its unity as a spiritual entity, one in speech, one in thought, one in its entire spiritual life.

Let it be observed that what is affirmed is not merely that any book which is widely read will tend to bind its readers together in a spiritual unity, and that the Bible, being the most widely read of books, both among the peoples and among the people, naturally exerts the greatest of unifying influences among books. It is affirmed that the Bible has shown itself in history, and is daily showing itself more and more, to possess a power which is unique, and which, when all is said, is most arresting, to stamp upon its readers a single spiritual physiognomy. So impressive is this fact that Martin Kaehler, for example—with a reference to whose fruitful characterization of the Bible as the book of mankind we began, and from whose instructive development of that theme we have never wandered very far—observing the unifying influence of the Bible on the world of men is impelled to discover in it a proof of its divinity. Side by side with the effect of the Bible on the heart of the individual who finds in it his inspiration to a holy life, there must be recognized its effect on the hearts of the peoples, fashioning them into one spiritual type. Nay, says Kaehler, side by side with the testimony of the Holy Spirit borne in the heart of the individual that this book is from God, is the testimony of history to the Bible, borne in the heart of humanity, that a book filled with such regenerating power for the race is from God. For there is, history itself being witness, a truly regenerating power in the Bible. And it is because, wherever it goes it creates a new humanity—a humanity informed by a new spirit and filled with a new life—that it is the great unifying power which it is.

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