

English Versions  
Prior to  
King James



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ENGLISH SPEECH  
PART I

THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT OF THE  
ENGLISH IN AMERICA TO THE PRESENT  
TIME

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# ENGLISH VERSIONS Prior to King James

(From the "Bible Society Record")



TINDALE TRANSLATING THE BIBLE

Tercentenary Leaflet 2

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## William Tindale, Translator and Martyr

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'I call God to recorde, against y<sup>e</sup> day we  
'shall appeare before our Lord Iesus, to geue  
'a recknyng of our doings, that I neuer al-  
'tered one sillable of Gods word agaynst my  
'cōscience, nor would this day, if all that is  
'in the earth, whether it be pleasure, honour  
'or riches, might be geuen me.'

'I assure you,' he said to a royal envoy,  
'if it would stand with the king's most gra-  
'cious pleasure to grant only a bare text of  
'the Scripture to be put forth among his  
'people, like as is put forth among the subjects  
'of the emperor in these parts [the Nether-  
'lands], and of other Christian princes, be it  
'of the translation of what person soever  
'shall please his majesty, I shall immediately  
'make faithful promise never to write more,  
'nor abide two days in these parts, after the  
'same; but immediately repair into his realm,  
'and there most humbly submit myself at the  
'feet of his royal majesty, offering my body,  
'to suffer what pain or torture, yea, what  
'death his grace will, *so that this be ob-  
'tained.*'

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# FOREWORD

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## The Tercentenary of the English Bible

**F**OR nearly three hundred years Anglo-Saxon Christendom has been mainly nourished on that translation of the Holy Scriptures generally known as the King James or Authorized Version.

The year 1911 will complete the third century of the prosperous reign of King James, a veritable monarch in versions whose scepter is universally acknowledged.

It is the desire and purpose of the American Bible Society to aid and help toward a worthy commemoration of this great event. The Churches generally will no doubt recognize it, and in some cases appoint formal celebrations. A committee of scholars of various churches sitting during the summer at Princeton, N. J., has been busily at work preparing a new commemorative edition. The British and Foreign Bible Society, as well as our own, is laying plans for an appropriate recognition of what so vitally concerns all Bible Societies. The National Bible Society of Scotland is also taking similar steps.

The constitution of the British and the American Societies has been in recent years altered to permit the publication of the Revised Version in English.

The amended Constitution of the American Bible Society now reads (Article I):

“The only copies in the English language, to be circulated by the Society, shall be of the version set forth in 1611, and commonly known as the King James Version, whether in its original form as published in the afore-said year or as revised, the New Testament in 1881 and the Old Testament in 1885, and published in these years under the supervision of the Committee of Revision, or as further revised and edited by the American Committee of Revision and printed under its supervision in 1901.”

The Revised Version is thus classified properly as a variant from the original version of 1611, so that the preferences of Christian people for either the earlier or the latter form of King James should not hinder them from heartily co-operating in a great Festival of Commemoration of this the chief classic of our English language and literature, and probably the finest reproduction in another tongue of the original Greek and Hebrew Scriptures.

This leaflet furnishes some brief memoranda relating to the history of the English Bible and the chief personages connected with its production, beginning with Wycliffe and including the Versions prior to King James. It will be followed by another dealing with the Authorized Version itself, including its later revision. The facts have often enough been stated, and in the limits of our space can only be very briefly touched on. It may be useful for us to



give some hints as to the best books on the subject, that pastors, Sunday-school superintendents, and others may know where to turn.

Every church, every family, every school, and especially every Sunday-school, might wisely make some special effort to awaken the minds and hearts of the people, and especially of children and young people, to the history of this the best English book for childhood, youth and age alike.

In tracing this history we can scarcely do more than mention those fragmentary and almost prehistoric beginnings that fall in the matin prime of English letters and English religious life.

First comes Cædmon the Benedictine monk in the seventh century, who paraphrased in Anglo-Saxon verse portions of Scripture, and a little later Aldhelm and Guthlac, each of whom translated the Psalms into Anglo-Saxon. Then came the Venerable Bede (born 675, died 735). His scholar, Cuthbert, who was an eye witness, has left for us the touching picture of his last day on earth when, as he finished his life, he finished his translation of the Gospel of John, chanting the *Gloria Patria* as he expired with the name of the Holy Spirit on his lips,—a fit foreshadowing of what was to come.

After him in the ninth century Alfred the Great prefixed to his laws a paraphrase of the Ten Commandments, and he too was engaged in making a version of the Psalms at the time of his death (901).

Eadfrith, Bishop of Lindisfarne (680), and

Aelfric in the tenth century, and the author of the Ormulum, a paraphrase of the Gospels and the Acts, followed, and others also. These were all of good use in that early period, the darkest hour just before the dawn of the Reformation, until John Wycliffe, its morning star, shone in England and the day was at hand.

## John Wycliffe and his Work

**W**YCLIFFE'S "Apology" puts into the clearest light his attitude toward the Bible. He was truly the John Baptist of the English Bible—*vox clamantis in deserto*.

"Oh Lord God! sithin at the beginning of faith, so many men translated into Latin to great profit of Latin men; let one simple creature of God translate into English for profit of Englishmen. For if worldly clerks look well their chronicles and books they shoulde find that Bede translated the Bible and expounded much in Saxon, that was English either common language of this land in his time. And not only Bede, but King Alfred that founded Oxenford, translated so his last days the beginning of the Psalter in Saxon and would more if he had lived longer. Also Frenchmen Beemers and Britons han the Bible and other books of devotion and exposition translated into their mother language. Why shoulde not Englishmen have the same in their mother language? I cannot wit."

The date of his birth is not certain, though it is ordinarily fixed in 1324. He synchronizes with "Dan Chaucer, well of English undefiled." The facts of his early life are not much known, but he was a student of Oxford, beginning his academic career very early and holding during his lifetime high university offices and dignities, chiefly as Master of Balliol. He was also one of the chaplains of Edward III., and in 1374 one of the commissioners sent by that monarch to confer with delegates appointed by Pope Gregory II., as to ecclesiastical authority in England. Although a priest in orders, he was, throughout his life, and increasingly as he grew older, a

Protestant, disputing against transubstantiation and rejecting with great boldness papal usurpation. This brought him into disfavor and he was tried for heresy, but escaped by the intervention of the Queen Mother. Being brought to account again he was finally compelled to retire from more public positions to his little village rectory of Lutterworth, of which Tennyson so beautifully sings:

“Not least art thou, thou little Bethlehem  
In Judah, for in thee the Lord was born;  
Nor thou in Britain, little Lutterworth,  
Least, for in thee the Word was born again.”

Dr. John Eadie, the Scotch historian of the English Bible, whose treatise (Macmillan & Co., London) no one wishing to understand the subject can ignore, ranks Wycliffe as “one of the quaternion of great schoolmen,” along with Bradwardine, Occam, and Duns Scotus. The catalogue of his works in both Latin and English, though not complete, covers more than sixty octavo pages, and he was according to Dr. Eadie the most popular writer in Europe.

His interest in Bible translation, however, was not scholastic or academic, but evidently grew out of a deep heart-experience of Divine grace. Here are two quotations which are sufficient to show this: “Christ and his Apostles converted the world by making known the truths of Scripture in a form familiar to them.” “Christian men and women, young and old, should study first in the New Testament, should cleave to the study of it; and no simple man of wit, no man of small knowl-

## Preface to Wycliffe's Harmony of the Gospels:

'I besek and with alle my hert pray them that  
'this werk redyn, that  
'for me thei pray the mercy of God, that I may  
'fulfyllen that is set in the draghing of this  
'boke; and that he at whos suggestyon I this  
'werke began, and thei that (this) werk redyn,  
'and alle cristen men with me, thurgh doynge  
'of that this is wrytyn in this bok, may com  
'to geder to that blisse that neuer salle ende.'

## From the Sermon on the Mount, Wycliffe version:

'And Jhesus seyng the peple went up into an hil, and whanne he was set his disciples camen to him. And he openyed his mouthe and taught hem; and seide,

'Blessid ben pore men in spirit, for the Kyngdom of hevenes is herun.

'Blessed ben mylde men: for thei schal be comfortid.

'Blessed ben thei that hungren rightwisnesse; for thei schal be fulfilled.

'Blessed ben merceful men; for thei schal gete mercy.

'Blessed ben thei that ben of clene herte; for thei schalen se God.

'Blessed ben pesible men; for thei schalen be clepid Goddes children.'

edge, should be afraid to study immeasurably in the sacred text."

With this in mind he began, strangely enough, with the Apocalypse, and by 1381 appears to have finished the New Testament, translating wholly from the Latin Vulgate. He only translated part of the Old Testament before his death in 1384, but his friend and follower, Nicholas de Hereford, and still more fully his "continuator," John Purvey, revised and completed what Wycliffe had left partly done, and it may be that he himself added finishing touches. At all events, the manuscript versions, which for the next one hundred or one hundred and fifty years of persecution were circulated all over England, are rightly called "the Wycliffe Versions," and the "poor Priests" whom he sent out to read them to the people and make them known were the first colporteurs, heralds of the larger company in these happier days who follow in their footsteps as itinerant distributors.

The influence of the Wycliffe versions not only upon his own immediate supporters, the Lollards, but upon the masses of the English people, can hardly be estimated. Whether or not his successors in Bible translation, William Tindale and the rest, borrowed very much from his diction, yet Bible language became increasingly familiar to English folk.

There is some difference among critics as to the precise relation that the Wycliffe Version sustains to Tindale. In general the attitude of later scholars may be summed up in

the following sentence from the Historical Catalogue of the British and Foreign Bible Society: "The Wyckliffite Versions seem to have exercised no considerable influence on Tindale or succeeding translators."

This is based on Tindale's own words addressed to the reader: "I had no man to counterfet, nether was holpe with englysshe of eny that had interpreted the same, or soche lyke thige i the scripture beforetyme."

On the other hand, however, must be set the judgment of so great an authority as Prof. George P. Marsh, in his admirable lectures on the English language, who says, "Tindale is merely a full grown Wycliffe;" and adds, "The influence of Wycliffe upon Tindale is too palpable to be mistaken, and it cannot be disguised by the grammatical differences, which are the most important points of discrepancy between them." Wycliffe he considers as having originated "the diction and phraseology which for five centuries has constituted the consecrated dialect of the English speech; and Tindale as having given to it that finish and perfection which have so admirably adapted it to the expression of religious doctrine and sentiment, and to the narration of the remarkable series of historical facts which are recorded in the Christian Scriptures."

For the guidance of those who wish to examine more carefully the sources of knowledge, not only as to the Wycliffe versions, but the others which succeed them, a convenient Bibliography can be found in the volume entitled "Roman Catholic and Protestant Bi-

bles Compared," these being the Gould Prize Essays, edited by the very competent hand of Prof. M. W. Jacobus of the Hartford Theological Seminary, and published by Scribner & Sons.

On this list, among English versions antedating the Authorized Version, will be found Wycliffe's New Testament, dated 1380, and his Old Testament, 1382—the whole Bible 1388; and to these is added in a footnote the "New Testament in Scots," being Purvey's Revision of Wycliffe. Wycliffe's translations, being made before the invention of printing, were, of course, in manuscript. They never were printed until 1731, when his New Testament was published, and again in 1848, but not until 1850 was his whole Bible published by the Rev. J. Forshall and Sir F. Madden.

The last edition of Bishop Westcott's Revision of his "General View of the History of the English Bible," revised by William Aldis Wright, of Cambridge University (published by Macmillan & Co.), is of the utmost value.

Those who wish to pursue the subject more widely would do well to turn to Milman's "Latin Christianity," book xiii, chapter vi, for a brilliant description of Wycliffe and his times, and also to an illuminating passage in John Richard Green's "History of the English People," pages 228-37. Wycliffe escaped the stake, but the indignity done his remains half a century later is perhaps more widely known than any other fact about him—how his remains were "ungraved," and,



as Thomas Fuller tells, " they took what was left of his bones and burned them to ashes and cast them into the Swift, a neighboring brook running hard by. Thus this brook hath conveyed his ashes into Avon, Avon into Severn, Severn into the narrow seas, they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wycliffe are the emblem of his doctrine, which now is dispersed all the world over."

## William Tindale and his Translation

**A**N eventful century and a half passed between the death of Wycliffe (1384) and the next great landmark in English Bible history, the publication of William Tindale's translation. Mighty forces were astir, world-shaking events were transpiring; the Papacy was rent by a schism, two rivals, and in one case three, claiming the right to Peter's throne. The Council of Constance, 1414-18, condemned John Huss and Jerome of Prague to be burned to death. The collapse of the Eastern Empire in 1453 scattered the scholars of Greece through Europe, especially in Italy. These became the pioneers of the New Learning. In 1492 Christopher Columbus opened the ocean gates into the New World. Synchronizing with these signs of manifest destiny, the printing press was invented, and, according to the oft-quoted saying, Europe awoke with the New Testament in her hand, for the publication of the Greek New Testament by the great humanist, Erasmus, began a new and glorious chapter in the history of western Christendom. One of the monks exclaimed with prophetic foresight, "We must root out printing or printing will root us out." Kings and prelates and popes joined hands in vain to shut the light out of England. The kingdom was drenched over and again with the blood of martyrs, martyrs now for the translation and reading of the Bible, whose blessed memory

it should be ours to revive for this generation. The authors of our English translation, scarcely less than the authors of the original Scriptures, were tortured, not accepting deliverance. Their work comes to us attested with the precious blood which they shed willingly for the truth's sake.

Of no one is this more true than of William Tindale, whose life story was a tragedy far more worthy of perpetual remembrance than many a famous recital which has been embalmed in our literature by the masters of poetic or dramatic art.

The genius of Shakespeare might well have seized on the moving tale of this sixteenth century hero. Almost as little is known of the circumstances of his life as of Shakespeare's own. The approximate date of his birth was 1484 and his death 1536, but the place of his birth is uncertain save that it was in Gloucestershire. The first clear indication of what he was to be was his university course at Oxford, where it is said by John Foxe, in his "Book of Martyrs," that he "was closely addicted to the study of the Scriptures." Thence he went to Cambridge and afterward (about 1500) became a tutor in the family of Sir John Walsh of Little Sodbury. Here his controversies began, one with a learned man, who said, "We were better to be without God's laws than the Pope's." "I defy the Pope and all his laws," Tindale replied, and added: "If God spare my life, I will cause a boy that driveth a plow shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost."

This promise was abundantly fulfilled. He wrought without ceasing throughout his life to give England a translation not like Wycliffe's from the Vulgate, but from the Greek and Hebrew, and he finished his work so well that to this day when we read King James we read largely William Tindale.

At first his hope was that he might enter the service of Tunstall, Bishop of London; but alas! the Bishop was not after his manner, and with cold courtesy dismissed him. God, however, raised up a friend for him in Humphrey Monmouth, a London alderman, who by his befriending of Tindale has earned for himself more of fame than he has received. He had heard him preach and was evidently drawn to him, and took him to his house. Afterward he was himself arrested and thrown into the Tower for what he had done, and to defend himself has given in evident sincerity a touching picture of what manner of man Tindale was: "Afterward (when this hope failed), he . . . came to me again, and besought me to help him; and so I took him into my house half a year; and there he lived like a good priest as methought. He studied most part of the day and of the night at his book; and he would eat but sodden meat by his good will, nor drink but small single beer. I never saw him wear linen about him in the space he was with me. I did promise him ten pounds sterling to pray for my father and mother their souls and all Christian souls."

He never ceased to love England, but seeing that his life purpose could not be accom-

plished there, after a year he turned his back on his native land to suffer as he says "poverty, exile, absence from friends, hunger and thirst, with very great dangers—sharp and hard fightings." By faith he foresook England, not fearing the wrath of King or Pope—desiring a better country, that is an heavenly. And who can measure the marvelous fruit of his faith?

It is difficult to trace his course exactly during the next few years on the Continent. He was first in Hamburg, then probably in Wittenberg and with Martin Luther—certainly he was credited with this added reproach. Such work as his needs leisure and to be done without distraction. A scholar in every fiber of his mind, as his work shows when judged by the keenest modern criticism, well able to reach a critical judgment on the Scripture originals or the relative value of the Vulgate, Luther's version, and the other accessories of his toil, he might have fitly spent his days in the cloistered shades of Oxford or Cambridge. But his life was rather that of a criminal, his footsteps dogged by Roman spies, notably one Cochlæus, who hunted him out at last in Cologne, so that he had to flee for his life. One reads the touching story and thinks of David pursued by Saul—chased like a flea—a partridge. "There is but a step between me and death!" He was driven to Worms with the three thousand sheets of an octavo Testament. These had already been printed in Cologne. In Worms he completed the edition and added to the octavo a quarto, and then managed to

smuggle them both into England in 1526, in spite of the vigilant watch that King Henry VIII. and the others kept to prevent it. These six thousand copies of the English Testament revolutionized England. They were thundered against in sermons; it was a criminal offense to be found possessing one, much less to spread it. Men and women were burned for it; but the leaven was in the meal and it was too late to get it out. Subsequent editions were printed and the Bible was finally completed, though probably not all by Tindale himself. Edition succeeded edition from Marburg and elsewhere, and though many of these were burned, enough were left to serve the purpose. In 1530 the Pentateuch was issued in English, and the rest of the Old Testament later (made directly from the Hebrew). In 1535 he was betrayed by a false friend, cast into Vilvorde Castle near Brussels, and there on October 6, 1536, he was strangled and his corpse burned. His last words, a prayer—"Lord open the eyes of the King of England," brought a speedy answer. In 1536 there were eight editions of his New Testament printed on English soil, and nineteen editions were issued between 1544 and 1566. Forty editions, it is said, were published in all, and few copies survive. He rests from his labors and his works do follow him.

Bishop Westcott, in his history of the English Bible, makes clear beyond peradventure Tindale's extraordinary qualification for his task. He was an independent and original

translator from the original text, able to use with critical judgment the Latin Vulgate, the Latin translations of Erasmus, and the German of Luther. The Historical Catalogue of the British and Foreign Bible Society confirms this judgment.

He made two revisions of his New Testament after the first issue, all of which show, according to Bishop Lightfoot, his complete independence and at the same time his skill in using other men's translations to the best purpose.

The extracts here given will give some slight impression of what this first masterpiece of Bible translation in English was like, and how much like it is to our own King James.

As to this nothing more authoritative can be quoted than this from Bishop Lightfoot:

“From first to last his style and his interpretation are his own, and in the originality of Tindale is included in a large measure the originality of our English Version. For not only did Tindale contribute to it directly the substantial basis of half of the Old Testament (in all probability) and of the whole of the New, but he established a standard of biblical translation which others followed. It is even of less moment that by far the greater part of his translation remains intact in our present Bibles, than that his spirit animates the whole. He toiled faithfully himself, and where he failed he left to those who should come after the secret of success. The achievement was not for one but for many; but he

## Tindale's New Testament (1525): Ephesians ii, 13-22.

(The Italics mark what is preserved in the Authorized Version.)

13 *But nowe in Christ Iesu, ye whych a whyle agoo were farre off, are made neye by the bloude off Christ.*

14 *For he is oure peace, whych hath made off both wone ād hath broken doune the wall ī the myddes, that was a stoppe bitwene vs,*

15 and hath also put away thorowe *his flesshe*, the cause of hatred (thatt is to saye, *the lawe of cōmaundemente contayned in the lawe writtē*)

16 *for to make of twayne wone newe mā in hym silfe, so makynge peace: and to reconcile bothe vnto god in one body throwe his crosse, ād slewe hattred therby:*

17 *and cam and preached peace to you which were afarre of, and to them that were neye.*

18 *For thorowe hym we bothe have an open waye in, in one sprete vnto the father.*

19 *Nowe therfore ye are no moare strangers ād foreners: but citesyns with the saynctes, and of the housholde of god:*

20 *and are bilt apō the foundacion of the apostles ād prophetes, Iesus Christ beyng the heed corner stone,*

21 *ī whom every bildynge coupled togedder, groweth vnto ā holy tēple in the lorde,*

22 *ī whō ye also are bilt togedder, and made an habitation for god ī the sprete.*

—From Bishop Westcott's "History of the English Bible," page 133.



fixed the type according to which the later laborers worked. His influence decided that our Bible should be popular and not literary, speaking in a simple dialect, and that so by its simplicity it should be endowed with permanence. He felt by a happy instinct the potential affinity between Hebrew and English idioms, and enriched our language and thought forever with the characteristics of the Semitic mind."

To this may be added Dr. Eadie's estimate: "The translation, as a first and individual effort, is wonderful in many points of view. Tindale had few appliances in the shape of grammars and lexicons; but he devoted himself to his daily work with singular earnestness and assiduity. He often keeps the proper translation of the aorist, where succeeding translators have given it the sense of the perfect. The English is racy Saxon, and much of it, sometimes clause after clause, with no change save in spelling, is yet preserved in our common version. It has a noble, unaffected simplicity, and the ring of genuine English idiom. It is more definite and concise than the current style of his day, and even of his own polemical writings. He may run that reads, and he that reads may understand, and the typical 'ploughboy' may gather the sense so given in his own tongue. The eulogy of Fuller is not overdrawn: 'What he undertook was to be admired as glorious; what he performed to be commended as profitable; wherein he failed is to be excused as pardonable, and to be scored

on the account rather of that age than of the author himself.'”

In addition to the general treatises already mentioned in this and in the preceding article, readers will find it profitable to look at Volume ii, Chapter vi, of Froude's History of England, who characterizes Tindale as “a man whose history is lost in his work, and whose epitaph is the Reformation.”

## **English Versions after Tindale's: Coverdale's, Matthew's, Tav- erner's, The Great Bible**

**S**EVENTY-FIVE years, following the death of Tindale in 1536, were necessary to ripen and bring to perfection the fruit of his labors in the Authorized Version.

Between Tindale's and King James there stretches an historical succession of eight Versions—Coverdale's (1535), Matthew's (1537), Taverner's (1539), the Great Bible (1539-40), Whittingham's New Testament (1557), the Genevan Bible (1560), the Bishops' Bible (1568), Rheims and Douay Version (1582-1609), then our own (1611), the last link in the series—the bright, consummate flower of them all. There are two groups of four each. The last chiefly belongs under Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603), though Whittingham's New Testament appeared in the last year of Queen Mary. No other new ones appeared either under Edward VI. the Protestant (1547-53), or under Mary the Catholic (1553-58). The publication of the Douay Old Testament was deferred until 1609 under King James. The present article deals with the four succeeding Tindale's and during the reign of Henry VIII.

These were times of travail, filled with a dramatic succession of extraordinary changes both in Church and State. The future of the English Reformation, and with it of vernacular Bibles, often seemed precarious in the ex-



THE STATUE OF TINDALE ON THE THAMES EM-  
BANKMENT, LONDON

treme. The outline of these events can only be hinted at here, but the Divine purpose in the making of the English Bible is writ large over them all.

The England of Henry VIII. was surely not a Merrie England. The public executioner was always busy beheading or burning the noblest and best in the land. The brilliant promise of Henry's early youth, who came to the throne at eighteen, was soon quenched in the horror of his violent and capricious tyranny, and England was drenched in blood and tears. The very year that Tindale was finally strangled at Vilvorde Castle, near Brussels, Anne Boleyn was beheaded on Tower Hill. The scandalous tale of Henry's six wives, to whom he was by turns a lover, a divorcer, and a Bluebeard, reads like an excerpt from Persian or Turkish annals. He had as little compunction in turning the edge of the ax toward his most faithful ministers—Wolsey, notably, the "King Cardinal," as Shakespeare calls him, who had served his King so much better than he served his God, and who only escaped the block by an opportune natural death, hastened no doubt by his disgrace. Still worse was the judicial murder of the great and virtuous Sir Thomas More, whose gray hairs and long service could not save him.

Cardinal Wolsey's successor in office as the King's favorite, Sir Thomas Cromwell, did not "fling away ambition," but held one after another the highest offices of state—Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary of

State, Great Chamberlain, and especially Vicegerent in ecclesiastical affairs. J. R. Greene calls his *regime* the English Terror, and reckons the first ten years of his ascendancy as among the most momentous in English history. But he notes one further fact, profoundly significant of the great change for good which, in spite of all the evil of the time, was passing over England—that there were, it is said, more Grammar Schools founded during the latter years of Henry's reign than in three centuries before. This change meant popular education and the creation of the intelligent middle-class, and this continued and increased. So likewise did University reform. This was due to the fact no doubt that, with all his faults and crimes, Henry loved learning, and was proud, with good reason, that he possessed enough himself to dispute now with Luther, now with the Pope. His Court was naturally dominated therefore by men of the highest gifts and graces like Sir Thomas More and Cromwell, who were alive to intellectual progress. Then Henry's breach with the Pope—anent the divorce of Catharine of Aragon—whatever his motive, inured to the benefit of the Reforming party, whose revolt from Rome had its inevitable sequence in an English Bible. To this grand *finale* kingly tyranny and the heroic patience of his victims both converged.

These facts throw a flood of light upon the succession of Versions which we are now considering—Coverdale's, Matthew's, Taverner's, and the Great Bible, all of which, as will be

seen, appeared within four years after the death of the proto-martyr of Bible translation.

The more minutely this high literary succession is scrutinized the more wonderful appears the transcendent influence of Tindale himself. Never was the power of one man to affect not only his own age, but ages to come, more clearly manifest. Our Bible is in a true sense a one-man version, but not in any bad sense ; for even before Tindale finished his work, Miles Coverdale had begun his, and he was to Tindale somewhat as Barnabas was to Paul.

### **Coverdale and his Version**

Born about the year 1488 in the "North Riding" of Yorkshire, Coverdale was educated at Cambridge under the Augustinian monks there, and admitted to priests' orders in 1514. He came early under the influence of the Reformation, especially as an inquirer at certain religious meetings held near St. John's College.

About 1529 he seems to have gone to the Continent to escape persecution, and it is possible that while there he helped Tindale translate the Pentateuch. However this may be, he began work as a translator himself early enough to publish his own Version in 1535—probably in Antwerp. This was the first complete printed English Bible.

Linked thus with Tindale from the beginning, the contrast between the two men is very marked, both in their external circumstances and their inward characters. Unlike his predecessor, Coverdale enjoyed the favor

of the great and powerful, notably that of Sir Thomas Cromwell, and as the King's favorite his patronage made Coverdale's task far easier.

In 1527 he was in intimate touch with the two great men of the day—Cromwell and the famous and brilliant Sir Thomas More, and it is now thought that under their patronage he was then preparing to translate the Scriptures. About 1534 a Convocation under the presidency of Cromwell petitioned the King to decree a translation; so that when his book was issued, though it was not explicitly under royal authority, it was evidently with a virtual consent. This was an immense step in advance and a marvelous answer to Tindale's dying prayer. In 1536 the Convocation again petitioned, and although nothing was done, ere long what had been forbidden became the accepted order of the day.

Dr. Eadie says of Coverdale, "He liked to lean on someone." Yet his leaning was not a burden but a help to Tindale, for he was a good second where he could not have been an adequate first. This appears very clearly in his Version itself. Tindale's is the creative mind, virile and masculine. Coverdale supplies, if we may say so, the feminine quality: the one *fortiter in re*; the other *suaviter in modo*. Gentle, humble, and tender by nature, Coverdale's style as a translator reflects these qualities. The majesty of Tindale was exquisitely supplemented by his delicacy and gentleness. "His speech was always with grace."



It seems clear now, though there has been some dispute as to the fact, that Coverdale did not and probably could not translate from the original languages. His own words would seem to settle the point. "To helpe me herein, I haue sondrye translacions, not onely in latyn, but also of the 'Douche' (German) interpreters: whom (because of theyr synguler gyftes & speciall diligence in the Bible) I haue ben the more glad to folowe for the most parte, accordynge as I was requyred. Lowly & faythfully haue I folowed myne interpreters, & that vnder correccion."

The "Douche" (German) to which he refers, Bishop Westcott thinks beyond all doubt was the Zurich Bible so far as the Old Testament was concerned, though he made use of Luther and also of the Vulgate. His New Testament, according to Bishop Westcott, has for its base Tindale's first edition, but carefully revised from the second and still more by the aid of the German versions. In the Old Testament he followed the German rather than the English, though with aid from Tindale and with constant reference also to the Latin versions. His phrasing "is nearly always rich and melodious and his work smooth rather than literal."

Dr. Eadie thus characterizes it: "Though Coverdale's version was only secondary, yet it possessed merits of its own. The gentle flow of its English is idiomatic and fresh, though many words and phrases are now antiquated, and it may still be read with pleasure in the Psalms of the English

Book of Common Prayer, of which it is the basis." . . . "No little of that indefinable quality that gives popular charm to our English Bible, and has endeared it to so many generations, is owing to Coverdale. The semitones in the music of the style are his gift. Tindale gave us the first great outline distinctly and wonderfully etched, but Coverdale added those minuter touches which soften and harmonize it. The characteristic features are Tindale's in all their boldness of form and expression; the more delicate lines and shadings are the contribution of his successor, both in his own version and in the Great Bible, revised and edited by him."

### **Matthew's Bible**

Next came Matthew's Bible, as it must be called, though it is generally believed that in some strange way John Rogers, also at first a priest of the Roman Church, preferred to use this pseudonym. His Bible was simply a reproduction for the most part of Tindale and Coverdale combined, the masculine and the feminine thus happily blended—Tindale still remaining Tindale in substance, but brought into a little closer relationship with Coverdale under the hand of Rogers. The Pentateuch and the New Testament are Tindale with very slight change. The Old Testament from Ezra to Malachi are Coverdale. The remaining books of the Old Testament, Joshua to Second Chronicles, are a new translation. John Foxe, in his "Acts and Monuments," says: "In the translation of this Bible the greatest

doer was indeed William Tindale, who with the help of Miles Coverdale had translated all the books thereof except only the Apocrypha and certain notes in the margin which were added after. But because the said William Tindale in the meantime was apprehended before this Bible was fully perfected, it was



ARCHBISHOP CRANMER

ANNE BOLEYN

HENRY VIII.

THE BAPTISM OF PRINCESS (AFTERWARD QUEEN) ELIZABETH  
(From an old volume of Shakespeare's Henry VIII.)

thought good . . . to father it by a strange name of Thomas Mattheve ; John Rogers at the same time being corrector to the print, who had then translated the residue of the Apocrypha and added also certain notes there-

to in the margin, and therefore came it to be called 'Thomas Matthew's Bible.'" Bishop Westcott quotes this passage not to indorse its minutiaë, but to indicate how the labors of these three men were interlaced. It was a weaving process, or rather the twisting of the strands of a cord, at first loosely and then a little more closely, until the finished product is reached.

Matthew's, or Rogers' Bible appeared in 1537, dedicated to King Henry VIII. Thus slowly the providence of God was shaping events toward the enthronement of His Word in public honor. "For vnto whom," Matthew asks, "or in to whose proteccyon shulde the defence of soche a worck be soner comytted (wherein are contayned the infallyble promyses of mercy . . . wyth the whole summe of Christyanitye) then vnto his Maiestye, which not onely by name and tytle, but most euydently and openly, most Christenly and wyth most Godly pollicye doth profess the defence thereof." Rogers won the martyr's crown, being burned at Smithfield in 1555. Without formal ecclesiastical action the book had now won its place among the English people. Henceforth Matthew's Bible, the happy marrying of Tindale and Coverdale, furnished the grand basis for the later revisions which were to bring to perfection the great classic translation of 1611.

### **Taverner's Version**

In 1539 another Version appeared, made by Richard Taverner. It has this distinction,

that it was the work of a layman—a learned layman, who had studied law and through the influence of Cromwell in 1534 obtained an official position in the service of the Government.

He was licensed to preach as a layman by Edward VI., but before that issued his Bible under the patronage of Cromwell, dedicated to the King. Like the others it is based on Tindale, whose work, however, he handles with distinction, originality, and vigor. Its merits as a version, however, did not procure for it the influence which might have been expected, as, according to Bishop Westcott, it exercised no influence whatever on later revisions. This may have been due to the fact that it was issued too near in time to the next version.

### **The Great Bible**

This version, "The Great Bible," came the same year (1539), so called from its size, 15 x 9 inches, which gave it its distinction, in which Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Tunstall, Bishop of London (the same 'My Lord of London' who had hounded Tindale to his death)—joined hands with Cromwell and Heath, Bishop of Rochester, afterward Archbishop of York, to aid Coverdale in carrying forward the great undertaking. The Great Bible is chiefly a revision of Matthew's made by Coverdale; not a mere superficial revision, but that of a competent editor. Coverdale was prepared by his own prior labors for what he now undertook and carried forward to successful conclusion, and the

result of his labors appears in successive editions of the Great Bible which are connected with the names of his colleagues, Cromwell in 1539 and Cranmer in 1540. Its title-page has a picture of Henry VIII. giving the Bible to Cromwell and Cranmer, who in turn give it to the clergy and laity surrounding them.

The publication of The Great Bible was accompanied with an injunction that it should be placed in the Parish churches, and six Bibles were set up in convenient places in St. Paul's Church. The King issued a proclamation in May, 1540, to accompany its reading. A public document justifying these measures declares, "Englishmen have now in hand in every church and place, almost every man, the Holy Bible and New Testament in their mother tongue."

So, then, within three short years after Tindale's death the leaders of Church and State were following in the footsteps of the great path-breaker.

## Elizabethan Versions:—The Genevan,—The Bishops',—The Douay

**T**HE Great Bible, so called merely from its folio size, was succeeded by a greater, not in size, for it was a quarto, but greater in its accuracy and felicity as a translation. The Genevan Version was based on the Great Bible, but added to it a scholarly fidelity, coupled with a happy grace and vigor of idiomatic English, which made it for many years the Bible of the English people. The circumstances which led to this result are part of the strange, eventful history of that time of stress and storm. To state even in outline the historical causes that lie behind the Genevan Version would be to picture the civil and religious convulsions which shook not only England but Continental Europe. As in the apocalyptic picture, there were "voices, thunders and lightnings, and there was a great earthquake."

The Genevan Version was made by English exiles, companions in tribulation for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. It might be said after the manner of the Acts of the Apostles that, because of great persecution against the church, they were scattered abroad and went everywhere preaching the Word—and translating it.

The name "Genevan" is profoundly significant. The school of John Calvin was a natural focus for the learning of the day. Thither the victims of religious persecution in England fled

for refuge. Henry VIII., though a friend of learning and by no means a foe of moderate reform in religious life, was at best a fickle and



JOHN CALVIN

treacherous friend. The close of his reign was marked by what is known as the Catholic



reaction. Although the Great Bible had appeared with a picture of him and his Prime Minister, during his later years severe restrictions were placed upon the use of this or of any vernacular Bible.

In 1543 Parliament forbade all translations bearing the name of Tindale and forbade, further, women (except women of rank), artificers, apprentices, journeymen, servants, farmers, and laborers to read, to themselves or others, publicly or privately, any part of the Bible under pain of imprisonment. It was not until Edward VI., Henry's son by Jane Seymour, ascended the throne that the Word in its new English dress had full course and was glorified.

The story has often been told of how at King Edward's coronation three swords were brought to him as signs of the triple kingdom. He asked for a Bible to be brought, saying that this was the sword of the spirit. Thirty-five editions of the New Testament and thirteen of the Bible were published during his reign. The beneficed clergy were commanded to provide large copies for public use. The people could read, with none to molest or make them afraid. It seemed as though the Book had come to its own.

Under these auspicious circumstances Bible translation might naturally have gone forward, but this was not to be during Edward's brief reign. It was not to Protestant Edward, but to Catholic Mary, who succeeded him—"Bloody Mary"—that we are indebted for the Genevan Version. Her fierce wrath drove the choicest spirits in England to the Continent, where

some of them found their way to that select company of Christian scholars who gathered at Geneva. As soon as Mary came to the throne eight hundred persons crossed the channel, including five bishops, fifty eminent divines, besides titled ladies, among them the Queen's own cousin. They were found in many cities, chiefly perhaps in Frankfort. Here there arose a division of judgment among themselves which led to the secession of a certain party, especially of the scholarly sort, to Geneva. From these came the Genevan Version. Among the names mentioned in connection with it are John Bodley (father of the founder of the Bodleian Library), Myles Coverdale, Thomas Cole, Anthony Gilby, Thomas Sampson, John Knox, and last but not least, William Whittingham. Whittingham was married to the sister of John Calvin (or of Idelette DeBeurre, Calvin's wife—it is not quite clear which), and was himself an Oxonian of scholarly accomplishments who had spent many years in foreign travel.

Under Calvin's mighty shadow, if not by his suggestion—who can say?—he issued his own translation of the New Testament. This was a forerunner of the Genevan Version itself, and is often, though incorrectly, identified with the Genevan New Testament. First, however, came the independent translation made by Whittingham, but accompanied with a stirring introduction by Calvin himself. While, then, Mary was desolating England, sending three hundred persons to the stake in three years, among them three bishops, and

Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, himself, this little group of scholar-saints quietly prepared the next stage in the history of the English Bible.

Calvin himself, of course, could not contribute anything directly to the English Version. He was, however, deeply interested in Bible translation, and was indeed himself engaged at that very time in perfecting the French version of Olivetan. He revised it three times—in 1545, 1551, and 1558. Whittingham's New Testament appeared in 1557, just before the close of Mary's reign in England, so that we may without much exercise of the historical imagination see these two men, so closely linked, laboring together, the one on the French and the other on the English New Testament. Calvin's revisions were scaffolding to the final form of the French version, which was issued in 1588 by a company of French Protestants. Though Calvin was dealing with another tongue, it could not fail that Whittingham and his *confreeres* should catch somewhat of his spirit. The quickening touch of so penetrating a genius as his must have been keenly felt in all the intellectual and spiritual life of that high company, of which he was the most distinguished ornament and the most influential member.

The Genevan Version was based in the Old Testament on the Great Bible, to the text of which it made considerable correction (so Bishop Westcott says), but not so much in its translation. In the New Testament it betrays the powerful hand of Calvin's associ-

ate, Theodore de Beza, through his Latin translation.

The Genevan was the first English Bible printed in Roman type, instead of the usual black letter; the first also to break up the solid paragraphs into verses like our own; the first to use italics to indicate the word supplied by the translators. It was the first version issued in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and was dedicated to her in simple language, free from unworthy adulation, coming out in 1560 soon after her coronation. It had marginal notes, a running commentary on the text (Calvinistic in tone), and was adapted to the needs of the common people, who heard it gladly and cherished it with devout tenderness in life and in death. It was above all others the people's book—the household Bible—not only in England but in Scotland, where it soon came into general use. John Knox took it in place of Tindale's version, which he used up to the time of its appearance, and carried it, so Dr. Eadie relates, to the First General Assembly of the Presbyterian Kirk in Edinburgh.

The influence of the English Bible upon English literature cannot here be discussed, but it is of special interest to note that the creative genius of William Shakespeare found in the Genevan Version no little of the most fine gold which furnished him with a fit medium of expression. This has been shown in more than one recent treatise—perhaps as well or better than any other, by Dr. Thomas Carter in his "Shakespeare and Holy Scriptures." In this he argues with elaborate care

and seemingly beyond refutation that Shakespeare's Bible was the Genevan Version.

Shakespeare's literary career was finished practically before the publication of King James. Dr. Carter goes through all the plays, showing the marvelous interweaving of Biblical phraseology in the very fiber of his style. It is not so much direct quotation as continual adaptation of Scripture phrase to his thought that betrays so unmistakably his minute familiarity with the text of the version. His use of it is not always reverent. He used Scripture "to dignify the thought of a king, to point the jest of a wit, or to brighten the dullness of a clown."

It is a striking coincidence surely that the school of Calvin and his "most potent grave and reverend Seignors" in Geneva should have thus potently touched to so fine issues the sublime genius of the myriad-minded master of the human heart.

A recent book by Mr. Sidney Lee on "The French Renaissance in England;" calls attention to French influence in Elizabethan literature. This, the writer thinks, is much greater than has been ordinarily supposed. The early translators of the English Bible, according to Mr. Lee, owe to contemporary French efforts of the same kind an appreciable stimulus. He also dwells upon the influence of Calvin's style on the English prose writers. This accords in general with the view here suggested.

Dr. Matthew B. Riddle, one of the American company of New Testament Revisers,

calls attention to a curious illustration of the vitality of the Genevan Version and its hold on English-speaking Christians, that at the Westminster Assembly, more than thirty years after the publication of the Authorized Version, the Genevan Version was still preferred by many members, and several places in the Westminster Confession of Faith framed by that body indicate its influence. He adds that the Bishops' Bible was used in the pulpit of the First Church of Hartford, Conn., forty years after 1611.

### **The Bishops' Bible**

This brings us to the Bishops' Bible, the chief distinction of which was that it has made the formally adopted basis for the King James Version. But for this it cannot be said to deserve to rank with its predecessors, and especially with the Genevan, which it was probably intended in some measure to supplant, but which it singularly failed to equal in power. It was sometimes called Parker's Bible, since Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, was its originator and promoter.

Strype, the historian of this phase of the subject, describes the method by which it was done :

“The archbishop took upon him the labour to contrive and set the whole work a going in a proper method, by sorting out the whole Bible into parcels . . . , and distributing those parcels to able bishops and other learned men, to peruse and collate each the book or books allotted them: sending withal his in-

structions for the method they should observe; and they to add some short marginal notes for the illustration or correction of the text. And all these portions of the Bible being



THE EARL OF LEICESTER  
(Illustration in the Bishops' Bible, 1568)

finished and sent back to the archbishop, he was to add the last hand to them and so to

take care for printing and publishing the whole."

It was the aim of the bishops to produce a popular rather than a literary version. Like so many other attempts of revision, it proved in the end less conservative than at the beginning. Bishop Westcott thinks the work as a whole extremely unequal. The bishops knew more Greek than they did Hebrew. The historical books of the Old Testament follow the Great Bible very closely, the others less closely. The Genevan Version had its influence throughout, and many of the changes made in the Bishops' are due to it. The first edition appearing in 1568, was followed by another revised edition in 1572. Many phrases and happy turns of expression can be cited for which we are indebted to the Bishops' Bible: "Joint heirs with Christ;" "the glory of his inheritance;" love "worketh no ill to his neighbour," and other like expressions.

The Bishops', like the Genevan Version, contains explanatory notes which are shorter and deal with the interpretation in the stricter sense of the word. One of them may be quoted as of curious interest to American readers in Psalm 45, 9, on "the gold of Ophir": "Ophir is thought to be the Ilande in the West coast of late found by Christopher Columbo: frō whence at this day is brought most fine golde."

### **The Rheims, or Douay, Version**

A rival translation produced by scholars bitterly antagonistic to those who had thus



far toiled at the English Version, was not without its value to them. The point of view of the makers of the Rheims, or Douay, Version was so diverse from the Geneva or the Bishops' Bible that their results make a useful foil and occasionally a wholesome corrective to both, and to the King James as well.

The men of Douay were genuine scholars, and though bent on supplanting the Tindale tradition, in spite of themselves the Rheimists profited by the labors of those whom they sought to undo.

William Allen, Principal of St. Mary's Hall, Oxford, initiated the new translation. Under his inspiration a college was founded at first in Douay in 1568 (the year the Bishops' Bible appeared) for the education of young Englishmen in the Roman Catholic manner, and the training of priests intended to reconvert England to the Papacy. The college was moved to Rheims ten years later and then back again to Douay. Allen, who was afterward made Cardinal by Pope Sixtus V., at the request of Philip II. of Spain, was its president, and it is interesting to read that in this Roman Catholic institution the Bible was carefully taught every day. Thus Protestantism was already modifying Roman usage.

Gregory Martin, "graduate and Licentiate in Theology" (so the official records of Douay read) a brilliant linguist, began the translation in October, 1578, ten years after the Bishops' Bible appeared, and did the most of the work. Associated with him were Cardinal Allen, Richard Bristow, Thomas Worth-

ington, and William Reynolds, all men of learning, but he bore the brunt of it. They adopted a false principle of translation in taking the Latin Vulgate, rather than the Greek



**CARDINAL WILLIAM ALLEN**

or Hebrew originals, as their basis, and adhered with courageous consistency to this principle even when their scholarly instincts

must have revolted from the manifest inaccuracies of the Vulgate. As a result all the errors of the Vulgate were transferred to their English version, so far as they can be transferred in a Latinized English style, which is at times hardly English at all and scarcely intelligible. "Loaves of proposition," a "curled mountain," "cherogrillus," "ophiomachus," "sciniph," "charadrion," for instance, are sufficient to indicate to what un-English absurdities these scholarly translators were driven by their theory.

The value of the Douay thus consists not in its unnatural and un-English style, and certainly not in the anti-Protestant notes accompanying it, but mainly in its vocabulary, which has forced as it were into the language many Latin words serviceable for the expression of scriptural ideas. Many of these usages the King James revisers subsequently adopted.

The Douay New Testament appeared in 1582 and the Old Testament in 1609-10, just before the King James appeared.

Two notable articles on the Douay Version are to be found in the Roman Catholic Encyclopedia from the pen of Monsignor Ward, President of St. Edmond's College, England. This learned writer points out that the Bibles popularly styled "Douay" now "are most improperly so called," being founded on the revisions of Bishop Challoner in 1749-52. The changes which he introduced according to Cardinal Newman, it is further said, "almost amounted to a new translation," and with this judgment Cardinal Wiseman concurs.

“ Scarcely any verse remains as it was originally published.” In nearly every case, Monsignor Ward adds, “these changes took the form of approximating to the Authorized Version.” To this may be added Monsignor Ward’s further admission in the article on Gregory Martin, that the Douay “is full of Latinisms, so it has little of the rhythmic harmony of the Anglican Authorized Version, which has become part of the literature of the nation,” but in accuracy and scholarship he thinks it “superior to any of the English versions which had preceded it, and it is understood to have great influence on the translators of the King James Version.” So it appears that these two companies of translators, working from such widely different standpoints, in the end proved each to be useful in varying degrees to the other.

Thus it came to pass that first by Wycliffe, then by Tindale, in the stormy days of Henry VIII. and on through “the spacious times of Great Elizabeth”—the golden age of English letters—then finally under King James, the English Bible came to its throne of power.

## Archbishop Cranmer to Sir Thomas Cromwell, Concerning Matthew's (Rogers') Bible, 1537

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'My especial good lord . . . , these  
'shall be to signify unto the same, that you  
'shall receive by the bringer thereof a bible  
'in English, both of a new translation and of  
'a new print, dedicated unto the king's maj-  
'esty, as farther appeareth by a pistle unto  
'his grace in the beginning of the book,  
'which in mine opinion is very well done,  
'and therefore I pray your lordship to read  
'the same. . . .

'And forasmuch as the book is dedicated  
'unto the king's grace, and also great pains  
'and labour taken in setting forth of the same;  
'I pray you, my lord, that you will exhibit  
'the book unto the king's highness, and to  
'obtain of his grace, if you can, a license that  
'the same may be sold and read of every per-  
'son, without danger of any act, proclamation,  
'or ordinance, heretofore granted to the con-  
'trary, until such time as we the bishops shall  
'set forth a better translation, which I think will  
'not be till a day after doomsday. . . .'

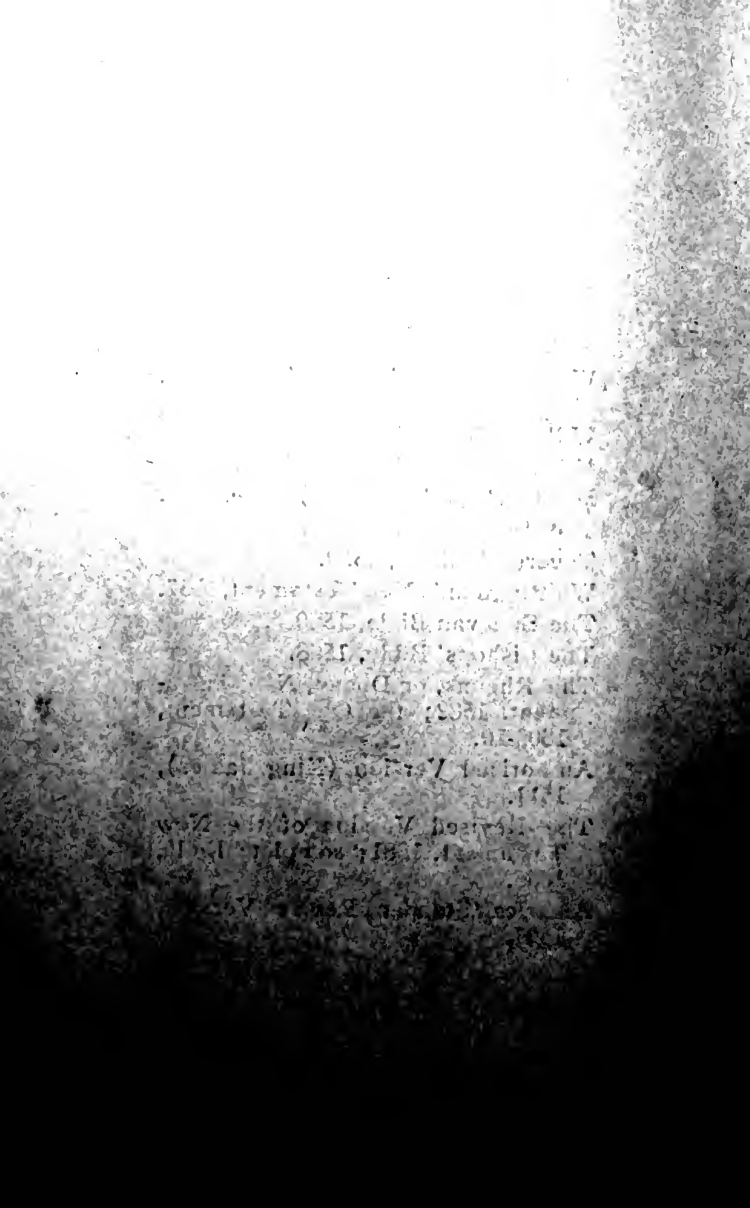
## The Dedication of the Genevan Version to Queen Elizabeth (1560)

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'The eyes of all that feare God in all places  
' beholde your countreyes as an example to all  
' that beleue, and the prayers of all the godly  
' at all tymes are directed to God for the pres-  
' eruatīō of your maiestie. For considering  
' Gods wonderful mercies toward you at all  
' seasons, who hath pulled you out of the  
' mouthe of the lyons, and how that from  
' your youth you haue bene broght vp in the  
' holy Scriptures, the hope of all men is so  
' increased, that thei cā not but looke that God  
' shulde bring to passe some wōderful worke  
' by your grace to the vniversal comfort of his  
' Church. Therefore euen aboue strēgth you  
' must shewe your selfe strong and bolde in  
' Gods matters. . . . This Lord of lordes &  
' King of kings who hath euer defended his,  
' strengthē, cōfort and preserue your maiestie,  
' that you may be able to builde vp the ruines  
' of Gods house to his glorie, the discharge of  
' your conscience, and to the comfort of all  
' them that loue the comming of Christ Iesus  
' our Lord.'

## **Chronology of the English Printed Bible**

- John Wycliffe's translation, circulated in manuscript only, about 1360 to 1384.
- William Tindale's New Testament, 1525.
- William Tindale's Pentateuch, 1530.
- Miles Coverdale's Bible, 1535.
- Matthew's (John Rogers) Bible, 1537.
- The Great Bible, 1539.
- Taverner's Bible, 1539.
- Whittingham's New Testament, 1557.
- The Genevan Bible, 1560.
- The Bishops' Bible, 1568.
- The Rheims, or Douay, New Testament, 1582; the Old Testament, 1609-10.
- Authorized Version (King James), 1611.
- The Revised Version of the New Testament, 1881; complete Bible, 1885.
- American Standard Revised Version, 1901.









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