

THE  
**PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.**

---

VOL. IV.      PITTSBURGH, JANUARY, 1836.

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No. 8.

**SERMON LVIII.**

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OF THE WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

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**THE ENGLISH BIBLE.**

DEUT. 4:7, 8.—*For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?*

THE present year\* completes just three centuries, since the publication of "COVERDALE'S BIBLE," the first translation of the *entire* scriptures given from the press in the English language. The work carries its own date on the last page in these words: "Prynted in the yeare of our Lord MDXXXV, and fynished the fourth day of October." It has been recommended, to take advantage of the occasion, as one that is proper and suitable to be used for solemnly calling to mind this interesting event, together with its connections and bearings, and turning the whole to profitable account by the reflections it is adapted to create. The thought is certainly deserving of regard. The translation of the bible into our own language, forms a most important chapter in the history of human improvement, worthy to be studied with interest by the friends of learning and religion in all countries; but more especially entitled to the attention of those by whom that language is spoken, whether on the other side of the Atlantic, or in the new world to which it has been transplanted among ourselves. It might be hard perhaps to find amid the changes that mark the history of England and her race, one that has a better claim to be remembered and celebrated, than the glorious revolution that wrested for her the keys of knowledge and of heaven from the power of the Man of Sin, and gave her sons the bible in their own language, that they might "know the truth," and that the truth might "make them free." The great charter of liberties obtained, sword in hand, from king John, the very ground-work as it is held to be of the nation's freedom and greatness, was in itself a less memorable achiev-

\* The year 1835. It is necessary to remark that the sermon was prepared originally by desire, and preached for one of the Bible Societies of Pittsburgh, the last Sabbath in November, in the First Presbyterian Church.

ment. For after all what is mere civil liberty, in comparison with the light of Heaven left to flow unrestrained over the general mind? What Declaration of Rights deserves to be prized, as that which asserts and secures the immunities of the soul, as called of God to the knowledge of virtue and immortality by the constitution of his own word? The true "Magna Charta" of the rights of man—the highest and noblest rights conferred upon him by his Maker—is the bible; the bible in his own language, the bible in his own hands. The most dire of all forms of tyranny is that which undertakes to rob him of this treasure; and so on the other hand, those occasions must ever stand the most illustrious in the history of his generations, by which the free and full possession of it is made sure to him, against all untoward circumstances, and in despite of the machinations of earth and hell employed to prevent the result.

In accordance, then, with the recommendation that has been mentioned, I propose this day to unite with you, my friends, in commemorating the birth-time of our English bible. Such a service cannot be out of place in itself; and it will fall in happily, at the same time, with the special object of the Society, in the presence of which and for whose benefit I am called to preach, and whose privilege and honor it is to be employed in the great work of spreading this holy volume into every part of the world. A sketch of the *history* of those attempts which resulted finally in the version of the scriptures we now use, a brief notice of its *merits*, and some *reflections* suggested by the subject, form the plan of the discourse by which I wish to assist you in improving the occasion.

I. I PROPOSE, IN THE FIRST PLACE, TO GIVE A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE, DOWN TO THE POINT AT WHICH IT MAY BE SAID TO HAVE BECOME COMPLETE IN THE FORMATION OF THE EXCELLENT VERSION NOW IN COMMON USE. This will lead us far back beyond the date of Coverdale's edition, and carry us also the greater part of a century this side. Still it all enters properly enough into the commemoration called for by the occasion we wish to celebrate. The appearance of that edition formed, as it were, the great central point in the course of this history; where the conflict between liberty and oppression in this case came to its crisis, and the new dispensation of knowledge and independence was happily begun, that continued to unfold so auspiciously from that time onward, as the fair sun of revelation rose higher and scattered its rays more widely over the land. Thus in celebrating the anniversaries of our national independence, we never dream of confining our thoughts to the transactions of a single day or a single year, however we may have singled out one particular occasion to stand as the rallying point of our recollections, and the nucleus of all the interesting incidents that went before and followed after. We call the *Fourth of July* the birth-day of our liberties, though we know that a long train of events was opening the way towards the freedom of the nation before, and that years of conflict and toil had to pass away afterwards, ere we came to sit as one great and happy people underneath the shadow of our present constitution. In looking back to the story of our independence, we hold it proper to recapitulate the memory of wrongs and struggles that lay

beyond and led the way to the Declaration of "76;" and then again to trace the stream of events that followed that Declaration, till we find it emptying its troubled tide into the broad and quiet sea of prosperity and peace toward which all had been forcing its way from the beginning.

Every part of the bible appeared from Heaven originally in the language of the people, into whose hands it was first given, in different ages of the world, as a divine revelation. The Old Testament accordingly was written in Hebrew, with the exception of a few passages in the Chaldee dialect, and the New Testament in Greek. This fact should be of itself sufficient to refute the monstrous error of those, who imagine that the sacred volume should be locked up in a dead language from the common use of men. If God had not wished the bible to be in general use, why did he not publish it at first in some strange tongue, that should have been accessible only to the learned, and not at all to the mass of the people to whom it was sent? Why should he have given the Old Testament in Hebrew, when the Jews all understood and used this language, instead of giving it in the dialect of Babylon, or wrapping it up in the mysterious hieroglyphics of Egypt? Why should he have published the New Testament in Greek, the common language of the civilized world at the time, and not rather have buried it in the speech of Persia, or even in the hallowed and venerable forms of the ancient Hebrew itself? To such inquiries we can find but one answer. He gave his word in the most intelligible form to those who received it, because it was his will that it should be known and read of *all*, that they might be made wise by it unto everlasting life.

And so the thing was understood from the beginning. The Jews of old never dreamed of shutting out from the lively oracles of God, any to whom those oracles were given. They looked upon the Gentiles indeed as excluded from all part in the blessing; but they held it to be the privilege of the seed of Abraham at least to hold direct communication with the God of Abraham at all times, in the use of the Law and the Prophets. Accordingly when a part of the nation came to be settled under the Ptolemies in Egypt, they felt themselves at perfect liberty to have the Old Testament translated there into the Greek tongue for their particular use. This gave rise to the famous Septuagint, or Translation of the Seventy, as it is called, which was formed in the course of the third century before the birth of Jesus Christ, and which still remains in the church, as a monument of its ancient liberty, and a testimony for the truth of religion better than a thousand pillars of brass. This version received the approbation of our Savior and his disciples, and was in such high credit at one time both with Jews and Christians, that it had well nigh usurped the place for a time even of the inspired original itself.

That the same right of translating and publishing the sacred writings for the use of all, should have been recognized and exercised also in the beginning of the christian dispensation, is of course not strange. Within the first two centuries of this era, the sacred volume was translated into Syriac and Latin, for the benefit of the Churches using these languages; and in the third century, if not sooner, into both

the Sahidic and Coptic, the dialects of Upper and Lower Egypt at the time. Other versions followed in the succeeding centuries, which it does not fall in our way now to notice.

We know almost nothing of the history of Britain, during the first four centuries of the christian era. It has been believed that the gospel found its way into the Island as early as the second, if not in the first century; but the tradition is not certain, and but few notices of its progress after it did gain an introduction appear among the records that have come down to us from early times. In the middle of the fifth century, we know, the province being sorely pressed with enemies, and abandoned by the Roman Government, which found itself too weak to hold its own frontiers against the invasions that were pressing upon it from the north, called in the assistance of the Saxons and Angles as a last resort for safety. These barbarians turned their arms upon the unhappy people they came to protect, and gradually rose to be the conquerors and proprietors of the land. Among this wild and cruel population, we are informed, the power of christianity did not find entrance till about the beginning of the sixth century; when the foundations of the Anglo-Saxon church were planted by the celebrated Augustine and his forty assistant missionaries, sent over for the purpose by Gregory the Great. We do not read of any attempt to translate any part of the sacred volume into the vernacular tongue of this people before the eighth century. The necessity of the case, and not any design of preventing the general use of the scriptures, constrained the churches to depend altogether upon the Latin version, as this could be employed for their edification by such of the priests and monks as made it their business to be acquainted with it for this end. Indeed there was comparatively but little call for any thing more; since the very few who were able to read at all, were for the most part able to read Latin as a thing of course.

The Psalter, or book of Psalms, was translated into the Saxon language, about the year 706, by Adhelm, bishop of Sherborn. The four gospels are said to have been translated soon after, by Egbert, bishop of Lindisfern; and early in the same century the illustrious Bede, called by his contemporaries the *wise Saxon* and by later generations *venerable Bede*, made a version if not of the whole bible as some say, at least some part of it for the use of his countrymen. All these excellent men were diligent in every way in trying to bring the scriptures within the reach of those among whom they lived, and in persuading all around them to use such opportunities as they enjoyed to become acquainted with their divine contents. The great and good king Alfred, who died in the year 900, made another translation of the Psalms, and toward the close of the tenth century a considerable portion of the Old Testament was translated by Elfric, archbishop of Canterbury, at a time when the deepest night of ignorance prevailed on every side. Other translations of particular portions of the sacred volume no doubt appeared in the course of these distant ages, of which we have now no certain account.

The first *English* translation of the bible known to be extant, of which three copies are preserved in manuscript in the different libraries of Oxford, is referred by archbishop Usher, to the close of the thirteenth cen-

tury, though some critics place it later. John de Trevisa is said to have translated the Old and New Testaments into English, toward the close of the next century; but some think his translation reached no farther than to certain passages merely of the bible, scattered through his works or painted on the walls of the chapel at Berkeley Castle. About the same time, lived the celebrated John Wickliff, often styled the Apostle of England. He translated the entire bible into English from the Latin vulgate, not being sufficiently master of the Hebrew and Greek to make use of the original text for this purpose. This work gave great offence to the enemies of knowledge at that time, and a bill was brought into the House of Lords in the year 1390 for the purpose of suppressing it; which, however, did not succeed, being met with spirit by some of the members, especially the Duke of Lancaster, the king's uncle, who inveighed against it sharply, declaring that the people of England should not be the tail of all mankind, in not having the law of God, the rule of their faith, in their own language like other nations—a position, he said with an oath, he would firmly maintain against those that brought in the bill. Wickliff had died six years before this time, greatly hated and much persecuted by the ignorant priests and friars of the age, whose errors he continued to attack with a bold hand during his whole life. The translation spread with happy effect for some time after. But in the year 1408, a convocation was held at Oxford by archbishop Arundel which passed the following infamous decree: “It is a dangerous thing, as St. Jerome assures us, to translate the scriptures, it being very difficult in a version to keep close to the sense of the inspired writers; for by the confession of the same father, he had mistaken the meaning of several texts. We therefore constitute and ordain, that from this time forward no unauthorized person shall translate any part of holy scripture into English, or any other language, under any form of book or treatise. Neither shall any such book, treatise, or version, made either in Wickliff's time, or since, or which hereafter shall be made, be read either in whole or in part, publicly or privately, under the penalty of the greater excommunication, till the said translation shall be approved either by the bishop of the diocese, or a provincial council, as occasion shall require. And whosoever shall do contrary hereunto, shall be punished as an encourager of heresies and errors.” This gave rise to great persecution, and many were punished severely for reading the scriptures in English, some it is said even with death. In the year 1428, the bones of Wickliff were dug up, by a decree of the Council of Constance, and burned, in order to cover his memory with reproach. The New Testament, as translated by this great man, has been printed in recent times; but his version of the Old Testament still remains only in manuscript.

With the rise of the Reformation, the demand for the sacred volume increased, as well as the zeal of pious men to bring it into circulation. The press, in the wonderful providence of God, had begun to unfold the rich resources of its power, and it soon became an object of the first interest to turn them to account, in multiplying and spreading copies of the bible among the people in their own vernacular tongues. Already had Luther begun to give his German bible by parts in this way to his countrymen, when WILLIAM TINDAL, who had been forced to leave his own

country by persecution, was led to translate the New Testament into English from the original Greek, and publish it in Holland for the benefit of the English nation. In this work, he was assisted by the learned John Fryth, and a friar called William Roye, both of whom afterwards suffered death as heretics. The work appeared in the year 1526, and makes the first printed edition of any part of the bible in the English language. In the same year, Cardinal Wolsey and the bishops consulted together on the subject of the translation, and published a prohibition against it in all their dioceses, charging it with false and heretical glosses wickedly brought in to corrupt the word of God. Still many copies continued to make their way into the country; whereupon, to enforce the prohibition, Tonstal, bishop of London, bought up all the copies he could find and committed them to the flames at St. Paul's cross. This had a hateful appearance to the people, and only led them to look after the scriptures more earnestly than before; while it hindered not at all the multiplication of printed copies, and in fact did but assist Tindal himself to execute still more important enterprizes than the first. Several other editions of this translation were published in Holland, before the year 1530, in which Tindal himself seems to have had no interest, but which found a ready sale whether bought to be read or to be burned. In the year 1530, a royal proclamation was issued, by the advice of the prelates and clerks, and of the universities, for totally suppressing the translation of the scriptures "*corrupted* by William Tindal." The proclamation declared it not necessary that the scriptures should be had in the English tongue, and in the hands of the common people, and that it was dangerous considering the malignity of the times to bring them thus into use. At a suitable time, it was said, the king would provide a fair and learned translation for the use of the nation, if it should be considered expedient. All this while Tindal had been going forward with the work of translating the Old Testament, assisted by his friend Miles Coverdale, and this same year accordingly, 1530, appeared his edition of the five books of Moses. He continued to translate afterwards, and before his death had gone over all the historical books at any rate, besides revising and correcting his translation of the New Testament. In the year 1531, through the influence of his enemies in England, he was seized and imprisoned at Villefort, near Brussels; and after a confinement of years, he was condemned to death by the emperor's decree in an assembly at Augsburg, in consequence of which he was strangled and had his body afterwards reduced to ashes. His dying prayer, repeated with much earnestness, was, "Lord open the king of England's eyes!" His translation of course had faults. He knew but little of the Hebrew, and probably translated the Old Testament from the Latin; and the work, at any rate, was too great to be executed in the best manner by any single man, though his circumstances had been far more favorable than those of this persecuted exile. Still as a whole it has been pronounced worthy of very great praise, and no doubt its influence has been felt on all the succeeding English translations, down to the time of that which is now in use.

In the year 1535, as was stated at the beginning of this discourse, appeared the bible of MILES COVERDALE, the first printed edition of the entire scriptures in the English language. This was dedicated to the

king, Henry VIII, and seems to have been substantially Tindal's translation, as far as he had gone, filled out by Coverdale himself with what was wanted to make up a version of the whole bible. It was called, however, a "special translation," and did not agree altogether with Tindal's; and besides it omitted Tindal's prefaces and notes, which had been offensive to many. At the time it appeared, the way had begun to open for a more free dissemination of the scriptures among the people. The king's supremacy in matters of religion, had been settled in Parliament the year before; and this same year, the two Houses of Convocation, through the influence of Archbishop Cranmer, were led to petition him for leave to have a translation of the bible made into the common language, by such learned men as he might see fit to appoint; which happily resulted in his giving orders to set about it immediately. Cranmer lost no time in entering upon the work, by dividing one of the old translations of the New Testament into several portions, and sending them to different learned divines to be corrected, and returned as quickly as possible for the use of the new edition. He found, however, that the zeal of others did not move so fast as his own; and before he could carry his wishes into effect, in this way, provision came to be made for them by other means. Coverdale's bible came forward, in the first place, to meet the growing demand of the times; and we find among other injunctions addressed to the clergy the following year, by the authority of the king, one requiring every parson or proprietor of a church to provide a bible in Latin and English, to be laid in the choir for every one to read at will. At the same time, the people were cautioned not to fall into controversy about difficult passages, but to use their liberty with modesty and sobriety. After the death of Tindal, another impression of this bible, with some slight alterations, was given to the world: and for this, by the intercession of Cranmer and Lord Cromwell, the king's approbation and license were formally obtained, so as to give it a standard character for the use of the realm.

This bible, bearing on its title-page in red letters the inscription, *Set forth with the King's most gracious authority*, is commonly known by the name of **MATTHEWE'S BIBLE**. It was printed also on the Continent, from the press of Grafton & Whitchurch, and under the superintendence of the celebrated *John Rogers*, who became a martyr afterwards for the truth, in the bloody reign of Mary. It contained prefaces and marginal notes, borrowed chiefly perhaps from the German version of Luther. The name of Thomas Mattheve, which it carried in front, was fictitious, as no such person probably had any part in it; only it was thought best to drop the name of Tindal, as it was unpopular with many. This bible is sometimes called also Cranmer's Bible, since he was looked upon as the prime mover in the business of bringing it forward, and drew up a preface for a subsequent edition of it published A. D. 1541. It appeared in the year 1537.

The year following, a new injunction was issued to have a copy of the sacred volume placed in every parish church, for the people to read; and the pastors were required to encourage and exhort all to make use of the liberty, as they could, for their edification. It is said, that many of these spiritual teachers were so badly affected toward the whole measure, that when they came to read these instructions from their

exact than any that had yet been made, having an opportunity of consulting for this purpose with the illustrious reformers John Calvin and Theodore Beza, who lived at that place. The name of Miles Coverdale stands conspicuous again, in the history of this version also. It was not finished until after the accession of Elizabeth, which happily restored the reformation and the freedom of God's word in England, in the year 1558. This GENEVA BIBLE was highly valued among the puritans, chiefly perhaps on account of the brief annotations that went along with it, which came all of the Calvinistic school. More than thirty editions of it were published between the years 1560 and 1610.

Archbishop Parker, by royal command it is said, undertook soon after this to form, with the help of several learned men, chiefly bishops, a revision of the "Great Bible," for the use of the church, such as might free it from the charge of being a false translation, of which the popish party was still trying to make so much. This appeared in 1568, and was called for distinction afterwards the BISHOPS' BIBLE. It went by the name also of "*Matthew Parker's Bible*." It was ordered to be used in the churches, and continued to hold this pre-eminence for forty years; though the "Geneva Bible" was more read in private houses.

The friends of popery, finding it in vain to stem the torrent of improvement, at last adopted the policy of publishing a translation of their own. Their New-Testament appeared at *Rheims* in 1582; and the Old Testament followed about thirty years after, at *Douay*. This DOUAY BIBLE, including the Rhemish Testament, forms the only English version still that is allowed to be read by the members of that church, so far as any of them have permission from their superiors to read the scriptures in English at all. The whole version was made from the Latin Vulgate, and not from the original Greek and Hebrew text; and many words were retained in it, which the mere English reader can in no wise understand without an interpreter; still it was set forth as the only correct translation that had yet appeared, and men were cautioned not to be deceived by the pretensions of any other.

We are now brought, in the course of this review, to the BIBLE OF KING JAMES, the last and crowning effort to supply the nation with a perfect translation, which happily displaced all former ones, and continues to bless the English-speaking world to the present time. James came to the throne in 1603. As complaints abounded on the subject of religion, a conference was held at Hampton Court the following year for the purpose of settling the order and peace of the church. Here a number of objections were urged against the translations of the bible then in use, and the result was a determination on the part of his majesty to have a new version made, such as might be worthy to be established as the uniform text of the nation. Fifty four learned and pious men were accordingly appointed to perform the important service; who were to be divided into six separate classes, and to have the bible distributed in parts according to this division, that every class might have its own parcel to translate at a particular place by itself. In every company, each single individual was required first to translate the entire portion assigned to that company; then they were to com-



pare these versions together, and on consultation unite in one text the common judgment of all; after which, the several companies were to communicate their parts each one to all the rest, that in the end the entire work might have the consent and approbation of the whole number of translators together. In addition to this, an order was issued by the king, making it incumbent on all the bishops in the land, to inform themselves of all such learned men within their several dioceses, as having special skill in the Hebrew and Greek tongues, had taken pains in their private studies to understand and elucidate difficult passages in the original scriptures, and to charge them to send in their observations as they might see fit for the use of the regular translators; so as to bring as it were all the learning of the kingdom, so far as it could be of avail in the case, to bear on the great and notable undertaking that was now to be commenced.

Some delay occurred in entering upon the business, so that it was not fairly begun before the year 1607; and before this time seven of the persons first nominated were either dead or had declined acting, so as to leave but forty-seven for carrying on the translation. Ten of these met at Westminster, and had the Pentateuch, with the historical books that follow from Joshua to the end of the second book of Kings, for their portion. Eight more, at Cambridge, had charge of the rest of the historical books, together with Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Canticles and Ecclesiastes. At Oxford, one company of seven had the Prophets assigned to them; and another company of eight, at the same place, were intrusted with the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Apocalypse. There was a second company also at Westminster, that had in charge the rest of the New Testament; and finally, a second company at Cambridge, consisting of seven, to which was allotted the books of the Apocrypha—a part which it would have been better not to have associated in this way at all with a solemn translation of the true and proper word of God.

The translators received certain general instructions from the king, to regulate them in their work. They were required by these to go by the "Bishop's Bible," as much as the original would allow; to retain proper names in their usual form; to keep the old ecclesiastical terms; out of different significations belonging to a word, and equally suitable to the context, to choose that most commonly used by the best ancient fathers, to abide by the standing division of chapters and verses; to use no marginal notes, unless to explain particular Hebrew or Greek words; to employ references to parallel places, so far as might seem desirable. If any one company should differ from another, on reviewing its part of the translation, about the sense of any passages, notice was to be returned of the disagreement and its reasons; and if this should not induce a change of views on the other side, the whole was to be referred for ultimate decision to a general meeting of the chief persons of each company, to be held at the end of the work. In cases of special obscurity, letters might be sent to any learned man in the kingdom, by authority, for his opinion.

Nearly three years were occupied with the work—a period that seemed long to the impatience of many at the time, and was made the occasion even of charging these good men with negligence and sloth,

but not too great certainly for the solemn nature of the service itself, and the deeply interesting bearings it was destined to have on the history of the church in coming years. Ten years of so many lives thus employed had not been too much to expend, for an object so vastly momentous as the formation of a version, by which so many millions of people speaking the English language were to be instructed in the will of God, to the end of time. The work became complete in the year 1610.

II. THE SUBJECT REQUIRES ME NOW TO SAY SOMETHING OF THE MERITS OF THIS TRANSLATION. These are allowed by the best judges to be very great. Perhaps no translation, take it altogether, ever represented more fully and happily the rich and expressive features of the sacred original.

1. The simple *history of it*, as it has now been sketched, is adapted to beget a high opinion of its worth, and to inspire confidence in its character. Other countries have been content to receive their standard versions of the Bible from the hand of single individuals—the growth of one age, the offspring of solitary minds; and it is counted an honorable distinction, as in the case of Germany, to be able to refer to such a name as Luther, to support the credit of the reigning translation. But the bible of England may be said to be the result of the learning and piety of a whole nation, working toward it as an end almost for an entire century. From the time of Tindal to the time of king James, the mind of the church may be said to have been more or less actively employed, in preparing the way for the last great work, our present translation. For it was not merely the separate translators, during this period, that were engaged in this service; but all in the church, who had any sort of capacity for judging, were stirred up to examine, and to start corrections or amendments, in a way tending to help forward the same general design. The very cavils of those who resisted the whole matter, became subservient in this way, no doubt, to the cause they were intended to discourage. The variety of translations that appeared also, connected with the deep religious interest of the times, tended to keep attention constantly awake, and thought active, in this direction. Year after year, the church sat as it were in solemn council, to deliberate on this great and interesting subject; and the influence of those deliberations was felt on every single version that came from the press, and handed down from one reign to another with accumulating weight, till at last the full benefit of it came to be exerted on the studies which gave birth to the translation of king James. Surely it was a great matter, in this case, that neither the moral idiosyncrasies of a single mind, however great, nor the reigning views of a separate age, however wise, were suffered to impress their image on a work that was to be so vitally connected with men's opinions to the end of time. As the mind of one man is needed to correct the mind of another, so does the general mind of one age require to be tried and balanced by the mind of another age also, in order to yield the best judgment; and that result of thought therefore is likely to be the most safe, and the most worthy to stand, which has been reached in this way through the widest and longest comparison of views.

And altogether suitable to the preparation that had gone before, was the solemn undertaking by which at the last these rich advantages were brought to bear on their proper end. It seems, indeed, as if the God of the bible himself, having gradually matured all things for the purpose, had caused the sense of a special call to rest on the minds of those who acted on the occasion, by which they were engaged to realize in some degree the immense weight of the enterprize as it has since appeared, and to move in it with becoming seriousness and awe. Had it been fully understood at the time, that this was to be the last and crowning translation for common use in the English tongue—that it was to be the great standing bond of union among all the conflicting sects which should use that tongue, out of the communion of Rome, to the end of time—and that it was destined to pass, with the language itself, into other countries and continents, to rule the faith of nations then unborn or sunk in pagan superstition; they could hardly have moved with greater solemnity, and exhibited more earnest concern than they did, to make their work complete. Surely we are authorized to say, the hand of the Lord *was* specially at work in the whole transaction, and the entire character of it was such as to furnish a pledge that the superintendence of his blessed Spirit rested upon it, and went along with it, from the beginning to the end. That must needs be a good translation, towards which the providence of God and the efforts of the church had been conspiring for so long a time; around which so many prayers were found to cluster, as their great end; for which the best resources of a great nation were so solemnly called into requisition; on which the light of so many learned minds was brought to meet; about which was thrown the hedge of so much human circumspection, vigilance, and care; and over which, above all, the sacred undying power of the Holy Ghost so manifestly hovered, to bring it into happy execution as it now stands.

2. It may tend still farther to impress our minds with respect for this translation, if we consider the *authority it has had* with all protestant denominations using the English language, from the age of King James to the present time. After its appearance, the old translations, as though they had fulfilled *their* destiny in preparing for *its* approach and ushering its glorious light at last upon the world, gradually and silently sunk away from their place, like the last stars of receding night, and were seen to shine no more. It is true that some exceptions were taken with the new work. Some of the Presbyterians particularly, and other non-conformists, were disposed to find fault with it, as being somewhat tinged with the spirit of the establishment, and their old favorite, the version of Geneva, was not given up without some difficulty. In the established church also a multitude of severe criticisms were poured upon it, from the pulpit and in private circles; while the Cerberus of Rome of course let loose all its tongues, to bark it into shame. But notwithstanding all this, it quickly gained a complete ascendancy in every part of the nation. This was the best of all arguments in its favor. The authority of the king, and the credit of the reigning church, were indeed on its side; but we all know, how unavailing such influences are to produce uniformity in the things of religion, where the minds of men are not moved to it on other

grounds. The very fact of their coming in to support a particular interest, becomes oftentimes the occasion of stirring into action a strong antagonistic sentiment, that fairly counterbalances the other power and makes it of no account whatever. And indeed the cause must have more than common merits, which in these circumstances *can* unite the confidence of whole classes, already predisposed to fly apart at this very point. With all its excellence, the Liturgy of the Church of England sought in vain, with the help of all the authority that could be thrown around it by the intolerance of the state, to command the respect and rule the religion of the nation at large. And it might have been apprehended, that the royal translation of the bible would encounter opposition in like manner; for the spirit of party had already begun to work in some measure, with regard to this very subject, and we may see in the history of the two ruling translations of the time, the "Bishops' Bible" and the "Bible of Geneva," what jealousy there was in the case between conformists and nonconformists, and how delicate was the design of bringing in a version which should supersede the use of both. But the bible of king James happily triumphed over these and all other difficulties, and won its peaceful way in a few years, over the hearts of all classes, to the supremacy it has since continued so admirably to maintain. What an attestation was here to its intrinsic worth!

And how has that attestation been confirmed, by the concurrent respect and confidence of conflicting parties down to the present time! We read indeed of some steps having been taken in the time of Oliver Cromwell to introduce a better version, which, however, soon came to nothing; and particular individuals, from time to time, have been strenuous since in urging the necessity of such a work. A strong movement for the purpose took place among many of the biblical scholars of England, during the second half of the last century, led on by such men as Pilkington, Kennicott, and Lowth. But such efforts have soon passed away, leaving the conviction more deeply grounded perhaps than it was before, that the English bible as it stands is worthy to endure to the end of time; and all along its authority with men at large has stood unlimited and supreme, throughout the English world. All parties in government, and all sects in religion, have united in doing it homage. Monarchists and Republicans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, and Methodists—conformists and nonconformists—high-churchmen, low-churchmen, and sectaries of every name—the followers of Arminius and the stern disciples of Calvin, whether in England, Scotland, or Ireland; all have agreed to hold this as their common bible, and have been found alike appealing to it as the instructor of their lives and the umpire of their religious disputes. It is confessedly the bible of no one denomination. It belongs alike to all; and finds itself at home, wherever their different altars are erected for public worship, as well as in all their families, and in every closet where their prayers are offered in secret to the common Father and Savior of all that believe. And it honors no one country or government, as specially its own. It goes with its own language wherever that is carried, and incorporates itself at once with the institutions of different lands, as though it had been born among them, and not

brought in from abroad at all. It is the bible of America, as well as of England; and here, as well as there, it is as a great and beautiful bond of union, reaching through all our conflicting modes of faith, and in this very fact giving ample proof, that Christianity is sundered into so many parts, only by the perverse fancies of men superinduced upon its living form, while that remains one and simple like the bible itself through every age. What an argument of the excellence of this version, that it could thus triumph over prejudice and quell the murmurs of suspicion at the beginning; and that the ascendancy which it thus secured, should have been so successfully maintained, in the midst of all the turmoil of political and religious strife, and through all the changes in church and state, that have since taken place, in the history of Great Britain and her colonics, to the present day! If the translation had not been possessed of extraordinary merit, it could never surely have survived the shock of so many storms; in the very bosom of which it has stood all along as some rock-surmounting light-house, in the midst of the sea, as it were to rebuke the angry spirit of the elements, and guide the mariner of every tribe and name upon his doubtful way.

3. On *examination*, the value of our translation, thus recommended as it is by its very history, becomes still more clear; and the best biblical scholars, accordingly, have united in assigning to it the very highest praise.

It is acknowledged to be remarkably true to the original. "If accuracy, fidelity, and the strictest attention to the text," says Dr. Geddes, "be supposed to constitute the qualities of an excellent version, this of all versions must, in general, be accounted the most excellent. Every sentence, every word, every syllable, every letter, and every point, seem to have been weighed with the nicest exactitude, and expressed either in the text or margin, with the greatest precision." It has been said, that the Old Testament may serve for a *Lexicon* of the Hebrew language, as well as for a translation, so literally do words answer to words, and phrases to phrases, all along. In this respect, it holds a high distinction above almost all other versions. The English language is, in its own nature, well adapted to receive the forms of thought that characterize the Hebrew. Perhaps no other ever existed, if we except the cognate dialects of the East, better suited to this purpose. The peculiar genius of the Hebrew is capable of being transfused into our idiom, to an extent that is far from being common in the relation which the speech of one people holds to that of another. And besides, an actual influence was exerted by the translation itself to bring the two languages into still nearer correspondence in this respect than had place before. It was at a time, when our language was still in some degree in the process of formation, that the bible of king James made its appearance; and there is no doubt at all, but that this translation did itself contribute very materially to mould and fix its ultimate character. The translators seem to have understood their position, in this view, and to have taken a noble advantage from it to render the language all that it needed to be in order to express the full meaning of the word of God; or rather, perhaps, they found the former translations already working this happy effect, and were wise enough simply to carry out what had thus been begun. At all events, it is certain

that while the Hebrew was made to clothe itself with English forms of speech to a certain extent, these last were themselves changed somewhat so as to correspond more closely with the other. Many of the idioms of the bible, that have since become like the home growth of our language, are pure Hebrew in English words, and came in at first as foreign forms with the translation of the sacred volume. All this has worked together, to make the language fit the inspired thoughts of the original, and to give so literal and true a version as the one we now possess. "There is no book," says the illustrious Selden, "so translated as the bible for the purpose. If I translate a French book into English, I turn it into English phrase, not French English. *Il fait froid*; I say 'tis cold, not, *makes cold*. But the bible is rather translated into English words than into English phrase. The Hebraisms are kept, and the phrase of that language is kept.

Literal as it is, however, our version is neither harsh nor inelegant. On the contrary, it is characterised by the very best qualities in this respect, that language can possess. It is simple, clear, harmonious, and nervous; and answerable, at the same time, to every sentiment, tender or sublime, that is made to pour along the channel of its unpretending words. No doubt much of its excellency in these particulars, is to be attributed to the power of the glorious original itself, and the circumstances already mentioned, by which this was allowed to mould the still ductile and pliant elements of our language into conformity with its own lofty spirit. It is a great recommendation of our bible, that it has nearly altogether avoided words of Greek or Latin derivation, and made use for the most part only of such as are pure English in their origin. This renders it always plain and easy to be understood by all sorts of persons, and at the same time contributes greatly to its dignity and energy, by allowing the mighty force of the sentiments to shine out with the greater splendor. The very simplicity of the diction is necessary in many cases, to unfold the full grandeur of the things that are said; and never perhaps did translation more happily adjust itself in this way to the character and design of its original. "The style of our present version," says Bishop Middleton, "is incomparably superior to any thing which might be expected from the finical and perverted taste of our own age. It is simple, it is harmonious, it is energetic; and which is of no small importance, use has made it familiar and time has rendered it sacred." Bishop Lowth himself, whose literary taste is known to have been of the most pure and classical order, has not hesitated to pronounce it "the best standard of our language;" and Bishop Horsley also represents it to have been the means of enriching and adorning the English tongue, by its close adherence to the Hebrew idiom. I shall close this part of the subject by quoting the testimony of the late celebrated Dr. Clarke, author of the Commentary on the bible. "Those," says he, "who have compared most of the European translations with the original, have not scrupled to say that the English translation of the Bible, made under the direction of King James the First, is the most accurate and faithful of the whole. Nor is this its only praise; the translators have seized the very spirit and soul of the original, and expressed this almost every where with pathos and energy. Besides, our translators have not only made a standard

translation; but they have made their translation the standard of our language. The English tongue in their day was not equal to such a work; but God enabled them to stand as upon Mount Sinai, and *crane* up their country's language to the dignity of the originals, so that after the lapse of two hundred years the English Bible is, with very few exceptions, the standard of the purity and excellence of the English tongue. The original from which it was taken, is alone superior to the Bible translated by the authority of King James."

### III. IT ONLY REMAINS, TO OFFER SOME GENERAL REFLECTIONS IN THE WAY OF IMPROVING THE SUBJECT.

1st. It becomes us to admire and bless the providence of God, so wonderfully displayed in providing this translation for the use of the church. The history of it, as we have seen already, is full of pleasing evidence, that his wise and holy Mind watched over it from the beginning, and ordered the time and manner of its end, with full reference to the mighty interests that were at stake on its success. The series of preparatory efforts that went before, the solemn order that was taken for the work itself, the mighty resources of intellect that were called in for its accomplishment, the time and learning and anxious care that were employed to carry it through, and finally the free and happy consent with which the nation was brought to bow to its authority; all was wonderful—all argued the invisible agency of a higher hand than that of man—all betokened the high and holy destiny of the English version, that was to be the vehicle of the word of life to so many millions of souls, as long as the world should stand. It may be said to have appeared just in the "fulness of time," for such a work. Had it been formed sooner, it could not have been so perfect. The language was not fairly ripe for it in the preceding century, and the discipline of time was needed to strengthen and mature the genius of the Reformation for the mighty task. Had it been delayed longer, on the other hand, it must have been too late to secure its best form, and too late also perhaps to become a standard for the nation. The language would have been less pliant, its forms less purely English, the spirit of its ancient simplicity and power more difficult to be maintained. Prejudices and jealousies too, political and theological, were coming to be of such a character, that they must have shed more or less of their complexion over any public translation that could have been made; or at least, must have powerfully hindered any general union of opinion and feeling in its favor, like that which so auspiciously won for itself by the version of king James almost from the very first. Let any man reflect for a moment, how hopeless would be the task of bringing forward a translation at the present day, which might be expected to unite the confidence of all religious parties, both in Great Britain and this country; and he will see at once how wise and favorable was the providence, which impelled the king of England to seal the vision, and settle the economy of its text, before the trouble and divisions of the time that followed were allowed to come on.

2nd. It is interesting to reflect on the mighty purposes of good, which the English bible has already accomplished, and for which still more extensively it seems to be reserved in the counsels of God. We behold in the unfolding sphere of its authority and active power, a full

reason for all the wonders of providence that attended the history of its formation. How many millions of souls have been taught the things of God, from this translation! How vast is the multitude now in Heaven, that have been led thither by its light! How has it run to and fro upon the earth, in copies beyond calculation, to bless families, and churches, and kingdoms, and generations, with its truth! Who shall compute the amount of good it is doing in the world, at this very time? Who will reckon up the blessings of knowledge and virtue and peace, which it is silently shedding on the inhabitants of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and the spreading population of this new world? Only think for a moment of its instrumentality, as God is using it for his glory in the salvation of men on the single Sabbath that is now passing; while from so many thousand pulpits, in all these lands, it is made to speak to whole congregations that listen to it as the voice of Heaven. And this is but a fragment of its service; we should need the understanding of angels at least to measure the full flow of its usefulness from year to year.

The character of the people too, that call this bible their own, deserves consideration. It was made, to be the bible of the *English* nation; and the intelligence and learning and enterprise, and power, and wealth of that people, were to be refined and sanctified by its influence, not merely for the benefit of the nation itself, but for the benefit of the whole world. The religion of England, like her commerce, was to be for the use of all nations; and on this account, her bible needed to be of the most perfect order. It was due also to the "American Dispensation," as the relations and responsibilities of this country in a religious view have been styled, that it should be provided with such a bible. How vast a proportion of the piety and strength of the church, how large a part of the hopes of the world, are comprehended in the christianity of these two nations! And how interesting in this light is the reflection, that they have but one form of the bible, and that the best of all translations that are known to exist!

But this is not all. The millions that now speak the English language are but a small number of people, in comparison with the myriads that are destined to make use of it hereafter. This continent will yet be covered with a civilized race, whose reigning tongue will be that which reigns in the country now. The single valley of the Mississippi will soon bear upon its broad bosom, a world of its own, through the whole length and breadth of which this language will be spoken. With such a prospect spread out to our contemplations, what new interest is found to encircle the English bible, and what new depths of wisdom and mercy are opened upon our astonished sight in the history of its origin! But in all probability, could we extend our gaze still farther down the tract of coming ages, we should find yet greater cause for admiration. The English language is now known upon the borders of Asia, and already the design is beginning to be formed of making it the medium of letters and religion to all India! And should this design be carried fully into effect who can say where the mighty experiment might be expected to end? Or in view of such a calculation, which to me I confess is far from being visionary, who will undertake to say, to the English language,



or to the English bible, any more than he would say to the ocean itself, "Hitherto shalt thou go but no farther, and here shall thy swelling waves be stayed!"

3d. Once more; we may derive from this whole subject a reason, why we should all improve the use of the bible as we have it, with joyful and thankful hearts, for our own salvation, and all unite in endeavoring to send it to those who are without it, wherever they are to be found. Time was when the word of God was found only in rare and exceedingly costly copies, even among the people of God themselves. Every copy had to be laboriously written out with the pen, and of course but few could afford to have even a part of the sacred treasure in their own hands; for the art of writing then was also but little understood.\* The price of Wickliff's testament alone, was equal to at least a hundred and fifty dollars of our currency. Time has been too, when few could find the bible, on any terms, to read in their own tongue; or when it was at the peril of life itself, that any could venture to steal the precious opportunity, when it came within reach. But all these hindrances with us are taken out of the way. The spirit of the Reformation has made the bible free, and the art of printing has brought it within the reach of every family that wishes to enjoy its light. A copy of the New Testament may now be had for twelve and a half cents! We have the word of God in our own language, and under the most happy form; and in all places, and at all times, it is near to us with its heavenly instructions, like an angel of God, to show us the way of life and lead us to the holy paradise of redeemed and happy souls. And are we brought under no special responsibilities by all these advantages; or do they constitute no reason, why we should diligently see to it that we are not found neglecting so great a salvation, and be filled at the same

\*In the fourth century, it was accounted deservedly an extraordinary act of munificence, when the Emperor Constantine ordered *Fifty Bibles* to be carefully prepared, at the expense of the state, and placed in different churches at Constantinople, for the use of the people. Toward the close of the seventh century books were so scarce, that one volume on the history of the world was bought by the king of Northumberland from the monastery of Weremouth, at the price of eight *hides* of land, which is said to have been equal to eight hundred acres. In 1364 the royal library of France did not exceed twenty volumes; and at the beginning of the same century, the library of Oxford consisted only of "a few tracts kept in a chest." The celebrated German abbot Trithemius died in 1516; he had collected about two thousand manuscripts; a literary treasure, which excited so much attention, that princes and eminent men of that day made considerable journeys to see it. "There have been ages" says the entertaining author of the *Curiosities of Literature*, "when for the possession of a manuscript, some would transfer an estate; or leave in pawn, for its loan, hundreds of golden crowns; and when, even, the sale or loan of a manuscript was considered of such importance as to have been solemnly registered in public acts. Absolute as was Louis XI, he could not obtain the MS. of Rasis, an Arabian writer, to make a copy, from the library of the faculty of Paris, without pledging a hundred golden crowns; and the president of his treasury, charged with this commission, sold part of his plate to make the deposit. For the loan of a volume of Avicenna, a baron offered a pledge of ten marks of silver, which was refused; because it was not considered equal to the risk incurred of losing a volume of Avicenna! These events happened in 1471. One cannot but smile at an anterior period, when a countess of Anjou bought a favorite book of homilies, for two hundred sheep, some skins of martins, and bushels of wheat and rye."

time with a sacred zeal to have it widely published to all the rest of the world? If Moses on the banks of Jordan could appeal to the distinguishing favors bestowed upon the nation of Israel, in the history of God's dealings with them in the wilderness, as a reason to engage them to piety; with how much more reason may I draw an argument of duty, in our case, from the review of what he has done for our English and American Zion! "For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is so great that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart, all the days of thy life; but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons." "Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people!" And with how much emphasis may it be said to us, in view of our manifold privileges as contrasted with the moral desolations of other lands, and in view of the ample facilities we possess for sending them the word of life, "Freely ye have received; freely give!"