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## THE BIBLE IN THE MIDDLE AGES.

BY L. C. BUCKINGHAM.

(From the Catholic Standard.)

Mr. Buckingham lays down a series of propositions, and enters upon his proofs in the order of his statement. His propositions are:—1st, that the monks and clergy possessed the Sacred Scriptures; 2nd, that they habitually perused them; 3rd, that they not only read, but diligently studied them, even to the extent of committing the Psalms and the Gospels to memory; 4th, that they circulated them indiscriminately among the laity—the poor as well as the rich; and 5th, that the clergy were enjoined by the Bishops and Abbots and other ecclesiastical authorities to read and expound the Scriptures to those who were unable to read themselves. The proofs adduced in support of each of these propositions are so ample, so strong, so clear, and convincing, that we really cannot conceive how any candid Protestant who may peruse this extremely interesting volume, or rather the first seventy pages of it, which are devoted exclusively to the consideration of this subject, can for one moment longer allow his mind to remain under the influence of those prejudices of religion, education, and society which in too many instances have led to the false conclusion that the Word of God was unread and unheard in the Middle Ages. In our epitome of these proofs we shall follow the order so naturally adopted by our Author. "The matter of possession," observes Mr. Buckingham, "is capable of easy demonstration. In the first place we find that all Priests—and a large number of the monks were in holy orders—were compelled to have in their possession, before they could be ordained, a considerable portion of the Sacred Writing. [And this, be it observed, at a time when paper and the printing press were not invented.] The Canons of Ælfric, about 950, decree that every priest, before he is ordained, must have the arms belonging to his spiritual work, that is, the holy books—namely, the Psalter, the Book of Epistles, and the Book of Gospels, the Missal, the Book of Hymns, the Manual, the Calendar, the Passional, the Penitential, and the Lectionary." Numerous passages to the same effect might be cited from these and other ecclesiastical canons of that period; and to show the value which was set upon the Sacred Writings the work before us abounds with instances in which they were treated as an inestimable treasure. "When the Normans attacked Nantes in 843, killed the Bishop in the Cathedral [St. Thomas of Canterbury was not, it will be observed, the first Bishop whom Norman impiety murdered at the Altar], put to death many of the clergy and monks who had sought refuge within its walls, and carried off a large number of prisoners, one of the captives, taking advantage of a quarrel among the victors, seized upon the Great Bible which had been taken from the Cathedral, and ultimately succeeded in reaching Nantes, having saved only this which the narrator designates 'their greatest treasure' from the wreck" (p. 7.) "Pope Leo III. gave to one Church a copy of the Gospels, bound in pure gold, and studded with precious gems; and to another, one so richly adorned that it weighed more than seventeen pounds. Hincmar, Archbishop of Rheims, in the ninth century, caused the Gospels to be written for his Cathedral, in letters of gold and silver, and bound in plates of gold, resplendent with jewels" (*ibid.*) "Pope Benedict III. presented to the Church of St. Calistus a copy of the Gospels, adorned with plates of gold and silver, weighing nearly seventeen pounds. About the same period the Emperor Michael presented to St. Peter's at Rome a copy of the Gospels, bound in pure gold, and adorned with precious stones. Paul, Abbot of St. Alban's gave to his Church two copies of the Gospels, adorned with gold, silver, and gems (*ibid.*) For every fact mentioned by Mr. Buckingham he gives his authority in a foot note, and one might run on with a narrative of incidents similar to those mentioned, which would occupy pages of our paper; for, as our author truly observes (p. 8), "It is impossible to peruse the lives of any of the Pope's or the biographies of distinguished Priests and laymen of the Middle Ages, or to open a volume of ecclesiastical or monastic history, without encountering innumerable instances of such donations."

An interesting incident in English history, which comes in opportunely at a moment when England is thinking of erecting a statue to the lion-hearted King, is mentioned by Mr. Buckingham to prove at once the huge labor of the monks in transcribing the Holy Scriptures, and the piety and zeal with which these treasures were revered in the Middle Ages. "William de Longchamp, Bishop of Ely, in order to raise the sum of 160 marks, which he contributed towards the ransom of Richard Cœur de Lion from captivity, pledged the precious covers of thirteen copies of the Gospels belonging to his church; and at a visitation of the Treasury of St. Paul's Cathedral, in

1295, by Ralph de Baudoke, the Dean, there were found there twelve copies of the Gospels, bound in silver, some of them decorated with precious stones, one encased in silver-gilt plates, . . . six copies of the Epistles, . . . two copies of the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark, with the Commentary of St. Thomas Aquinas, and two entire Bibles." Of these ancient copies of the Scriptures, several have survived the ravages of time, and of man's cupidity—more ruthless than time. "At Metz there are to be seen a very fine Bible, 700 or 800 years old, and a copy of the 'Greater and Lesser Prophets,' in Saxon characters"; and the researches of Martene, from whom our author quotes, in other churches, more than a century and a quarter ago, were attended with similar results. In the monastic archives "these precious relics of antiquity have been discovered in still greater abundance"; and it has been almost a matter of course to fall upon beautiful MS. copies of the Scriptures, often including the whole Bible, varying from one to nine centuries in age. "Brethwold, Bishop of Salisbury, in the eleventh century, gave to the Abbey of Glastonbury, where he had been a monk, two copies of the Gospels . . . . At the destruction of Hyde Abbey, near Winchester, in the twelfth century, there were found ten copies of the Gospels belonging to the monastery; and when William Rufus imposed a heavy tax to pay for the purchase of Normandy, Godfrey, Abbot of Malmesbury, was compelled to strip the precious covers from twelve copies of the Gospels, in order to pay the amount which was levied upon his abbey."

If we consider for a moment the enormous amount of labor which transcription and comparing of these copies of the Scriptures entailed upon the monks upon whom this holy work devolved, it must be admitted that the monastic life in the Ages of Faith was not a life of indolence and sloth. To say nothing of the monastic rules which enjoined much reading, recitation, psalmody and prayer—a matter into which we shall hereafter follow our author the mere manual labor of transcribing upon parchment the multitude of Biblical copies that are known to have existed between the 5th and the 15th centuries, must have been inconceivably great and must have occupied a very considerable portion of the time which the monks had at their disposal. The same evidence by which Mr. Buckingham demonstrates that the clergy possessed the Scriptures in the Middle Ages, also establishes clearly his proposition that the monks labored hard to multiply copies of the Word of God. Equally satisfactory and overwhelming are the proofs that the clergy not only possessed but read and studied the books of Holy Writ. "St. Benedict," says Mabillon, "after modestly declaring that his Rule is but a guide to Christian perfection, avows that those who aspire to the highest excellence must learn the means of attaining it in the Books of the Old and New Testaments, which contain in every page, a perfect rule of Christian life." St. Anthony referred his monks to the same sacred source for the principles which should regulate their conduct; and St. Jerome says, "Cultivate with diligent affection a knowledge of the Scriptures." (pp. 16, 17.) The practice of scriptural reading was strongly enjoined by the Canons of the Council of Pavia; and that these injunctions were faithfully obeyed by Bishops, Priests, and Monks, is amply demonstrated, as our author remarks, by the records of mediæval history. In the monasteries the reading of the different portions of the Bible was so arranged that the monks got through the whole every year.—"It may reasonably be doubted," says Mr. Buckingham, whether many of those who are most vehement in their condemnation of the monks, as enemies to the reading of the Scriptures, surpass those against whom their hostility is directed, in their diligent perusal of the Sacred Volume; and in support of his position he refers to the account of the usage of the Benedictines of Clugni drawn up by Abbot Ulric, for the instruction and guidance of the other monasteries belonging to that illustrious Order, whose great services to the cause of literature even the most inveterate traducers of the monastic system and mediæval manners are forced to admit. And what is true of the Benedictines as regards the diligent perusal of the Bible, may be also said with reference to the other great monastic institutions all over Europe.

But they did not only read the Bible; it was also the practice to commit its sublime contents to memory. On this point the Rules of St. Pachomius, St. Basil, St. Ferreol, and St. Benedict are clear and positive; and so are the Canons of the Church. "At the Eighth Council of Toledo, which was held in 835, it was decreed that no one should be admitted to the priesthood who did not know by heart the whole of the Psalms, the Hymns of the Church, and the Office of Baptism; and it was required that each Bishop should, at stated periods, make a regular in-

quiry through his diocese for the purpose of ascertaining, among other things, whether every priest could rightly interpret the Gospels and Epistles, and whether he knew the whole of the Psalms by heart" (pp. 22, 23.)

"Still [continues our author] it has been maintained by some writers, that this reading and committing to memory was a purely mechanical operation, and that the religious, even when they perused or recited the various portions of the Scriptures, performed a mere lip-service, and did not devote their minds to the study of the book, in the reading of which their time was thus extensively employed.—Thus Tyndale, one of the most prominent of the English Reformers, says,—'The Abbots took the Scriptures from their Monks, lest some should ever bark against the Abbots living, and set up such long service and singing withal, that they should have no time to read in the Bible but with their lips; and other writers have given utterance to similar imputations. Were we disposed to be critical, it might be objected that if the Abbots 'took away the Scriptures from their Monks,' it was clearly a work of supererogation to 'set up long service and singing,' to prevent them from reading that which they had not in their possession; and it might be suggested that the admission of Tyndale, that the Monks were set to 'read in the Bible with their lips,' clearly overthrows his previous allegation that the Scriptures were taken away from them by their superiors. The evidence which already before us will enable us at once to perceive the utter falsity of the charge thus brought against our monastic forefathers; and the spirit of the entire philippic is much akin to that of another passage from the pen of the same amiable and Christian polemic, in which he avers that the custom of continual psalmody was adopted by the Monks merely as a salutary precaution to favor the digestion of their heavy dinners; 'your singing,' he says, 'is but roaring, to stretch out your maws, as do your other gestures and rising at midnight, to make the meat sink to the bottom of the stomach, that he may have perfect digestion and be ready to devour afresh against the next refection;' the charity of which imputation can be likened only to its rationality. Certainly, it would be a very deep and sagacious device, to set men to the daily perusal of a particular book, and to compel them to commit a large portion of it to memory, in order to keep them in entire ignorance of its contents. It is to be feared that such a scheme would have been almost too profound for the comprehension of our mediæval ancestors; and certainly if it was ever attempted, the testimony of history fully proves that it failed most signally to achieve the desired result.

"Seriously, however, it may not be amiss to inquire, whether the reading of the Scriptures by the Monks was accompanied by a careful and diligent study of the sacred volume.

"That such was required of them, both of those who were in holy orders, and of those who wore the simple habit of religion, no one can doubt. The monastic rules are all sufficiently plain upon this point, and the canons of many Councils exhort the Priesthood to become learned in Holy Scripture, as a qualification indispensable to the due discharge of their sacred duties; nor do we find that those who were thus admonished, were backward in the discharge of this obligation.

"Indeed, no one who has ever studied the literature of the Middle Ages, can have failed to perceive in every page of the works of monastic writers which he may have examined, the strongest evidence of the profound and intimate knowledge of the Scriptures, which the authors of these productions must have possessed. It is not so much in the quotations made from the Inspired Volume, though these are generally abundant, as in the general character of their style, that the extent of their biblical learning is eminently and strikingly displayed. The language employed, the imagery introduced, the entire tone of the composition, is essentially and wholly scriptural, and evinces, more clearly than any other species of testimony could evince, their habit of constantly reading and studying the Bible, until their minds had become so imbued with its contents that new thoughts naturally assumed a form, and arrayed themselves in language drawn from it alone. Many examples of this may be cited, in which the bad taste displayed is indisputable, and in which the passing events of their own day are illustrated by comparisons with incidents in Scripture history which may seem to modern apprehension fantastic and absurd; but these incongruous applications of their Biblical learning, are perhaps among the best proofs of the deeply rooted and inveterate habit of infusing the fruit of their scriptural studies into all their productions, the evidences of which pervade the entire body of mediæval literature."

Having proved to demonstration that the monks

possessed, read, and studied profoundly the Sacred Writings, Mr. Buckingham proceeds to establish as incontrovertible the fact that they used enormous labor in multiplying copies of the Scriptures.

"We have already, seen [he says] that each Priest was compelled to possess copies of the Gospels, the Epistles, and the Psalms, before he could be ordained and, as the Monks were the only copyists, the supply of all the copies thus required would have afforded them considerable employment, even if none had been needed by the monastic libraries; but if we take these into account, we shall perceive that the fruits of their diligence afford an ample demonstration of their unwearying industry. But we are not compelled to rest satisfied with such inferential evidence ample direct testimony exists in proof of the constant occupation of the Monks in the transcription of the Sacred Writings. The learned authors of the *Histoire Littéraire de France*, in accounting for the neglect of general literature in that country at the beginning of the eleventh century, especially point to the diligence with which the Monks devoted themselves to the copying of the Scriptures, and of the deficiency of religious works in general, as one of the principal causes of books of a secular character; 'the tenth century,' they remark, 'had not sufficed to repair the losses which literature had sustained in France, in the destruction of books which resulted from the ravages of the Saracens, the Normans, the Hungarians, and the Bulgarians; although great efforts had been made to repair these injuries, books were still very rare, and this rarity threw many obstacles in the way of the prosecution of study; and the Monks who were then almost the only copyists, began by transcribing those books which they deemed most essential; the Scriptures, the Liturgies, the writings of the Fathers, and the canons of the Church engaged all their diligence, so that it was not until time had elapsed, that they could begin to multiply the poets, the orators, and the historians."

The stupid charge that the laity were kept in ignorance of the Word of God, Mr. Buckingham disposes of with great force and effect. We wish we could quote the whole of his argument, which is as cogent in reasoning as it is brilliant in diction; but we must limit ourselves to matters of fact. Mr. Buckingham mentions (pp. 45-47) instances of translations of the Bible into sixteen different modern languages, including English, Gaelic, Gothic, German, Italian, Bohemian, Armenian, Swedish, Flemish, Polish, Russian, and Spanish, including the various dialects of that century—between the 4th and the 14th centuries, and these, as he judiciously remarks, "must obviously have been made for the use of the laity, since the Scriptures were invariably read by the Monks and the clergy in the Latin, then the universal tongue of learned Christendom." And this purpose was frequently declared. "Thus Ælfric avers that he made his translation of the first seven Books of the Old Testament, and part of Job into Anglo-Saxon at the request of Ethelwerd the ealdorman 'for the edification of the simple who knew only that language,'—and Otfrid composed his Harmony of the Four Gospels in French, in the 9th century, to gratify the wish of a noble lady who desired him to undertake that labor for the purpose of providing the common people with a manual of Sacred reading" (p. 48.) Copies of the Scriptures were frequently given by laymen to churches and monasteries, and the magnificence of their covers too often excited the cupidity of barbarians, and led to their destruction in innumerable instances—losses which the Monks labored diligently to supply afterwards. It was a common practice to bequeath Bibles for the express purpose of placing them in conspicuous places in the churches where the laity could read them. "Thus, Thomas de Farny, Chancellor of the Church at York, bequeathed at his death, in 1371, a Bible and Concordance to the Church of Saint Nicholas, at Newcastle, 'there to be chained for common use.'—Coelfrith, Abbot of Wearmouth, sent a copy of the entire Bible as a present to the Pope and placed two others in different churches, 'to the end,' says Bede, 'that all who desired to read any chapter in either Testament might be able at once to find what they desired,'—and part of the penance imposed by St. Dunstan upon King Edgar for his abduction of Wulfthrit from the Convent of Wilton, was that he should, at his own expense, transmit to every county in the kingdom copies of the Holy Scriptures for the instruction of the people" (pp. 53, 54.) "The Monks exerted themselves actively to induce the laity to read the Sacred Writings. At the Monasteries of St. Pachomius, where infants and adults were educated, all who received instruction were obliged to learn by heart the New Testament and the Psalms. Those who could not read themselves had the Scriptures read for them by the monks and clergy" (*ibid.*) Some monasteries required a high repute solely through the superior of their scriptural expositions;