

literary, is almost incomprehensible; its beauties lost or hidden. It is a cipher without a key.

How, then, it may be asked, has it come about that, since the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church which, on the evidence of Blessed Thomas More, and many others,¹ encouraged and allowed the use of the vernacular Scriptures by the laity, has apparently withheld, or, at all events, seemed to discourage their use? The answer, so far as the charge has any basis, which we do not admit, would, I think, be found in the two words: "the Reformation." That is to say that a liberty conceded to the laity of a united Christendom would, for a time at least, be guarded, if not actually restricted—both being within the Church's right, who can withhold inopportune good as well as forbid evil—when, in whole countries, it degenerated into a licence which appalled the more moderate reformers themselves; and the Bible, which Christendom owed to the Church, was wrested into a weapon against her. It was inevitable, indeed, that, under the circumstances then prevailing, not only should the Church find herself compelled temporarily to restrict the general use of the vernacular Scriptures, which the printing press might, otherwise, have made available for every educated Catholic, rich or poor, but that the faithful themselves, seeing the blasphemous misuse and perversion of Scripture, that was going on around them should come to regard vernacular translations as suspect, or even heretical. Being moreover, for the most part, unable to read the Vulgate, they naturally lost, in a very short while, their ancient, reverent familiarity with the sacred text. In a word, the conditions of war and rebellion are wholly different to those of peace, and the Catholic remnant, in England and Scotland, fighting for very existence, clung less tenaciously than they might have done to matters not absolutely essential to salvation. And it is no small part of the penalty incurred by the Church, through her respon-

¹ See *Encycl. Brit. Art.*: "English Bible;" and Gairdner "*Lollardy and Engl. Refn.*" Vol. II: "The English Bible."