

TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE.

AS the DEDICATION of the English translation of the BIBLE to King James the First of England seems to be wholly unnecessary for the purposes of edification, and perhaps on some accounts improper to be continued in an American edition, a short account of the translations of the Old and New Testaments from the original Hebrew and Greek in which they were written, is substituted

To the Jews was first committed the care of the Sacred Writings, and for many ages they were in a manner confined to that chosen people. There was then no need of translations into other languages; yet was the providence of God particularly manifest in their preservation and purity. The Jews were so faithful to their important trust, that, when copies of the law or the prophets were transcribed, they observed the most scrupulous exactness; they not only diligently compared the one with the other, but even counted the number of letters in each book, and compared and recorded the numbers.

The first translations that were made of the Old Testament were after the Babylonish captivity. They are called the Targums, which word in the Chaldean language signifies Translations. They are also often called the Chaldee Paraphrases; some of them are exact translations of different parts of Scripture; others are properly paraphrases, containing enlargements, explanations, and even additions. Several of them are yet extant, and they are often mentioned by the ancient fathers of the Christian church. Some have affirmed that the five books of Moses and that of Joshua were translated into Greek before the days of Alexander the Great. But the most remarkable translation of the Old Testament into Greek is called the Septuagint, which, if the opinion of some eminent writers is to be credited, was made in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, about 260 years before the Christian era. At any rate, it is undoubtedly the most ancient that is now extant, and on many accounts deserving notice, though not to be put on a level with the Hebrew text, as has been sometimes done.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek; and no sooner was the gospel spread through the nations than it was found necessary to translate the inspired writings for each into its proper tongue. Some translations of the Old Testament, different from the Septuagint, were made into Greek from the year of Christ's birth 128 to 200. It is generally believed that the church of Antioch was favoured with a Syrian translation of the Bible as early as the year 100. The Ethiopians of Abyssinia have a version of the Bible, which they ascribe to Frumentius, of the fourth century. Chrysostom, who lived in the end of the fourth, and Theodoret, who lived in the middle of the fifth century, both inform us that they had the Syrian, Indian, Persian, Armenian, Ethiopic, and Scythian versions. The ancient Egyptians had the Scriptures translated into their language. The Georgians have a version in their ancient language. The most ancient German translation is supposed to have been made by Uphilas, A. D. 860. The Old Testament of all these translations, except the Syrian, is taken from the Septuagint, and not immediately from the Hebrew text.

We will now give some account of the translations of the Bible into the English language. There have been some who have affirmed that Adeline, Bishop of Sherburn, who lived in the beginning of the eighth century, translated the Psalms into the Saxon tongue. That however is uncertain, as some of the best historians make no mention of it; yet it is possible, as he was a man of great parts, and of great learning for those times, and said to be the first Englishman who wrote in the Latin language. About the same time, or a little after, Bede, commonly called the venerable Bede, translated some parts of the New Testament, some say the whole Bible, but that is not probable. Near 200 years later, King Alfred translated the Psalms into the same language. In 1382 Wiclif finished his translation of the Bible, which is yet extant; that is to say, there are copies of it in some public and private libraries. All these translations were made from the Vulgate. In the reign of Henry the Eighth, several editions of the Old and New Testaments were published in English; one of the most remarkable is that of William Tyndal in 1530. The translation of the New Testament was made from the original Greek, but probably the Old Testament either from the Latin of the Vulgate or the Greek of the Septuagint. This was soon followed by the improvements of Coverdale and Mathews. By order of the king, Tonstal, Bishop of Durham, and Heath, Bishop of Rochester, made a new translation, which was published in 1541: but, not pleasing Henry, it was suppressed by authority. In the reign of King Edward the Sixth, another translation was made; two editions of which were published, one in 1549, and the other in 1551. In the reign of Queen Elizabeth another translation was made, which, being revised by some of the most learned of the bishops, went by the name of the Bishops' Bible. This professed to be translated from the Hebrew of the Old Testament, and the Greek of the New, though, in some instances, when there was a difference, it preferred the Septuagint to the Hebrew.

This last circumstance, with some others, induced King James the First to select fifty-four persons, eminent in learning, and particularly well acquainted with the original languages in which the Old and New Testaments were written, to make a new translation of the whole Bible. In the year 1607, forty-seven of those persons, the other seven probably having died, assembled together, and arranged themselves into committees, to each of which a portion was given to translate. They were favoured not only with the best translations, but with the most accurate copies and the various readings of the original text. After about three years' assiduous labour, they severally completed the parts assigned them. They then met together, and while one read the translation newly formed, the rest had each a copy of the original text in his hand, or some one of the ancient versions, and when any difficulty occurred they stopped, till by common consultation it was determined what was most agreeable to the inspired Original. This translation was first published A. D. 1610, and is the one which has been ever since that time printed by public authority, and generally used in the British dominions, as well as in the United States of America. It may be added with safety, that it has been generally approved by men of learning and piety of all denominations, of which its having never been superseded by any other, for two hundred years, is a sufficient proof.

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