In the Library of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

To book-lovers no less than to the student in typography, there must always be a peculiar interest attaching to the Holy Scriptures, the first book printed, and no other single book can show such a history of the development not only of the art of printing, but of book illustration, as this venerable record of history and religious faith. Between 1455, when the first Bible, known as the 42-line Gutenburg Bible, appeared, and the present day—an interval of nearly four centuries and a half—no book has gone through so many editions, or such varying episodes of publication and suppression, or so many translations from the original into foreign tongues, as the Bible. Before any classic work had been printed, some half-dozen huge folio Bibles in Latin or German, besides two magnificent Psalters of 1457 and 1459, printed from movable types, had been given to the world.

All the earliest printed Bibles were in the Latin Vulgate; the earliest in European languages were the first and second German Bibles printed by Mentelin and Eggesteyn, of Strasburg, somewhere about 1465-6. An Italian translation by Malerio was printed at Venice in 1471, and another by Nicolas Jensen. The first New Testament in French was by Buyer, at Lyons, 1477; and the Old Testament in Flemish during the same year, printed at Delft by Jacob Jacobszoon and Mauritius Yemants Zoen. A Saxon Bible was issued from the press of Heinrich Quentel, of Cologne, in 1480, a second edition of which appeared in 1491 and a third in 1494. A French paraphrase Bible was published by Guyard de Moulins in 1487. A Bohemian translation was printed at Prague in 1488. In 1475 we have the sixth German Bible, printed by Zainer at Augsburg, which was the first folioed; the first of Koberger's Bibles printed at Nuremberg, and one printed by John Peter de Ferratis at Placentia, in North Italy, which was the first book printed there. The next year brought forth four Bibles: those of Moravus, at Naples; Jenson, at Venice; Gering Crantz and Fiburger, at Paris; and F. de Halebrun and N. de Frankfordia, at Venice. The first Bible with a distinct title-page was printed at Venice by George de Ravabenis, in 1487, in small quarto. The first Bible in small octavo, or the "Poor Man's Bible," was one of the earliest books from the press of Johann Froben, of Basle, in 1491.

Although printing was introduced into England by Caxton in 1477, yet it was not till 1526 that the first printed copy of the New Testament in English, by William Tyndale, made its appearance here; up to that date the nearest approaches that the people of England had to the Bible in their native tongue were "The Golden Legend," printed by Caxton in 1483, which contained much of the Pentateuch and part of the Gospels under the guise of the lives of Abraham, Moses, the apostles, etc.; the "Liber Festivalis," of 1483, containing scripture paraphrases, and the apocryphal "Gospel of Nicodemus," printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1509; but Koberger and others sold many Latin Bibles in London from 1480 onwards, and the Flemings made a regular merchandise of Bibles.

Within the first ten years from 1526, about fifteen editions of Tyndale's New Testament were printed and sold, until at last he was hunted down and burnt in 1536. The first complete English Bible, by Coverdale, was finished on October 14th, 1535, but it is not known definitely where or by whom it was printed, although it is generally considered to have been in Antwerp, at the house of Jacob van Meteren, who was probably the translator, and that Miles Coverdale revised it. The whole edition, under the law of King Henry, 1533-4, had to be sold in sheets to some London bookseller, to prevent injury to the binders, and is supposed to have been sold to James Nicolson, of Southwark.

The collection of Bibles to be found in the library of the British and Foreign Bible Society, numbering between eleven and twelve thousand, is one of the most celebrated for perfect and rare copies, though not so large as that of the British Museum, which has upwards of 16,000 Bibles or parts thereof; the Royal Library at Stuttgart, over 8,000; the library of Wolfenbüttel, over 5,000; and the Lenox Library at New York has a collection of rare and valuable editions which is perhaps unsurpassed. The Bible Society's collection, enriched as it was by the library of Mr. Francis Fry, of Bristol, which contained over 1,200 specimens, most of which are of a date prior to 1700, is, however, especially valuable as an illustration of the history of the printed Bible through all its variations and translations. It begins with Tyndale's Testament of 1526, in facsimile of which no quite perfect copy is known, and also contains Tyndale's Pentateuch of 1530. The five books of the latter are in different type, have different titles, and were evidently printed in different places.

The first English Bible, "translated out of Dacche and Latyn," known as the Coverdale Bible, is the largest copy known, 12½ inches high, with full foredge margins, all being genuine after folio 6 of Genesis, except the last leaf. It contains three facsimile titles; the German title, 1535, as in the text, is in Secretary Gothic type, with woodcuts; the English title, 1536, same as the previous one except the date; and the German one of 1549, on which a mixed type is used, and the texts over the woodcuts are in Latin. The eight preliminary leaves are in facsimile, by Harris, from a second edition, and this volume contains also a facsimile of the last page of Coverdale's Prologue to the reader, only to be found in Lord Leicester's copy; this is in Secretary Gothic type, which proves that it was printed with the first edition. One half of the original map, entitled "The description of the land promes called Palestina, Canana, or the holy londe, is in this volume; and besides, a fine facsimile of the whole map, with another from the Bishops' Bible.
There are two peculiar readings in this edition, noticeable in other versions: one in Psalm xc. 5, "so that thou shalt not need to be arrayed for any bugges by night," and the word "tricle" for "balm" in Jeremiah viii. 22. Some parts of this book being worn and torn on the margins, it was given to a man without arms and only one foot, who has mended it perfectly, rubbing down and joining the pieces with marvellous skill.

The first folio English Bible printed in England, stated on the title-page to be "newly oersene and corrected MDXXXVII. Imprinted in Southwarke for James Nycolson," is the most interesting and rarest of English Bibles: only two perfect copies are known—one in Lincoln Cathedral, and the other in the Baptist College at Bristol. The British Museum has two imperfect copies, and one is in the Bodleian Library. The woodcuts and map are the same as those in the Coverdale Bible, but the type is black-letter English. Another Bible, in quarto, was published the same year, "Imprinted in Southwarke in Saynt Thomas Hospitale by James Nycolson. Set forth with the Kynges most gracieous licences." This volume has a contemporary binding of brown calf with brass corners, studs, and clasps. A copy of this is also in the Library. It is not known which of these two was first issued, but it is generally considered that the folio was the earlier edition.

The John Rogers' Bible, "purely translated into English by Thomas Matthew, set forth with the Kinge's most graciouslye lycece," 1537, is a perfect copy, although the two leaves in front of Esdras xii. and xiii. differ from those usually found, and are supposed to have been taken from a pirated edition. The leaves at the beginning of Matthew and Romans have the notes and preface, which in most copies have been defaced by order of Henry VIII. This Bible is generally called the Matthew Bible, but it was really edited by John Rogers under an assumed name. He was the first martyr under Mary, 1555. As an instance of the stern censorship of the press in the reign of Henry, almost all the copies of this work, which embodied all the available readings of Tyndale's work and explanatory notes, were treated to a heavy coat of red mixture, which obliterated the parts supposed to be subservient of kingly or ecclesiastical authority. This copy is rare, from having escaped disfigurement, but another copy in the Library is smeared on many pages with the colouring matter, which it is impossible to remove entirely.

A complete set of The Great Bible, or Cranmer's, the first edition and first authorised version, "Printed by Rychard Grafton et Edward Whitchurch," 1539, with fine title-page design by Holbein, was issued at the suggestion of Thomas Lord Cromwell. Archbishop Cranmer wrote the preface to the second edition, and both Cromwell's and Cranmer's arms are on the title-page in a small circular space in Holbein's design. In the edition, "Printed by Edwarde Whitchurch. Finished the XXVIII. daye of Maye Anno Domini MDXL II.," we find the arms of Cromwell cut out, he having been deprived of the royal favour.

A reprint of Matthew's Bible (Day & Seres, 1549), imperfect, has the original calf binding with the hair left on the hide.

Here is a quarto New Testament of Tyndale's, printed in London by Richard Jugge, 1552. It has a woodcut in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew representing the Parable of the Sower, in which the devil is drawn in the costume of a peasant, but with a wooden leg, sowing tares. Two other editions containing the same illustration are also in this collection.

The New Testament, 16mo, translated by Dr. Whittingham, Dean of Durham, who fled to Geneva for fear of Queen Mary, and printed by Conrad Badius in Geneva, 1557, is the first English Scripture divided into verses, and contains an introduction by Calvin.

Then we have the Geneva Bible, 1560, printed by Rovland Hall, in the translation of which Whittingham took part with other exiles. This is familiarly known as the "Breeches" Bible, owing to the word occurring in Genesis iii. 7, but in "The Golden Legend" the word also occurs: "And they toke figge leuis and sewed them to gyder for to couere their membres in maner of brechis," a reading previously given by Wycliffe.

Another peculiar version is that published in Geneva, without a printer's name, in 1562-3, which is remarkable for the typographical error, "Blessed are the placemakers," Matthew v. 9.

"The Holie Bible," the second authorised version known as the Bishops' Bible, printed by Richard Jugge, 1568, which was revised by eight of the bishops under the presidency of Archbishop Parker. This is sometimes called the "Treacle" Bible, from the reading in Jeremiah viii. 22, "Is there no tryacle in Gilead," which is rendered "rosin" in the Douai version.

Amongst the many other old Bibles interesting from various peculiarities or historically, the following may be instanced:

The Bassandyn Bible, printed "Be Alexander Arbuthnot Printer to the King is Maiestie dwelling at ye Kirk of field 1579." The New Testament printed by Thomas Bassandyn, Edinburgh, 1579.

The Holy Bible printed by Robert Barker, 1611, a revised version by authority of King James, known as the "He" Bible from the reading at the end of Ruth iii. 15: "He went into the city," whereas in another version by the sameprinter in the same year, it reads "She went into the city."

Another early copy of King James' version in black letter, R. Barker, 1613, is chained to a movable desk. The chain originally belonged to a Bible in the time of Henry VIII., and is put on to this one merely to illustrate the custom of chaining books in bygone times.

The Holy Bible "Printed at London by Robert Barker, Printer to the King's most excellent Maiestie: and by the Assignes of John Bill Anno 1631." Title within a woodcut border of twenty-four small and four larger oval medallions, with the royal arms on the reverse. This is known as the "Wicked" Bible, as the seventh commandment reads, "Thou shalt commit adultery." This edition was suppressed and only about twelve copies now remain.

Among unknown editions there are three fine copies of the New Testament in English, 1536. The first is known as the "Mole" edition, as in the front of all
the Epistles of St. Paul there is a woodcut figure of a man supposed to be intended for the apostle, standing with his foot on a square stone on which there is a mole in silhouette. The second, known as the “Blank Stone” edition, is nearly the same as the “Mole” edition, but without the mole on the stone. The third, known as the “Engraver’s Mark” edition, has a kind of hieroglyph on the stone in place of the mole. But we noticed other points in these engravings which are neither mentioned in Wilson’s “Catalogue of English Bibles” nor in the “Caxton Celebration Catalogue”: the face of St. Paul is quite different in the Mole edition to that of the other two, and the foreground of the picture on the left-hand side is different in each of the three blocks, the Mole edition being most boldly drawn.

Here is an octavo New Testament “Emprêt in the Yeare of our Lorde M.d.XXXVIII.” by Matthew Crom, at Antwerp, in original brown calf binding of the time of Henry VIII., with a block device of angels supporting the royal arms on one side, and an angel supporting a Tudor rose on the other. The binding is marked G.G., and it was this binder—name unknown—who discarded the proper supporters of the royal arms, and put angels in their place. This book is supposed to have belonged to Henry VIII., because of the royal arms on the binding, but that is a common feature of the bindings of the period executed for ordinary sale. It was stolen from the Bible Society’s premises many years ago, but was subsequently discovered by Mr. Fry, and recovered for the library.

There are two copies of Testaments in shorthand by Rich, 1660, and a Bible in shorthand by William Addy, 1687.

A fine copy of the Bible—Oxford: J. Baskett, 1716-17—which is a very beautiful specimen of typography, but so full of mistakes that it was called a “basket full of errors.” The chief of these, from whence it obtains its name of “The Vinegar Bible,” is the headline of Luke xx., “The Parable of the Vinegar” for Vineyard.

Among many other versions and editions, we find here the Complutensian Polyglot of Cardinal Ximenes, printed at Alcalá, 1514-17, but not published until 1520, owing to the license being withheld by Pope Leo X. In the meantime Erasmus, annoyed at the delay, produced his first Greek and Latin Testament, 1516, supposed to have been got out by Erasmus and Froben in five months. The Antwerp Polyglot, 1569; the Paris Polyglot, 1645, the expense of which ruined Le Jay; Walton’s Polyglot, London, 1657; Beza’s Codex; the Codex Fuldensis; all are here, with De Lyra’s Postilla, 1478.

There is a grand array of first editions in foreign languages: the first Protestant French, called the “Olivetan,” Neuchâtel, 1535; the first Icelandic, 1540; the first English Concordance, 1550; the first Spanish Bible for Christians, 1553; the first Welsh Testament, London, 1557; Licarrague’s Basque Testament, 1571; a Wendish folio, 1583; the first “Manks,” 1772; beside some grand old editions, such as Koberger’s Bible, 1485, and Zainer’s, of 1473, in old vellum, stained red; the third edition of Luther’s, 1536, in stamped pigskin contemporary binding, and many others; the Codex Zacynthius, a Palimpsest, with part of St. Luke’s Gospel in the uncial letters of the sixth century, and another work of the thirteenth century over it, found in the island of Zante.

Here are the Indian Bible by John Eliot, 1685, which no man can read, and a Malagasi Bible, complete and extremely rare. It is composed of books of different sizes, the various parts having been published separately. Also the Gospel of St. Matthew from Uvea, one of the Loyalty Islands, which bears the stains of blood of its former owner, a native catechist, who was attacked by the heathen with hatchets, one of which fell upon the book, cutting off a corner, and left blood upon the paper. Among the liturgies is “La Liturgia Ynglesa ó el Libro de la Oração Común, etc., Hispanizado,” by F. de Alvarado, Edicion Segundo, Londres, 1715, octavo, of which only one other copy is known to exist, the other being the book from which it is said the Duke of Wellington, with the aid of a Spanish grammar, learnt that language on his voyage to the Peninsula.

These, and many other rare, curious and interesting specimens of Bibles of many ages and many lands, we were shown in a comparatively small room on the upper floor of the massive stone building in Queen Victoria-street, the Bible house, by the librarian’s clerk, Mr. Geo. Clark, who spared no pains to make our visit profitable. As a striking contrast to the laboured productions of the early printers, there is a Bible, one of a hundred copies, printed on the 30th of June, 1877, for the Caxton Celebration, from movable types. The hundred copies of 1,525 pages, 10mo, minion type, were printed in Oxford, sent up to London, folded, sewn, and bound in Turkey morocco, bevelled boards, with the arms of the Oxford University on the side, all within twelve hours. One hundred and one persons were engaged in the Oxford Bindery, Barbican, to complete this remarkable feat, which was successfully accomplished in time to deliver copies at the Caxton Memorial Exhibition, at Kensington, within the twelve hours.

One more Bible deserves mention. It is known as the Mary Jones Bible, because the purchase of this Bible by Mary Jones, a poor weaver’s daughter, of Bala, Merionethshire, was the cause of the foundation of the British and Foreign Bible Society. She had saved up her money for six years to buy a Bible, and when she had obtained the sum required for the purchase, she had to walk twenty-five miles to the Rev. Thos. Charles to get the book. He was so impressed with her experience that he came to London and used the story in trying to form a Bible Society for Wales, but at a meeting with the Rev. Joseph Hughes and other friends the idea was extended, and eventually the British and Foreign Bible Society was established in 1804. The enormous growth of the Society and its work may be understood when we are told that its expenditure during its first year of existence was £91; for the year 1802-3 it was £220,956.

A firm of booksellers in Cleveland, Ohio, have just purchased from Messrs. Pickering & Chatto, of the Haymarket, their perfect copy of “Walton’s Angler.” The sum paid for the book was £35.