

The Dr. Gene Scott Bible Collection

STATION 16: COVERDALE'S BIBLE



Born in 1488 and, like Wycliffe, a native of Yorkshire ("Coverdale" is the name of his native district), Miles Coverdale was raised by and joined the Augustine monks in Cambridge. Together with other early reformers, he was an active missionary, preaching the gospel outside the confines of the University, and gathering for religious discussions at the "White Horse" tavern. When one of the reformers, Dr. Barnes, was arrested for heresy and sent to London for trial early in 1528, Coverdale went with him. Soon, Coverdale renounced his monastic orders and became a secular priest and missionary to his countrymen in the Essex district.

One of his converts later confessed to the Bishop of London that he and Coverdale had discussed Erasmus' works, and that Coverdale had said that confession to God alone was sufficient, and preached against transubstantiation and the worship of images. With things growing hot for him, Coverdale left for the continent; he worked with Tyndale at Hamburg during 1529 (after Tyndale's shipwreck). In England, meanwhile, Henry's divorce from Catherine (a cause of his rupture with the church of Rome) ushered in a new climate. Cranmer became Archbishop; Thomas Cromwell, Chancellor of the Exchequer, revealed he knew Erasmus' Latin New Testament by heart. Queen Anne Boleyn was a secret admirer of Tyndale's writings. They all helped along the process of giving England the Word of God in the people's language.

By denying the supremacy of the Papacy, Henry raised the scriptures above the authority of Rome - making it imperative that they be published. In 1533, a rumor spread throughout Europe that Henry might approve printing the scriptures in English; it even reached Tyndale. On 19 December 1534, a formal convocation under Cranmer ordered that all prior versions (i. e. those of Wycliffe and Tyndale) be turned in, and that a new translation "into the vulgar tongue" be made "by some honest and learned men to be appointed by the King."

By this convocation, the King, as head of the Church of England, was the supreme ecclesiastical authority, and reserved the sole right to authorize publication of the English Bible. When some of the "honest and learned men" (most notably the Bishop of London) declined to take part, largely because they objected to Bibles read by the common people, Coverdale (still in Europe) jumped at the chance.

Coverdale's was the **first complete Bible printed in English**, published in 1535 and printed at Zurich. It contained a preface reproving Henry for his past conduct, but commending him for seeing the error of his ways.

Coverdale's Bible was divided into 6 parts. The Pentateuch and Jonah are revisions of Tyndale; Job and the New Testament are mostly Tyndale as well (parts of both the 1526 and 1534 editions, though deviating from both). The rest of the Old Testament was probably translated by Coverdale from the Vulgate and Luther's German.

Coverdale sent copies of his Bible to England, for review by the King; Henry VIII turned it over to various bishops for comment. When they replied that it contained many errors, Henry asked, "Well, but are any heresies maintained thereby?" They answered, "There are no heresies." Henry thereupon ordered, "Then, if there be no heresies, in God's name let it go abroad among the people." Thus, Coverdale's was also the first English Bible to obtain royal permission. Though Henry soon changed his mind about it after he had Anne Boleyn (who had strongly supported it) executed, the book itself was not prohibited. Coverdale was also responsible for the **first complete Bible actually printed in England**, by James Nycholson of Southwark in **1537**, based on the 1535 folio; the quarto edition (a gem of Dr. Scott's Bible Collection) has the royal license on the general title page.

Coverdale's Bible - The First Bible Printed in England

1537 - Coverdale's first edition of 1535 and all prior English Bibles, were printed in Germany. In 1537, James Nycholson of Southwarke was the first to print English Bibles in England, this quarto and an accompanying folio edition. The title page of the quarto incorporates the royal license, obtained from King Henry VIII. The book follows the elaborate typesetting conventions of early English printing (somewhat slower to develop than on the Continent);

included throughout the book are initial letters originally used in "The Dance of Death." The small but clear "Black Letter" type, in two columns, has some of the titles of the books given in the old familiar Latin (e.g. "Sapientia" for "Wisdom"). This is an exceedingly rare "milestone" Bible; the only other example in the United States is at the New York Public Library (home of **another** great Bible collection!). Probably no more than five or six examples of this Bible are known, all told. Its importance to the stream of English Bibles is immeasurable; on this foundation, built of Wycliffe and Tyndale, all subsequent versions in English were built. (Herbert #33)

Coverdale's "Certain Most Godly...Letters..."

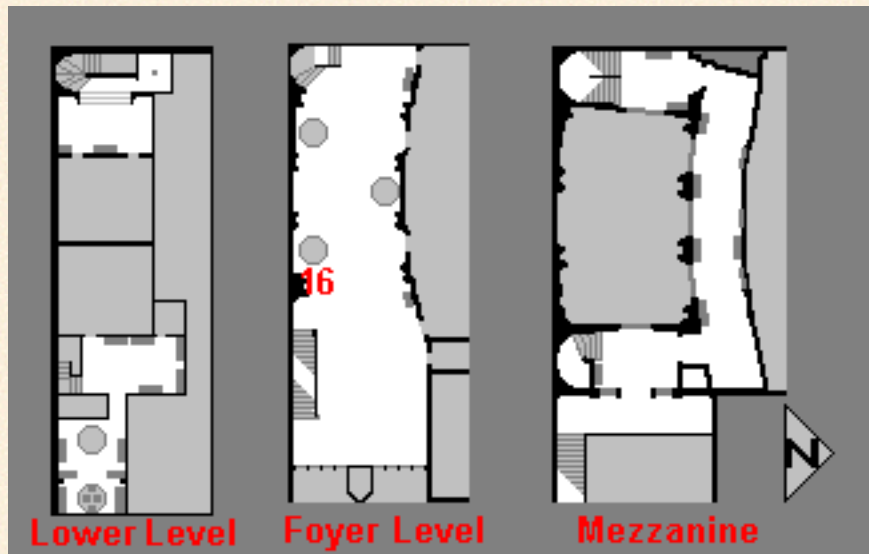
1564 - A compendium of "Godly Letters" put together by Miles Coverdale and published by John Day of London; "Black Letter" type. Opens with Archbishop Cranmer's letter to Queen Mary, written during his imprisonment at the Tower of London (he was martyred in 1556), and includes numerous other "testaments" by martyrs of the period. Full title:

***"Certain most godly,
fruitful, and
comfortable letters of
such true Saintes and
holy Martyrs of God,
as in the late bloodye
persecution here within
this Realme, gave
their lyves for the
defence of Christes
holy gospel: written
in the tyme of their
affliction and cruell
imprysonment."***
manuscript throughout.

Neatly annotated in 16th-century

STATION LOCATION MAP

Below is a floor plan map of the Cathedral in 3 sections, one for each level. The first section is the Lower Level, the second is the Foyer Level, and the third is the Mezzanine Level. This station is located in the East Octagon on the Foyer Level at the red #16.



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