

THE HOLY BIBLE IN VERSE, 1698

BY WILBUR MACEY STONE

TO THE inveterate collector, the discovery of a desirable item in an old attic or wayside shop is an event to cheer the heart. But nowadays, when even the backwoods are combed and recombined by keen-eyed book scouts, opportunities for the individual collector to make discoveries are rare indeed. The next best thing, particularly for the collector who does not roam, is the second-hand book catalog. True, he cannot be the first to spot a rarity, as the bookseller must first have found and cataloged it. But there is a real thrill in removing the wrapper from a catalog and discovering a hitherto unrecorded morsel, which would fit into some small but cherished section of one's library.

A basket on the top of my office desk receives my morning's mail. The book catalogs are at the bottom, the letters above. When emptied onto my desk the catalogs are on top. A short time ago, the first catalog opened was from a Newcastle dealer, who has a keen scent for early juveniles. Of course that portion of his catalog received my first attention. Near the top of one page appeared the following:

384. Holy Bible in Verse. For the benefit of Weak Memories. Printed and Sold by Benj. Harris Senior, 1698. 32 mo. Lacks first and last two leaves. Slightly soiled throughout and corners worn.

To one familiar with the late Dr. Charles L. Nichols' essay on the subject, read before this Society in April 1926, it did not require unusual perspicacity to realize that here was a juvenile of outstanding importance. I hastened across the street and cabled for it.

The Holy Bible.

But Daniel in the matter pryce,
and finds the Judges falities ;
Whereon Stannish Freedom hath,
And both the Elders put to Death.
And next the Fraude of Priests of hell,
Discover'd is by Daniel.
The Maccabees do most contain
How many Jews in Wars are Slain.
How Seven Brethren with their Mother
All in one Day the Flames do Inother ;
And how for all the Tyrants Threat,
Those Martyrs do no Swine-flesh Eat.

The End of the Apocrypha.

The

The New

Testament, In VERSE ;

For the benefit of weak
MEMORIES.

London, Printed and Sold
by *Benj. Harris Senior*, at the
upper-end of *Grace-Church-Street*,
next *Cornhill*, 1698.

The Holy Bible.

How God-Almighty's Voice doth make,
The very Wilderness to Quake,
and also Force the Hinds to Calve,



And how his Mercy is a Salue,
Oh blessed Chorister, which Sings
Eternally Jehovah's Hymns !
This Book, in General doth discover
God's Justice, Mercy, Favour, Power.

B 3

Pro

The Holy Bible.

To choote another do agree ;
And as they Pray the Lord to show
Who 'tis belath chosen of the Two,
The Lot on Matthias doth fall,
Who numbered is among them all.



St. Matthias preached in Aethiopia
suffered Martyrdom, and was buried

The little book offered was a previously unknown issue of Benjamin Harris' "Holy Bible in Verse," and of a date earlier by a year, than the earliest known record. And even that record was not of an existing copy, but only of a newspaper advertisement.

When one has passed the psalmist's allotted span, thrills are scarce, but this gave me a real one, and I had some difficulty to restrain my impatience during the week necessary for a reply. Would I be the lucky one, or would some local enthusiast gobble it up? By my calculations, I would have to wait over a week-end for a reply, but upon my return from lunch on the previous Friday, a fat registered envelope lay on my desk and I knew the prize was mine. A deep breath of satisfaction was followed by a careful slitting of the envelope, and the dirty little old rag fell out. It was in an overhanging cover of coarse heavy brown paper, into which it was securely sewed many years ago.

The bookseller was modest in describing its defects, as a careful collation disclosed that the first two and the last three leaves were lost. Although it lacked the first title, that for the New Testament portion was present and perfect. The inside of the front cover bore the printed and soiled book label of "John Allison, Carlisle." After cutting the numerous stitches I was able to examine the book more fully, to do a little patching and to supply in blank, from some old paper, the missing leaves.

For reconstructing the probable first title, I had recourse to the advertisement of 1699 in "The London Post," quoted by Dr. Nichols, supplemented by a line for line transcript of the title of the Edinburgh edition of 1724. This assumption of the first title is further strengthened by the close correspondence of the second title of the Edinburgh issue with that of the second title of the 1698 copy. Incidentally, this Edinburgh issue contains no cuts.

To the best of my judgment the first title of this 1698 issue should read as follows:

The/Holy Bible/In Verse/Containing/The Old and New/
Testaments,/with the/Apocripha./[rule]/For the Benefit of
Weak/Memories. The whole contain-/ing above one thousand
lines,/with Cuts./[rule]/London, Printed and Sold/by Benj.
Harris Senior, at the/upper-end of Grace-Church-/Street, next
Cornhill, 1698./

Note: The spelling of "Apochrypha" above, is as given in the body of the book.

This first title should be on recto of A2.

The second title is on the recto of C3 and is as follows:

The New/Testament/In Verse;/[rule]/For the benefit of
weak/Memories./[rule]/London, Printed and Sold/by Benj.
Harris Senior, at the/upper-end of Grace-Church-/Street,
next Cornhill, 1698./

The book is three inches tall by two inches wide. It was obviously somewhat taller originally, as the catch words at the foot of some pages are bled. It contains thirty-two unnumbered leaves, and collates A to D in 8s, this copy lacking A1 and 2, and D6, 7 and 8. It contains sixteen relatively large cuts, the ones at the commencement of each testament being nearly full page and none of the others being less than one-half page in size.

The copy of the 1717 edition, given to the Society by Mr. Frank B. Bemis, measures $3\frac{1}{4}$ by $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches, while another copy of the 1717 edition measures $3\frac{3}{8}$ by $2\frac{1}{8}$, and the only known fragment of the 1724 issue is $3\frac{1}{4}$ by $2\frac{1}{4}$. It would thus appear that this newly discovered copy of the 1698 issue is the smallest copy of this book so far found.

Of course I was curious to learn the history of this book, and further correspondence disclosed that an ancient aunt of the bookseller had owned it from childhood.

In the copies of the 1717 edition and in that of the 1724 issue (Dr. Nichols 1724B), the running title is "The Holy Bible, Epitomiz'd in Verse," half being on the left-hand page and half on the right, while in the

1698 edition the running title is "The Holy Bible," repeated on each page.

It is also interesting to note that this 1698 issue is the only one, which has so far turned up, which bears a London imprint; and the Edinburgh 1724 issue, is the only other one having the name of a place of printing in Great Britain. We have, however, records of two Boston imprints 1729 and 1751, and one in Philadelphia in 1754.

Dr. Nichols, in his paper, page 7, is apparently in error in placing a line between "Holy" and "Bible," and should have placed one between "the" and "Apocrypha." At least these changes are required to conform to the Edinburgh 1724 copy.

Also, same page, Dr. Nichols says, "the text is unchanged in those editions which are represented by copies." In this 1698 issue I find in the Genesis portion, at least ten variations from the text of the 1717 issue.

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|------|-----|--|
| Line | 7. | 1698, And God—1717, How God |
| | 8. | " makes him—1717, made him |
| | 11. | " 'tis decreed—1717, 'twas decreed |
| | 12. | " Christ shall pay—1717, Jesus should
pay |
| | 18. | " M'Affliction's—1717, My grief is |
| | 19. | " is very great—1717, grows very great |
| | 21. | " The Deluge comes and all—1717, It
comes & in it all |
| | 31. | " For which he's cursed—1717, He's
cursed and |
| | 34. | " th' Aetherial Sky—1717, Azure sky |
| | 41. | " turns back—1717, looks back |

Further than that, I have not compared them. These are of course minor changes but they indicate real editing.

Dr. Nichols says that "it is a fair inference that it [The Holy Bible in Verse] was intended for an English audience as the New England Primer was for an

American one." But as far as I can determine, all the copies of *The Holy Bible in Verse*, except two, were found in this country. So it would appear that it was at least popular here, if we can draw conclusions from the location of the few copies found. How I wish Dr. Nichols could have lived to examine this little book. It would have given him much pleasure.

The illustrations are highly interesting, and differ materially from those in any of the later known editions with which I am familiar. The first cut, nearly full page in size, is of Adam and Eve, with the serpent in a tree in the background. The serpent has a human head, arms and legs, and is handing an apple to Eve, who has another apple in her left hand. A second serpent is crawling on the ground at Eve's feet. The first cut for the New Testament shows the nativity in the foreground, the shepherds being repeated on the hill in the rear, with the announcing angel in the clouds at the top. The other cuts are boldly executed and are definitely illustrative of the text.

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