

THE HOLY BIBLE IN VERSE

BY CHARLES L. NICHOLS

OUR associate, Frank B. Bemis, has presented to this Society a most interesting bibliographical puzzle, the complete solution of which seems hardly possible at this late date.

The loss of many records, the imperfection, according to the standards of today, of those which have been preserved and the absence of biographical information about the persons who enter into this drama raise a formidable barrier to success which, however, adds to the zest of the search.

The gift is a miniature book entitled, "The Holy Bible in Verse," is dated 1717 and measures $3\frac{1}{4}$ x $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches. It is bound in contemporary calf, contains 64 unnumbered pages, the first and last being blank, and has ten woodcuts in the text including one on the title page.

There is no mention on that title page of the author or the place of printing and neither Evans' American Bibliography nor Plomer's Handbook of English Printers contains a reference to this edition or any other of this curious book to confirm its American or English origin.

It is claimed, however, and apparently with reasonable certainty, that the author is Benjamin Harris, a printer, publisher and writer, whose business was conducted in London from 1668 to 1686, then in Boston from 1686 to 1695, and finally in London from 1695 to the time of his death in or about the year 1716.

These vicissitudes in his life above recorded were caused by his invincible hatred of Popery and the

Catholic tendency of King James II, and resulted in the Production of "The Protestant Tutor," "The New England Primer, enlarged," "The New English Tutor," and this small book, "The Holy Bible in Verse." Each one of these bears the imprint of his vigorous mind and his poetical ability although in no case does his name appear as author or compiler. Let me read a few extracts from ancient records to establish my statements: In the Stationers' Register of London for June 9, 1683, is entered for copyright by Benjamin Harris, "The Protestant Tutor."

Mr. Ford, in his Boston Book Market, has called attention to an entry, dated Oct. 5, 1683, by Master John Gainé, of the title, "The New England Primer or Milk for Babes." In the Almanack of Henry Newman for 1691, printed in Boston by Benjamin Harris, is advertised a second impression of "The New England Primer, enlarged, to which is added, more Directions for Spelling, the prayer of K. Edward the 6th, and verses made by Mr. Rogers, the martyr, left as a legacy to his Children." If the discovery of the John Gainé title by Mr. Ford leaves any uncertainty as to the part which Mr. Harris had in the first edition, this advertisement is definite evidence of the improvements which he introduced into the second impression. Mr. Ford also notes, in a list of books sent to Boston by John Ives of London, dated April 15, 1685, the statement in response to a query for copies of this book for the Boston trade, "that there is not one New England Primer in London."

In A Brief Account of the Worshipful Company of Stationers by Charles R. Rivington, 1921, occurs the notice taken from their records; "that about the tenth day of November last (1685) the Wardens of the Company of Stationers did take into their hands from the hands of Mr. Harris, Primmer binder, about 40 Reams of counterfeit Primmers." It would be most interesting could we prove that Harris was attempting to supply that lack of New England Primers noted six

months before. It is not impossible and may have been the case.

It is certain that the Protestant activities of Harris had been noted and punishment had already been meted out to him. In this case, while there is no mention of the kind of counterfeit primer it was, the New England Primer, printed without a license, would have been doubly counterfeit.

Again it is written in these records that in 1686 large quantities of two of Harris' publications, "English Liberties and the Protestant Tutor," were seized and fines imposed upon him. John Dunton, writing from Boston to George Larkin said; "I think the Book of English Liberties, that you printed, was done for him, (Harris). Mr. Harris, I think also printed the Protestant Tutor," and he continued, "he advances in years as well as yourself." This was written in March, 1686 a few months before Harris reached New England. These acts against Harris were the final cause of his sailing for Boston where he remained until the—to his mind—iniquitous Printing Bill failed of re-enactment in 1695 at which time he returned to his business in London. "The New English Tutor, enlarged," contained a print of John Rogers from the block used by Harris in the second edition of "The New England Primer" and in 1699 is found a notice of "The Holy Bible in Verse" in a newspaper printed by Harris.

These references give credence to the statement that Harris was the publisher and compiler of these small books the design of which, as John Dunton says was, "to bring up children in an aversion to Popery."

But we have, in the book under consideration, more definite information of his authorship for a note to the "Christian Reader" which follows the title page is signed B.H. and a reference to B. Harris, Senior, in the same issue by his son explains the initials.

Another fact of interest, connecting Harris with "The New England Primer" as well as this book, is

that the cuts in our small book are identical with ten of the twenty-four in the earliest copy of the Primer now extant, that of 1727, except that they are reversed showing them to have been drawn on new blocks from an earlier edition. They may have been taken from the 1691 edition spoken of but more probably from the edition which Mr. Ford says that Harris published in London in 1701. Reference to any of these primers will show that the rhymed-alphabet pictures on each page were combined in one block and that therefore new blocks were necessary for use as separate pictures in this new publication. In the 1712 edition and repeated in that of 1717, is found "The Author's Caution to the Reader" which is dated March 15, 1712, and is signed by B. Harris, Junior. Had the son been the author the book would not have been copyrighted by the father on June 12, 1710, with his other books at which time the son had copyrighted another book under his own name, Junior, two weeks earlier. The explanation of the statement seems to be that the son had taken over his father's publication in that year 1712.

All of these statements taken in conjunction with the character and principles of Benjamin Harris, the Anabaptist and Anti-Romanist, point to him as the author of our book, written with the object, as he expressed it: "that you may turn Berean and run oftener to its Sacred Original."

The place of printing of our edition of this book is a far more serious one for solution. Eleven editions of the Holy Bible in Verse have been traced by me, only five of which editions are represented by copies in existence. But as there are three examples of one edition and two of another the number of separate copies the ownership of which is known today amounts to eight, our own copy being the nearest perfect. These editions and copies will be described at the end of this paper with the reasons for their existence and their present location.

There are three distinct types of title-page in these editions: 1st, that of the earliest years, which reads; "The/Holy/Bible,/containing/the Old and New/ Testaments,/with the Apocrypha./Done into Verse for the benefit of/weak Memories. The whole con- taining above One Thousand Lines." This title accords with the newspaper advertisement of 1699, with the Stationer's Register and with the Edinburgh copy.

2nd, that of which our copy is the example for the years, 1717, 1718 and 1724 which is; "The/Holy/ Bible/In Verse./"

3rd, that of the two Boston imprints of 1729 with the words, "The/Holy Bible,/In Verse./Very pleasant and profita- ble, and greatly tending/to encourage Chil- dren &/others to Read and also/to understand what they/read in that sacred Book./"

In all of these the text amounts to a little more than one thousand lines and is unchanged in those editions which are represented by copies and by inference in all editions. It should be mentioned here that this book differs from the other three publications ascribed to Harris, as compiler, in that the poetical text of this was without question entirely written by him.

This fact would explain the care taken in preserving the words and arrangement which in all cases are identical and unchanged although the type, in the various editions and copies seen, has been reset. This is proved by variation in the use of italic type and in a few typographical changes in wording, such as the word "Berean" in our copy on the page following the title page, which reads "therein" in the Lenox Library copy.

The cuts also are the same in each except that in the 1729 edition one block has been recut and another replaced by a new one, the subject being reproduced with sufficient changes in the lines to prove it to be from a new block. On pages 52 and 58 of our copy are two ornamental head pieces from which it was hoped that evidence could be drawn as to the place of printing.

These type ornaments were found in the 1717 edition of John Wise's "Vindication," printed in Boston by John Allen, the Boston partner of Harris, a fact which appeared to point to an American origin of this edition but the same ornaments were seen in the 1716 edition of the "History of Fair Rosamond," printed in London and the conclusion from this usually doubtful evidence was negative. There is therefore nothing of absolute certainty to be learned from the text and we turn to the title page for such scanty information as can be gleaned from it.

"The Author's caution to the Reader" in our copy, signed by B. Harris, Junior, registers a warning against a little spurious book, "Printed with the same title as this (referring to the 1712 edition) by one Bradford which book is partly stole from the Original first Printed by B. Harris Senior, &c." The first reference to this book, known to us, was in "The London Post," a newspaper printed in London by B. Harris from 1699 to 1705, and it would seem that this was the "original first" mentioned in the above quotation. It is also a fair inference that it was intended for an English audience as "The New England Primer" was for an American one, a new edition of "The New England Primer" being recorded by Harris in this same year, 1701.

The warning, just noted, against a "spurious book like this printed by one Bradford" may be further evidence of its English origin and intent.

It was stated by Paul Leicester Ford, in his "New England Primer," that the Bradford spoken of here was William Bradford of New York probably because he had already found him guilty of a literary theft of an early edition of "The New England Primer," evidence of which deed he believed to exist in the so called "Bradford fragment" now in the possession of the Pennsylvania Historical Society.

A more probable explanation, however, is given by Wilberforce Eames who writes that the "Pirate

printer" was John Bradford of London, who printed there at that period and was commonly referred to as a "printer of other mens copies."

These varied statements and inferences point to London as the place of printing of this first title page at least.

The marked change in the title of our copy of 1717 and those which immediately followed may be explained by the reason that B. Harris, Sen. whom John Dunton, in 1686, stated was advancing in years then, had ceased to print at or before that time and B. Harris, Junior, became the printer and publisher of this little book. It has been stated that Harris died about 1708 but he copyrighted this book in 1710, his name is recorded as coeditor in 1711 of the London newspaper "The Protestant Post Boy" and an edition of "The Protestant Tutor" for 1716 printed by B. Harris is in existence. After this date his name has not been found, while the name of B. Harris, Junior, is in the editions of this book as late as 1724.

If a copy of the 1712 edition, which was without question printed by B. Harris, Jr. is found and a title identical with that of 1717 appears in it that fact would seem to prove an English rather than an American origin as this printer was never recorded as working in America. That this 1712 edition had a different title from the preceding is shown by the statement that Bradford's pirated one had a title "Like this" (referring to the 1712) and this warning also appears in those of 1717, 1718 and 1724 but not in those frankly American which followed.

Mr. Brigham calls attention to the fact that there is no copy mentioned in the British Museum catalogue or in that of the British and Foreign Bible Society compiled by Darlow & Moule. He also notes that while there is one copy of this book in the Advocates Library in Edinburgh where it was printed in 1724, all other known copies are owned in America where they had been in families for generations. He infers from

this that these books were popular in this country and that this later title may have been printed in America as we know that the books with the third title were in 1729.

An argument in favor of this can be drawn from the fact that the Edinburgh edition with the first title was printed in that city in 1724 and another edition with the second title was (?) issued in London in the same year.

It would not seem probable that two editions with varying titles would be called for at the same time and in the same country.

The third title is represented by two copies with date, 1729, and with imprints, in the one case, "Boston: Printed and sold by T. Fleet, in Pudding Lane, 1729." in the other, "Printed in the year, 1729."

In these two copies the type, text, cuts, ornaments and arrangement are identical and they must have been parts of the same edition, the variation in imprint being explained by the custom, not uncommon, of the printer's leaving off his name from copies to be sold by other booksellers.

In searching for the origin of the title of this book, it has been found, that, in 1596, Henoeh Clapham published in Edinburgh a book entitled "A Brief of the Bible, drawn first in English Poesy," a later edition of which, printed in London, is on our shelves. Simon Wastell, in 1629, published in London, a book with title, "Microbiblon, or the Bible's Epitome in Verse," an octavo volume of more than five hundred pages.

Again John Taylor, called the Water Poet, who died in 1653, wrote a poetical description of the Bible, called "Verbum Sempiternum," which was printed in his collected works in 1630. A new edition of this miniature book, which was later called "The Thumb Bible," was printed in London in the year 1693. In our collection of miniature books is a New Testament of this bible dated 1765. Benjamin Harris may have seen one or another of these books and received a

suggestion from them for the title of his smaller literary production.

The conclusions of this investigation would seem to be that "The Holy Bible in Verse" was written and printed in London by Benjamin Harris, Senior, from 1699 until the 1712 edition and for an English public; that this and the later editions were probably printed and published by Benjamin Harris, Junior, at which time his father ceased to print them, and finally that copies were printed in Boston in the year 1729 for the American public already attracted to it by the earlier English editions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE "HOLY BIBLE IN VERSE"

1699. "The Holy Bible in Verse, containing the old and New Testaments with the Apochrypha. The whole containing above one Thousand lines with cuts."
No copy known.

The above title appeared in "The London Post," number 13, dated July 3, 1699, printed in London by Benj. Harris and ran through every issue to Jan. 1, 1700. It is also found in "Davenport's Saint's Anchor hold" printed in London, by Benj. Harris, in 1701.

In the "Author's Caution to the Reader," signed by B. Harris, Jr. in, the 1712 edition, he states that the original first edition was printed by B. Harris, Senior, and this of 1699 appears to be the first.

1710. "The Holy Bible, containing the Old & New Testaments with the Apochrypha, Done into Verse for the benefit of weak Memories. The whole containing above one Thousand Lines, with Cuts."

(signed) BENJA. HARRIS.

No copy known.

The Stationer's Hall Register of Copyright in London, dated June 12, 1710, contains the above notice, the only one of this title between the years 1697 and 1730. Seven days later in these records is entered another title signed Benja. Harris, Senior, thus distinguishing him from, B. Harris, Junior whose title appeared on May 30th.

1711. "The Holy Bible in Verse" Printed in London by John Bradford. Title and collation unknown. No copy known. For explanation see page 76 of text.
1712. "The Holy Bible in Verse." Title and collation unknown. No copy known. The "Author's Caution to the Reader," signed by B. Harris, Jr. and dated March 15, 1712, found in the edition of 1717 shows that an edition was printed in 1712.
1717. The/Holy/Bible/in Verse/. [cut of open Bible]/1717. [title enclosed within double plain rules.] Size $3\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{4}$. 64 pp. unnumbered. 24 lines to page. nine cuts in text and one on title page. Ornamental rule at top of pages, 52 and 58. Three copies known.
1. American Antiquarian Society, gift of F. B. Bemis, original owner Miss Ellen Dole of Rowley. Perfect except lower half of last blank leaf.
 2. Lenox Library of New York, gift of C. W. Frederickson in 1893. Lacks three leaves at end, arrangement identical with I. but reset. In "Christian Reader" the word "Berean" in A. A. S. copy read "therein" in this.
 3. Mrs. Edward Turnbull, of New York from Geo. C. Vernon sale, Oct. 27, 1913, at Anderson's. Lacks two leaves in centre.
1718. The/Holy/Bible/in Verse./ [cut of open Bible]/1718. [title enclosed within double plain rules.] Size $3\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{1}{4}$, 64 pp. unnumbered. 24 lines to page. Nine cuts in text and one on title page. Ornamental rules at top of pages 52 and 58 same as in 1717 edition. One copy known, sold at American Art Galleries, W. G. Shillaber sale, April 8, 1926. Original owner, J. P. Taylor of Haverhill. Lacks first two leaves, title in facsimile from original now lost, lacks a leaf in sign. D. Contains "Author's caution to Reader." Typographical errors and changes in use of italic type show this edition to have been reset.

1724. The/Holy Bible,/ containing/the Old & New/ Testaments,/ with the/Apochrypha./ Done into verse for the benefit of/weak Memories. The whole con-/taining above one Thousand Lines./[ornament]/Edinburgh: Printed in the year, MDCC, XXIV./

Title taken from "Ford's New England Primer", p. 284. One copy known, at Advocates Library, Edinburgh. As this title is identical with that recorded in 1710 by B. Harris, Senior, and practically the same as his advertisement in the London Post it is probable that this edition, cuts &c, would be found identical also.

- 1724.b The/Holy/Bible,/In Verse/[cut of open Bible]/1724./ [title enclosed within double plain rules]
Size $3\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{1}{4}$. 64 pp. unnumbered. 24 lines to page. cuts same as in other editions, so far as found in this imperfect copy.

One copy known.

Wilbur M. Stone of New York, Sign. A, seven leaves, first lacking, Sign. C. complete eight leaves. Sign. B and D lacking. Arrangement shows that "Author's Caution" on last page of sign. B, was in this edition. The "Introduction" follows the title page in this instead of "Christian Reader" otherwise the text is identical except such typographical changes as show it to have been reset.

1729. The/Holy Bible,/ In Verse./ Very pleasant and profita-/ble, and greatly tending/to encourage Children/& others to read, and also/to understand what they/Read in that sacred Book./-/[cut of open Bible]/-/
Printed in the year 1729./ (title enclosed within ornamental rules)

Size $3\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$. 64 pp. unnumbered. 22 lines to page. Nine cuts in text & one on title page.

Ornamental rules at top of pp. 1, 2, 52 and 58. Text identical with previous editions except absence of "Author's Caution." Cuts identical except, a, cut of Job, sig. B. new block and b, cut of Jonah, sig. B, recut.

Two copies known.

1. A. C. Bates of Hartford. Perfect in text but lacking the first and last blank leaves. See Goodspeed's Cat. No. 56, Dec., 1907 and No. 320, Libbie's Cat. Terry sale, Dec. 6, 1906.

2. Philip L. Spalding of Boston. Text identical with that of Mr. Bates even errors, showing them from same type setting, except that this has imprint: "Boston: Printed and sold by T. Fleet, in Pudding Lane, 1729."
1751. In Wigglesworth's *Day of Doom*, Boston, 1751, is noted "Books to be sold by T. Fleet," among which is "The Holy Bible in Verse."
1754. In Evans Bibliography, No. 7148, is recorded; "Holy Bible in Verse," Philadelphia, Printed by James Chattin, 1754."

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