



MR. HENRY FROWDE.

Photo: Bassano, Ltd., 25, Old Bond-st., W.

### About Oxford Bibles.

INTERVIEW WITH MR. HENRY FROWDE.

ONE of the inadequately recognised debts of the Christian community is that which it owes to the purveyors of the literature without which it would, humanly speaking, be practically crippled. Even the publication of copies of the Word of God is perhaps too readily classed as a mere matter of business, whereas acknowledgment is undoubtedly due for the great ingenuity and devotion displayed in this connection. Recognising this fact, it was with pleasure that we had an interview a few days ago with Mr. HENRY FROWDE concerning the relation of the Oxford University Press to the Bible trade of the English-speaking world generally.

As was carefully explained, the ideal which the Delegates of the Press have in view are not primarily religious, but educational, in harmony with the circumstances under which the institution originated and is carried on. The Press seeks to meet the common literary needs of students and of the religious life of the country. But the printing and circulation of Bibles has from early days been a very prominent part of the business, and in more recent years at least has been by far

the largest portion of it. That it is still going steadily forward is shown by Mr. Frowde's statement to us that the output of the London house has increased ten-fold during the thirty-five years of his management.

It is pretty generally known that the copyright of the Revised Version of the Scriptures is vested in the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge; but probably many readers are unaware that the old Authorised Version, with which our forefathers have been familiar since the days of King James the First, really belongs to the Crown, but the University Press enjoys special privileges under charter. It is now difficult to obtain anything of the nature of accurate statistics concerning the publications of early years; but it is not a little surprising to find that in 1666 an edition of the New Testament in Turkish was produced.

During the seventeenth century the Press passed through many vicissitudes, which are shown in Mr. Falconer Madan's brief account of the Press; and even in the second half of the eighteenth century we find that editions of the Scriptures fell away to an average of about two each year. With the nineteenth century there appears to have been a renewal of activity; for it was

ascertained in the year of Waterloo (1815) that in the seven preceding years 460,500 Bibles and 386,600 New Testaments had been sent out. Last year the number of editions of the Bible had grown to ninety-eight, while the sale of Bibles advanced from 500,000 in 1875 to 1,120,000 in 1905.

How much all this activity in the preparation of Bibles has meant to the religious life of the land will never be known, but that its influence for good has been very great will be readily understood and admitted. Copies which were shown to us illustrated the striking change in the printing and binding of the sacred volume within the years of Mr. Frowde's connection with the Press. Thick unwieldy volumes have given place to those that are light and convenient to handle. In large measure that change has been brought about by the use of the Oxford India paper, now

familiar in all parts of the world; but in binding the improvements have been no less important and noticeable.

The adornment and artistic finishing of many of the volumes have been brought to a point at which there seems nothing to be desired; but in the view of many of our readers even more important has been the development of the durable and supple yet beautifully plain "yapp" bindings which, as Mr. Frowde says, are so flexible that they will bear without injury folding in almost any fashion. These are the books that are to be seen in the hands of preachers and workers in all directions. All is, of course, of the best quality; but we were informed that the secret of the special durability and flexibility lies in the slow and careful way in which the sewing is done. Indeed, it was surprising to learn what a very small part machinery plays in the binding of Bibles of better quality, though naturally the case is entirely different with cheaper editions. Looking around at the books displayed, we were impressed by the evidence of how much has been done to make the Bible in the hands of the devout student, of the teacher, and of the regular reader, a more attractive volume outwardly, as well as much more convenient to read and to carry.

It is matter of common knowledge that the Christian public have not been slow to take advantage of the practical revolution in Bible production which has thus taken place within a generation. It was satisfactory to learn that the diminution in bulk has led to an increase in the use of Bibles in types which were formerly considered by the public scarcely practicable because of the bulk and weight involved; and, as Mr. Frowde shrewdly remarked, it looks as though people really were reading them more than they could easily

do with the old minute typography. The enterprise thus shown has met with due response; for it is found that people are quite willing to pay the extra cost of furnishing the Word of God in somewhat worthier dress.

A reference to the use of what have been called *fac-simile*, or page-for-page, editions, elicited the remark that they had been highly appreciated. Mr. Frowde explained that people have two sorts of memory—sound and sight. The latter is a possession of high utility in a compositor, for such a man can set the type of a book, say, in Chinese, though he does not understand it. By readers with sight-memory the editions referred to are specially valued, because when they have forgotten chapter or verse they can often recall the position of a favourite passage on the page; and when small and large volumes correspond in this way, the transition called for by failing sight is deprived of a great drawback. Two different series of Oxford Bibles are now available, with volumes from pocket size upward giving verses in the same relative position on the page.

Editions of the Bible for the use of students, with wide margins for notes, are increasing in number, and are very useful. We note also that in recent years more attention than is commonly realized has been given to the references, which enable us to turn so easily from passage to passage in the study of a subject. After the publication of the Revised Version, a committee was appointed to prepare references for it, and the purpose was carried through with a thoroughness which has greatly simplified personal study. Since then, as new editions of the Authorised Version have been called for, the references included in them have been carefully revised and edited, with results highly valued by those which have put the matter to the test. In this same connection mention was made of the Oxford Bible for Teachers—with its serviceable concordance and indices, as well as a mass of Scriptural information admirably arranged—which appeared in 1876, and immediately claimed for itself a high place in the regard of those for whom it was intended. Several millions of copies of this, which is the best known of all Oxford editions, have been sold throughout the world.

Mr. Frowde has taken an important part in the supply of the hymnals used by different denominations. When the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland combined in the preparation of "The Church Hymnary," the time-honoured custom of binding with the Scriptures the Metrical Psalms, which for generation after generation had constituted

the material available for public praise, suggested the same course with respect to the Hymnary. As a result no fewer than a million copies of the Hymnary—by itself or bound with the Bible—

were issued in three months. "The Book of Praise," for the Presbyterian Church of Canada, has also issued from the same source. Another collection of hymns, in preparation for the Episcopal Church in Canada, is expected to be ready for publication during the coming year.

Mr. Frowde placed in our hands a copy of "The Oxford Hymn Book," for use in the Church of England, which is being published to-day. Dean Strong (Christ Church) and Dr. Sanday, to whom the preparation of this book was entrusted, invited the co-operation of Miss Mary Church, Rev. J. M. Thompson (Magdalen), and Dr. Basil Harwood (Christ Church). As they point out in their preface, their choice has "gravitated towards what may be called the Old Masters—Watts, the Wesleys, Doddridge, Cowper, Newton." They have also drawn freely on the New Version of Tate and Brady; and "have been more attracted than repelled by the archaism of some of the seventeenth century writers."

Among devotional works coming from the Oxford Press in recent years which have attained a large measure of popularity are "My Counsellor," "The Cloud of Witness," and "Day by Day of the Christian Year." Our attention was directed to the books which had been on display at the Franco-British, showing how the public taste tends towards the use of fine bindings, not only for the religious classics—with the appearance of which in more or less sumptuous styles our readers are familiar—but for an ever-widening range of general literature.

The business of the Oxford Press is rapidly extending, not only at home but in the United States, Canada, Australia, and elsewhere. We came away with a deep sense of its value as an agency in the promotion of the highest welfare of our people, both spiritually and intellectually, and recognizing in Mr. Frowde an attractive personal combination of geniality and up-to-dateness.

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