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A BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF THE INFLUENCE
OF THE BIBLE ON
ENGLISH LITERATURE
(and in part on the Fine Arts)
Compiled by
Wilbur M. Smith, D.D.

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A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE BIBLE ON ENGLISH LITERATURE
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PREFACE

As far as I know, there is no volume devoted exclusively to the fascinating, inexhaustible, and very important subject of the influence of the Bible in world literature. I vividly remember a visit to the great Imperial Library in Berlin in 1937, where I made careful inquiry as to whether a book had been published covering the subject of the influence of the Bible in German life and literature, and two librarians there, after discussing the matter between themselves for a half-hour (in German), accompanied by some feverish investigation, told me there was no such volume. They seemed to be surprised themselves. I have not seen a work by Pétavel-Olliff, *La Bible en France* (Paris: Librairie Française et Étrangère, 1864), which may have some material on this subject, but such books as George Borrow's *The Bible in Spain*, Jellicott's *The Bible in India*, and Marshall's *The Bible in China*, deal with the circulation of the Scriptures, not with the influence of the Bible on literature. I wish I could persuade some young man to make this a life-long study. On the Bible influence in English literature there is a great deal of material.

It is very difficult at times to determine what titles should be included in such a bibliography as has here been attempted. If it were to be strictly exhaustive, all the literature about any outstanding book in English literature arising from Biblical material would have to be included. This would mean, to mention only some earlier works, all that has been written concerning *The Exeter Book* and *The Vercelli Book*, and practically all the writing of Cynewulf. I have confined myself in this bibliography to the principal works regarding only one of these early classics, *The Dream of the Rood*. (Something of the vastness of the literature that has gathered around these early works may be seen in *Earliest English Poetry*, by Charles W. Kennedy (New York: Oxford, 1943) and a very scholarly work, *The Literature of the Anglo-Saxons*, by George K. Anderson (Princeton: Univ. Press, 1949). Such a bibliography, if exhaustive, would have to include two-thirds of the writings of John Milton; I have here included only some of the major works on *Paradise Lost*. It has been difficult to determine what authors should be included. The list could be extended indefinitely. Biblical material dominates, for example, in the writings and drawings of William Blake (1757-1827) concerning whom there is a whole library of literature. The same can be said for Francis Thompson (1859-1907). This is true likewise for many artists who have produced a number of notable paintings based on Biblical themes, such as Holman Hunt. There is also a wide area of literature pertaining to musical compositions which in a more exhaustive bibliography on the influence of the Bible in art would have to be included. The latest and one of the
most important volumes in this field is *Handel's Messiah; A Touchstone of Taste*, by Robert Manson Myers (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1948). I suppose there should also be included the literature pertaining to the theme of the Holy Grail. Here I would mention only the exhaustive work, with extensive bibliographies, of Arthur Edward Waite, *The Holy Grail, Its Legends and Symbolism* (London: Rider & Co., 1933, 624 p.). A unique volume appeared recently, which might well be the model for many others of a similar character covering other portions of the Bible, viz., Arnold Williams' *The Common Expositor, An Account of the Commentaries on Genesis, 1527-1633* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948, xiii, 297 p.).

The following bibliography, of course, is not complete. I hope it will be found in the matter of literature to contain practically all the important books devoted to the subject; but only some of the chapters in books, and some periodical articles, are here included, though I have tried to discover the most significant ones. To my knowledge, this is the only extensive bibliography of the influence of the Bible in English literature that has been published.

We may begin this list with a statement by the greatly beloved professor, Dr. William Lyon Phelps of Yale University: "The Bible has been a greater influence on the course of English literature than all other forces put together; it is impossible to read standard authors intelligently without knowing something about the Bible, for they all assume familiarity with it on the part of their readers" (*Reading the Bible*, p. 17).

**OUTLINE**

I. GENERAL WORKS:
   1. Books
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   3. Particular periods and geographical areas

II. TYPES OF LITERATURE:
   1. Drama
   2. Poetry
   3. Fiction
   4. Music
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   6. Law

III. BIBLICAL SUBJECTS:
   1. Literary reference to certain books of the Bible
   2. Christ in literature
   3. Christ in art
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IV. INDIVIDUAL AUTHORS

V. RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF MODERN LITERATURE

I. GENERAL WORKS

1. Books

There are a great many books giving the history of the Bible in its various translations, in Great Britain and America, which do not properly belong to this bibliography, and are therefore omitted, though many of these versions did exercise enormous influence over the thinking and literature of each successive generation. I feel compelled, however, to include here that definitive and truly exciting work of vast scholarship, *The Lollard Bible and other Medieval Biblical Versions*, by Margaret Deanesly of Newham College, Cambridge (Cambridge: University Press, 1920. xx, 483 p.).


The most comprehensive narrative account of the influence of Christianity over English authors in the 19th century that has been written. A truly monumental work.


This, instead of being an exhaustive list as Long's contains references to about one hundred English writers, frequently with brief quotations, concluding with an essay by Dr. Frank Allen Patterson of Columbia University, "English Prose Writers and the English Bible," and one of three pages by Dr. James Moffatt, "The English Bible and English Poets."

Kohut, George Alexander, ed., *A Hebrew Anthology; a collection of poems and dramas inspired by the Old Testament and post Biblical tradition gathered from writings of English poets, from the Elizabethan period and earlier to the present day*. Cincinnati: S. Bacharach, 1923. 2 v. With indexes of titles, first lines, and authors.

Vol. I is devoted to Lyrical Narratives and Devotional Poems, Vol. II to selections from the Drama. The subtitle gives an indication of the contents. (This work I find is not well known to Bible students. It is a monumental achievement, possibly quite rare today. I am fortunate to own a copy.)


The most complete list that I have seen—and it is simply a list, without comment—of all the major works in English literature in which some Biblical theme dominates. Arranged in chronological order. Now out of print, but very important.


This is a remarkable series by Sir William Robertson Nicoll's co-worker, and co-editor of the *British Weekly* for years, probably the most widely-read woman Christian writer in Great Britain in her generation. These volumes include much more than literature, but there is an abundance of literature. In these two works there are forty-five pages of index to Scripture references alone.


The best general work on this subject yet written in our language. It has a good chapter, incidentally, on "The Holy Grail," and also one on "Biblical Doctrine in Literature."

A very scholarly work, with many references to both well-known and obscure works of England and the Continent, of the 16th and 17th centuries, is *The Legend of Noab. Renaissance Rationalism in Art, Science, and Letters*, by Don Cameron Allen (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1949, vii, 221 p.) This is Vol. XXXIII, Nos. 3, 4, of the Illinois Studies in Language and Literature.

Contrary to what the title would seem to indicate, there is a vast amount of material relating to the influence of the Bible in Western literature in Gilbert Higlet's *The Classical Tradition. Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature*. (N.Y. and Lond.: Oxford, 1949, xxxviii, 763 p.).
2. Chapters and Articles


Muir, William, Our Grand Old Bible. N.Y.: Revell, 1911.


An indication of the great influence of Christian themes throughout the history of the literature of Great Britain will be seen in the titles of the following chapters in the Cambridge History of English Literature:


3. Particular Periods and Geographical Areas


Smith, M. W., Biblical Quotations in Middle English Before 1350. N.Y., 1911. lxix p.

II. TYPES OF LITERATURE

1. Drama
   a. Books

   Coleman, Edward D., The Bible in English Drama; an annotated List of Plays Including Translations from other Languages. N.Y.: New York Public Library, 1931. iv, 212 p.

   "The Old Testament plays are arranged according to the Hebrew canon of the Scriptures, beginning with Genesis and ending with Nehemiah. Under each book the plays are again arranged under incidents in the order given in each book . . . The New Testament plays are arranged in the order of incident as given in the Cambridge Harmony (i.e., The Cambridge Companion to the Bible, 1905, p. 334-46)."


   "Contains extant examples of church drama employed by the medieval church in western Europe as a part of public worship; text interspersed with commentary."

   b. Articles

   While it is impossible to attempt here a complete bibliography of the innumerable periodical articles on the Bible in literature, the following are given as among the more important:


2. Poetry


By far the most exhaustive investigation of English religious poetry ever undertaken. The series is not yet complete.


Arranged in chronological order with a list of authors and index of first lines. This is really a remarkable work, seldom seen in private libraries today. (Horder edited the Oxford University edition of the poetical works of Whittier.)


Bibliography: p. ix-xix.


"The contents of this volume are of two kinds—some are more or less direct quotations from the Bible, others illustrate suggestively and aptly the thought of the verse which is prefixed. I have omitted the longer and familiar poems on subjects like Rizpah, Samson, and Pilate's wife. Even so, considerations of space have prevented me from treating some books of the Bible with the same fullness of others."

As an illustration, Moffatt devotes four pages to material relevant to Genesis, but sixteen pages to material relating to Exodus. There is an index of authors, and an exhaustive index of subjects.


The two creative traditions are "Greek Themes" and "Biblical and Medieval Themes." The second division extends from page 167 to the end of the volume. This is practically an anthology, without notes and even without an index.


The particular sections relevant to this bibliography begin with p. 463. Two hundred pages are devoted exclusively to poems regarding the Lord Jesus. In many ways the most important anthology of religious poetry brought together.


3. Fiction


Biblical subjects are found on p. 39 and 40, and books relating to the life of Christ on p. 59 and 50.


4. Music


This catalog lists 171 musical titles, with composers, whose themes derive from the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament material, and that from Apocrypha, is arranged according to the books of the Bible. A copy of this was placed at my disposal by Dr. Mason Long.

5. Art


As far as I know, this brief treatment is the only comprehensive catalogue-list of this subject we have. The most valuable part of it, p. 9-46, is entitled "Painting by British and American Artists," based on "Themes from the Bible." The booklet begins with an article, "Unrecognized Influences of the Bible in Music and Art," by Albert Edward Bailey, former Professor of Religious Art, Boston University.


Of course the most elaborate work in the English language on Biblical subjects in art is that done by Mrs. Anna B. Jameson, of which the principal volumes are as follows:


6. Law

For years I have tried to find a monograph on the influence of the Bible in Law. My search is over. The librarian of Harvard Law School has introduced me to a volume published by Binfords and Mort, Portland, Ore., in 1944, which I have never seen referred to in any review or any recent literature concerning Biblical works. It is by H. B. Clark, a volume of 350 pages, *Biblical Law, being a Text of the Statutes, Ordinances and Judgments Established in the Holy Bible—With many Allusions to Secular Laws: Ancient, Medieval and Modern Documented to the Scriptures, Judicial Decisions and Legal Literature.* The volume carries a great apparatus of footnotes, and one can discover at once from these pages the influence over laws of different countries, and various states of our union, of Biblical texts. A remarkable work.

III. BIBLICAL SUBJECTS

1. Literary References to Certain Books of the Bible

The book of Psalms has been worked out with more thoroughness in this field than any other, particularly in the well known volumes of R. E. Prothero (found usually listed under the name Rowland Edmund Prothero Ernie), *The Psalms in Human Life* (Lond.: J. Murray, 1903, xii, 331 p.) and John Ker, *The Psalms in History and Biography*, (Lond.: Nelson, 1903, xvi, 219 p.

Dr. James Moffatt issued seven little books at the beginning of our century (4 x 5 inches) with the general title, *Literary Illustrations of the Bible*, covering seven different Biblical books, all published in London:

- *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1905, vi, 131 p.

This material first appeared in the *Expositor*, 6th series, Vols. 10 and 11.
2. Christ in Literature

a. Books

This is a vast subject. The following are only the more important volumes.


Divided into eight chapters: Nativity, Youth, Ministry, Death, Resurrection of Christ, and then chapters on “What Think Ye of Christ?” “The World’s Jesus,” and “Christ and the World War.” The volume was republished in 1928.

Eggleston, Edward, comp., Christ in Literature; or, The Words and Acts of Jesus, with Choice Illustrative Readings from the Great Writers of all Ages, and Embracing their best Thoughts. Chicago, 1876. Index to authors: p. 373-83; Index of subjects: p. 385-421.

The material is arranged in 44 sections in chronological order. Most of the material is in prose. Not a great work, but rather original when published. There was an edition published in New York by J. B. Ford and Co. in 1875.


To me this seems the most satisfying and exquisite anthology of Jesus in our language. There are full references for all material used, including the famous confession of that literary group that said if Shakespeare should enter the room, they would rise, but if Jesus came into the room at any time, they would kneel.


Discusses the influence of the Bible in the writings of Cynewulf, William Langland, Shakespeare and Robert Browning.


This large quarto work arranges its excellent collection of material under the following headings: His Coming, The Hidden Years, Legends, His Work on Earth, The Social Gospel, The Passion Drama, Christ as Redeemer and Savior, Afterwards, Christ Universal.

There are many anthologies concerning the death and resurrection of Christ, etc., which might be included here, and of course a great many books written around the birth of Christ might also be considered, but this would enlarge this bibliography beyond my original intention. There is one volume, however, to which I must refer here which will guide one to the literature of this theme:


b. Articles

I have not even attempted to list articles on this subject, but the following are significant:


3. Christ in Art


*Legends of the Madonna as Represented in the Fine Arts*. New ed. Lond.: Longmans, 1890. lxxx, 344 p. (several other editions.)


This volume carries an elaborate index to artists (16 columns), an index to places and an index to subjects.

Venturi, Adolfo, *The Madonna; a Pictorial Representation of the Life and Death of the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ by the Painters and Sculptors of Christendom in more than Five Hundred of their Works*. Translation and introduction by Alice Meynell. Lond.: Burns and Oates, 1902. xiii, 446 p.

This is a translation of a work that originally appeared in German in 1900.

4. Other Subjects

Probably the most exhaustive study of the influence of any one character of Scripture in European literature, apart from those relating to Christ, is the volume published in 1948 by Wilbur Owen Sypherd, *Jephthah and His Daughter* (Univ. of Delaware, xiii, 227 p.).

IV. INDIVIDUAL AUTHORS

Robert Browning, 1812-1889


John Bunyan, 1628-1688

As far as I know, no adequate study of the use of the Bible in Bunyan’s writings has been published. All I have seen is an article by L. Powys, “Bunyan, the Bible and Bedfordshire,” in the *North American Review*, 217:232-38, 1923.

Geoffrey Chaucer, 1340-1400


Charles Dickens, 1812-1872


Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803-1882


Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928


Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1807-1882


T. B. Macaulay, 1800-1859


John Milton, 1608-1674


Some idea of how saturated Milton’s writings are with the Bible may be gained by an examination of the index to the Columbia edition of his works, where, e.g., one discovers 600 lines of references to quotations from the Pentateuch alone, and 1400 lines of index under “Christ”.

**Edgar Allen Poe, 1809-1849**


**John Ruskin, 1819-1900**


The material is arranged alphabetically and, for the most part, quoted, with an index to the Scripture references. A far more extensive list is in the index volume (XXXIX) of E. T. Cook’s great edition of Ruskin’s works, p. 48-77 (about 3000 different Scripture passages).


**Sir Walter Scott, 1771-1832**

Dickson, N., *The Bible in Waverly, or Sir Walter Scott’s Use of Sacred Scriptures.* Edinb.: Longman’s, 1884. vi, 311 p.

**William Shakespeare, 1554-1616**


In the *Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies,* J. Isaacs refers to Whiter’s work, and in a letter to the *London Times Supplement,* he says, “In the pure illumination of Shakespeare’s imaginary, Whiter is at his best; and perhaps no instance is more brilliant than the tracking of Shakespeare’s Bible-reading in the line ‘Spirits are not finely touch’d But to fine issues’” (*Measure for Measure,* i, 1, 37).

For the reference to Whiter and the two preceding titles, together with this critical note, I am indebted to my friend Dr. Waldo H. Dunn, Professor of English at Scripps College, Claremont, Calif., author of the notable work, *English Biography.*

Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1782-1822

Brooke, Stopford A., "Shelley’s Interpretation of Christ and His Teaching." 

Weaver, Bennett, _Toward the Understanding of Shelley._ Ann Arbor: Univ. of Mich. Press, 1932. xii, 258 p. ( Entirely devoted to the subject of the influence of the Bible on Shelley’s writings.)

Edmund Spencer, 1552-1599


Alfred Tennyson, 1809-1892


See also his "List of Biblical Quotations and Allusions Found in the Works of Tennyson," in his _The Poetry of Tennyson_ (N.Y.: Scribner’s, 1889 and at least nine later editions), p. 273-96.

Walt Whitman, 1819-1892


John Greenleaf Whittier, 1807-1892

Stevens, James Stacey, _Whittier’s Use of the Bible._ Orono, Me.: Univ. of Maine, 1930. 103 p.

V. RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF MODERN LITERATURE

A great deal of material relating to this subject of the use of the Bible in literature may also be found in books treating the religious aspects of modern literature, a complete list of which I have no intention of making. The following, however, are suggestive:


Davies, Trevor H., _Spiritual Voices in Modern Literature._ N.Y.: Doran, 1919. 312 p.


A work not too well known, by a professor in the University of Virginia, with a superbly important concluding chapter, "The Bible in our Literature" (p. 175-230).


Since constructing the above bibliography, my attention has been called to a series of small volumes which, I deeply regret to say, were previously unknown to me (except by name). I refer to the *Temple Bible*, a helpful series of commentaries on each book of the Bible, published in pocket size, leather cover (5 x 4 inches) each edited by some outstanding Biblical scholar. These were published in 1902 in London by J. M. Dent and Company, and in Philadelphia by the Lippincott Company. They have been out of print for many years. At the end of each of these volumes is a remarkable appendix, "Biblical References in English Literature." The one I am using here is the one on Genesis, edited by the great archaeologist, A. H. Sayce. There are approximately 140 references to famous works in English literature in this appendix! Who was responsible for these excellent lists, I do not know. Learning of this series, I talked to a number of men well acquainted with Biblical literature, and as none of them had ever seen a copy of this it may be that others will here find what I did, a previously unknown but important work. This work was first called to my attention by Dr. Mason Long, of Pennsylvania State College.

In a number of the issues of *The Bible World* for 1898 appeared some very important collections of material generally entitled, "Material From English Literature Illustrative of the International Sunday School Lessons." For many years Dr. Amos R. Wells had an important list of revelant material called "The Lesson in Literature," in the annual volume of Peloubet's *Select Notes on the International Sunday School Lessons*. The list was only fragmentary, and did not indicate what texts of the lesson were used in the titles mentioned. In the last few years in this volume, which I have the honor of editing, I have attempted to conclude each lesson with a paragraph entitled "The Lesson in Life and Literature."

There is one encyclopaedic article that contains excellent material, and valuable bibliographies on many of the above subjects, "The Bible in the Church," by E. von Dobschütz, in *Hasting's Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. II, p. 579-615 (approximately 45,000 words).
I think an excellent way to conclude this bibliography would be to quote one of the finest paragraphs on the influence of the Authorized Version of the Bible that has been written in the last half-century:

"... the Bible [possesses] a universality which has placed it at the foundation, or the head, or both, of all modern literatures. There are several reasons for this. Every one is interested in the origin of the world and of man. It may be warrantably urged that no other literature gives so plain and coherent an account of these origins, and of the early history of mankind, as the book of Genesis. Next, the Bible emphasizes the conception that all nations are of one blood, and that all men are brethren, since their Father is one. This, in satisfying the social instinct, has tended more and more to draw tribe to tribe, and kingdom to kingdom, as well as individual to individual, and, indirectly, has appealed to national and personal ambition. Thirdly, the morality of the Bible, even where its takes the form of statutory enactments, keeps in view the interests of individual happiness and social well-being. Fourthly, the Hebrew race is presented as in some sort the prototype, or the beneficent elder brother, of all other races and nationalities, so that any of its experiences are likely to find a parallel in subsequent history... Fifthly, the future of mankind is regarded in the Bible as bound up with the general acceptance of Hebraic principles and ideals. Sixthly, the utmost fulness of individual life is represented as conditional upon the acceptance of that God who first distinctly revealed Himself to the Hebrews, upon obedience to Him, and upon spiritual union with Him. With this is associated the Messianic hope of a Deliverer, who, greater than His brethren, yet even as they, should serve to bring God down to man, and lift man up to God. These, perhaps, are reasons enough why, notwithstanding the lyrical note which is everywhere heard throughout the Bible, it possesses also a character of universality, and, one might also say, of impersonality. Thus, the Psalter, the most lyrical part of the Bible, is perhaps the widest in its appeal of any, simply because the cry of the individual believer, however impassioned, finds an echo in every other believing soul, and is not without some response from even the most apathetic." (Albert S. Cook: *The Authorized Version of the Bible and Its Influence*, p. 17-19).

Note: Inasmuch as I have never been a teacher of English Literature, I am sure that there are some titles which have been inadvertently omitted. I would greatly appreciate hearing from any who know of such items that might be included in a revision of this bibliography. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Arnold D. Ehler, Librarian of Fuller Theological Seminary, and Miss Clara B. Allen, Assistant Librarian, for painstakingly checking this list with the Library of Congress Catalog of Printed Cards and other bibliographical helps, resulting in the addition of considerable bibliographical data, and in some places, important corrections. In returning the corrected manuscript to me, Dr. Ehler adds this note: "Reasonable care has been exercised to verify the bibliographical data here presented, and to provide full entries, but a number of titles do not appear in the Library of Congress Catalog of Printed Cards, the English Catalog, or the Cumulative Book Index, in which cases entries may not be complete. In the case of some periodical articles, it was impractical to examine the issue to obtain full data."