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THE ENGLISH BIBLE.

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Continued from RECORDER of last September.

II.—THE TRANSLATION OF WYCLIFFE.

THE first complete version of Scripture in the English language we owe to the energy of Wycliffe—the morning-star of the Reformation. This we know has been denied, both by the friends and the enemies of the Reformation; but after a very careful examination, we repeat the assertion that there was no complete version of Holy Scripture in English prior to that of Wycliffe. As it is desirable that the truth on this subject should be clearly known, we shall devote a few sentences to the elucidation of the disputed point.

The Elizabethan Reformers, anxious to prove that the withholding of the Scriptures from the laity was an innovation, and not the ancient practice of the church, somewhat overstated their case, and trusting too much to vague expressions, asserted that the whole Bible had been translated into the native language, in the Anglo-Saxon times, and was publicly read in church in this vernacular version. Thus John Foxe says, "If histories be well examined, we shall find both before the Conquest and after, as well before John Wycliffe was born as since, the whole body of the Scriptures by sundry men translated into this our country tongue."

On the other hand, the apologists of the Church of Rome, both at the time of the Reformation and in our own days, equally anxious to free her from the opprobrious charge of having withheld from the laity the Word of God in their native language, have pertinaciously maintained that it was only Wycliffe's version that was forbidden, and that there were other earlier versions, which might be read with impunity. Sir Thomas More, obviously ashamed of the conduct of the bishops of his own days in burning the English Bible, strives hard to show that his hostility was directed not against all English versions, but only against the "heretical and depraved translations."