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THE BIBLE AND THE REFORMATION.

BY AN ENGLISH MINISTER.

ONE of the earliest uses to which the invention of printing was applied was the wider circulation of the word of God. In fact, the Bible was the first large volume which issued from the press: it was the Vulgate Latin, and the date usually ascribed to it is A. D. 1455. In 1471, Malermi's Italian version was published. A Dutch translation appeared in 1475, and one in French in 1477. In the following year, a learned Spaniard, Boniface Ferrier, printed at Valencia a version in the language of his native country; but it was quickly destroyed by the Inquisition, and a complete copy does not now exist. An edition of the German Bible was put forth in 1483. The Bohemian version was published in 1488. Some of these editions, particularly the Latin, were reprinted several times before the beginning of the reformation in Germany.

There is no reason to believe, however, that any considerable effect was produced by the circulation of the Scriptures before the time of Luther. The translations just mentioned were very imperfect: the high price of books operated as a prohibition on the greatest part of the community; and the number printed was in all

cases small, the editions varying from three to five hundred. Even then, it was difficult to dispose of the article, so limited was the demand. Printers seem to have thought that the best book would have the best sale, and speculated accordingly; but it was a measure in advance of the age. The public mind was not yet prepared for the word of God.

Nevertheless, the requisite preparation was advancing with rapid steps. The revival of learning was in successful progress, and was destined to accomplish a marvellous revolution in society. In the fifteenth century, knowledge began to be sought with unparalleled eagerness by all ranks and classes; and as it pursued its triumphant course, it threw a blaze of light on long established opinions and practices, revealing enormities hitherto unsuspected, and bringing into the glare of day the "hidden things of darkness." Learning was first the herald and harbinger, and then the firm ally of the reformation.

In the year 1503, a student at the university of Erfurth was prosecuting some inquiries in the public library, when he casually opened a Bible.