

E S S A Y,

&c.

I. "IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH . . . GOD CREATED MAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE; IN THE IMAGE OF GOD CREATED HE HIM." Such is the only authentic record in existence of the first formation of our species, and of the world which we inhabit. Whence is it extracted? What adventurous author has dared to lay open to our unhallowed eyes the history of events hitherto involved in the mists of antiquity? This most curious account is contained in the Bible; a book which stands forth in so-

litary grandeur, a sublime record of days long since gone by, an imperishable monument of the olden time,—which rears aloft its gigantic head

As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,
Swells from the vale and midway leaves the storm.

The apparent audacity^a of this undertaking can only be equalled by the excellence of its execution. What beauties are not united in its pages! beauties almost incompatible with one another. The originality which pervades every line, (and which might be expected, as there was no book in existence from which it could borrow,) is not marred by that primitive rudeness which usually characterizes the works of the early stages of man's existence. Within this volume are to be found the oldest history, the oldest code of laws, and not only the oldest, but the most beautiful poetry that has been handed down to us. It is the object of this Essay to examine the influence which the translation of this truly great work into our

^a It should be mentioned that the "Holy Bible" is here considered only as a literary work.

language has produced upon English literature; a subject than which none could have been selected of more importance, or of greater difficulty; which embraces the consideration of the effects which the most interesting work ever committed to the hands of mankind has produced upon that language; which bids fair to become, if it is not so already, the most generally diffused^b upon the face of the earth. It is evident that, whatever may have been the influence of the Bible translation upon our literature, it must have been exerted, in a great measure, through the medium of language. It will not, therefore, be irrelevant to the subject, if we should set out by giving a short account of the formation of the English language, and of its progress up to the time of the translation of the Bible; having done which,

^b On the European continent, the English language is very generally understood by many of the higher ranks, particularly in the north. In America it is the common language of the whole (with a small exception) of the northern continent, and of a great part of the West Indies, and is understood by the merchants of the southern hemisphere. In Asia, our Indian possessions ensure its progress, while we are yet unable to determine by what, as yet unborn, nations, it may be spoken, sprung from our numerous colonies in Africa and Australasia.

we shall proceed to examine the effects which the latter has produced by means of a cursory review of English literature down to the present day.

II. The Norman conquerors of England, men of the most lawless and ferocious habits, who had been allured by the promises which were held out to them of lands and possessions to be won by their valour in our island, were by no means disposed to forego the realizing execution of these brilliant visions, when they found themselves the undisputed possessors of the Saxon kingdom. But it was impossible to satisfy the demands of such a number of men without entirely extirpating the ancient race of native nobility, of whom many had survived the battle of Hastings. This policy, therefore, William, whether reluctantly or not, was compelled to pursue; and from henceforth, for nearly four centuries, there can be traced in our island two distinct races; the one filling all places of power, trust, or emolument; the other condemned almost to a state of servitude, and never al-