

LECTURE

ON THE EXCELLENCY

OF THE

PRESENT ENGLISH VERSION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

NEHEMIAH viii. 8.

“ So they read in the book, in the law of God, distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.”

IF God has given us a revelation of his will, and that revelation be contained in the sacred scriptures, the Sacred Scriptures must be at once, the fountain whence religious truth emanates, and the infallible Judge in controversies. All denominations of protestants therefore refer to the sacred book as the source whence they derive their tenets; and in their mutual controversies profess to decide every dispute by its authority. But if once any doubt be entertained that the version in general use is faithful, a wide field is opened for interminable discussion. A small number of men only, compared with the bulk of a nation, is versed in foreign, especially in ancient languages. A still smaller number is familiar with Hebrew and Greek, the languages of the sacred scriptures. And it must be very painful to the common people to hear the teachers in whose learning, piety and judgment they confide, insinuate, that our established version gives a distorted picture of the original. In this way much has been done, latterly, to shake the faith of men in the great doctrines of christianity, such as the Trinity, the fall of man, the depravity of human nature, the deity of Christ, the

atonement, the personality, divinity and influence of the Holy Spirit, justification by faith, the existence and agency of good and bad spirits superior to man, and the eternity of the future punishment reserved for the wicked. Great pains have been taken to point out the blemishes and faults which exist in our authorized version, as in all works merely human. Alterations and improvements have been suggested, one after another, till an impression has been made, that no dependence can be placed on the established version in such places as refer to the great doctrines of christianity. It has been gravely stated that the prejudices of infidels are attributable to the blunders of the English version: and some have hinted that, were the sacred books fairly translated, much of the evidence which now appears in them for orthodox sentiments would be silently annihilated. I shall enter no farther into this subject, as my present hearers can be no strangers to the attempts which in this town have been made to diminish their confidence in the fidelity and excellency of the authorized version.—In discussing this momentous subject before a general audience, I shall follow this easy method.—I shall

I. Give a history of the translations which preceded, and paved the way for our version.

II. State the manner in which the version itself was accomplished.

III. Subjoin the testimonies of some of the first scholars and critics to the excellence of our version.

IV. And examine briefly the claims of the improved version.

1. Let me detail the translations which paved

the way for our present one, and which the translators used as helps in their great undertaking.

The first is the Septuagint, the oldest in the world, and the ground work of all the Translations which have followed. This is a Translation into Greek of the Old Testament. It was made in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, about two hundred and eighty years before Christ, was universally used in the Jewish synagogues, and was for three hundred years equally venerated by the Christian churches. It is called the Septuagint because seventy two interpreters are recorded to have been employed in the great work.

2. The Jewish Targums may be next mentioned. After the Babylonish captivity, the purity of the Hebrew tongue was corrupted, and neighbouring dialects prevailed among the Jews. These Targums are paraphrases of the Hebrew text in the Chaldee, and in many instances both afford a clear light to the meaning of the Hebrew, and an unquestionable evidence of the ancient Jewish faith in the divinity and spiritual kingdom of the Messiah.

3. The Samaritan is next in order. This is a very servile copy of the Pentateuch, and by its singular deviations from it in some texts has excited much discussion among the learned.

4. Of all modern versions, the Syriac versions stand first. They were made most probably in an early part of the second century. There are two Syriac versions of the Old Testament, one made from the Seventy, and one from the Hebrew original. The version of the New Testament has long been highly valued among scholars.