AN

Historical ACCOUNT

Of the Several

English Translations

OF THE

BIBLE

ONE Thing censur'd by the Church of Rome in our Reformation, is, The committing so much Heavenly Treasure to such rotten Vessels, the trusting so much excellent Wine, to such musty Bottles; I mean, the Version of the Scriptures into the usual Languages of the common People, and the promiscuous Liberty indulged them therein. This they charge as an Innovation of a dangerous Consequence. But the constant Current of Antiquity does affirm the contrary, which plainly shews,
that the Church did neither innovate in this Act of Her's, nor deviate therein from the Word of God, or from the Usage of the best and happiest Times of the Church of Christ.

The Word of God, no doubt, was committed unto Writing, that it might be read by all that were to be directed and guided by it. The Scriptures of the Old Testament were first written in Hebrew, the Vulgar Language of the Jews, and read unto them publickly in their Synagogues every Sabbath Day, Acts xiii. 27. and xv. 21. The New Testament was writ in Greek, the most known and studied Language of the Eastern World, for the same Reason; and written for this End and Purpose, that Men might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they might have Life in his Name, John xx. 31. But being that all the Faithful did not understand these Languages, and that the Light of Holy Scripture might not be likened to a Candle hid under a Bushel, it was thought good by many godly Men in the Primitive Times, to translate the same into the Languages of the Countries in which they lived, or of which they had been Natives: Concerning which Theodoret (who lived in the Beginning of the fifth Century) ad Græc. Infid. Serm. 5. thus speaks; We Christians are enabled to shew the Power of Apostolick and Prophetick Doctrines, which have
have fill'd all Countries under Heaven. For
that which was formerly uttered in Hebrew,
is not only translated into the Language of
the Græcians, but also of the Romans, the
Indians, Persians, Armenians, Scythians,
Sarmatians, Egyptians, and, in a Word, in-
to all the Languages that are used by any
Nation. For the Sacred Writ being the
Foundation of the Christian Religion, upon
which they built the whole System of their
Morality and Doctrine, and which the Chris-
tians were obliged to read both in Publick
and Private; the several Churches of the
World could not be long without such Trans-
lations as might be understood by every
Body.

Not to mention other Places, this was
done here in England, by Adelm or Alde-
helm the first Bishop of Sherborn, who
translated the Pflater into the Saxon Tongue,
about the Year 706. This Adelm, in his
Book de Virginitate, praises the Nuns to
whom he writ, that studying the Holy
Scriptures, they had manifested their In-
dustry and Towardliness in the daily read-
ing of them. And Bede, l. 3. c. 5. ad Anno
634. tells us how Aidan (a Scotch Bishop,
who promoted Christianity in the Kingdom
of Northumberland, in the Reign of King
Oswald, and fixed his See in Holy Island)
took Care that all those that travelled with
him, whether Clergy or Laity, should
B 2 spend
spend a considerable Part of their Time in reading the Holy Scriptures: And the Saxon Homilies exhort the People with great Earnestness, to the frequent Perusal of the Scriptures; and inforce the Advice from the great Benefit of that Exercise. At this Time of Day the Bible was not accounted a dangerous Book; it was not lock'd up in an unknown Tongue, or kept under Restraint, or granted with Faculties and Dispensations. In those Days there was a Translation of the Scriptures extant in the Vulgar Language, otherwise it had been impossible for the Women to have studied them, when the Knowledge of the Latin Tongue was so rare in those Days, that few of the Clergy understood it; and this Adelm was the first of our English Nation who wrote in Latin; having been educated at Rome and in France. He wrote a Letter to Egbert (whom they also called Ethfrid, Eadfrid, and Ecksfrid) Bishop of Landisfern, extant in Wharton's Autarian Hist. Dogmat. Usserij, p. 351; in which he exhorts him, that for the common Benefit and Use of all People, the Scriptures might be put into the Vulgar Language, which Butler in his Book against the Vulgar Translation, says he did. And Archbishop Usher, in his Historia Dogmatica, c. 5. tells us, that the Saxon Translation of the Evangelists done by Egbert, without Distinction of Chapters,