

INTRODUCTION.

AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE SEPTUAGINT VERSION.

The earliest version of the Old Testament Scriptures which is extant, or of which we possess any certain knowledge, is the translation executed at Alexandria in the third century before the Christian era: this version has been so habitually known by the name of the SEPTUAGINT, that the attempt of some learned men in modern times to introduce the designation of the Alexandrian version (as more correct) has been far from successful.

The history of the origin of this translation was embellished with various fables at so early a period, that it has been a work of patient critical research in later times to bring in plain light the facts which may be regarded as well authenticated.

A writer, who calls himself Aristeas, says that when Ptolmy Philadelphus was engaged in the formation of the Alexandrian Library, he was advised by Demetrius Phalereus to procure a translation of the sacred books of the Jews. The king accordingly, as a preliminary, purchased the freedom of more than one hundred thousand Jewish captives, and he then sent a deputation, of which Aristeas himself was one, to Eleazar the high-priest to request a copy of the Jewish Law and *seventy-two* interpreters, six out of each tribe. To this the priest is represented to have agreed; and after the arrival of the translators and their magnificent reception by the king, they are said to have been conducted to an island by Demetrius, who wrote down the renderings on which they agreed by mutual conference; and thus the work is stated to have been completed in seventy-two days. The translators are then said to have received from the king most abundant rewards; and the Jews are stated to have asked permission to take copies of the version.

Other additions were subsequently made to this story: some said that each translator was shut into a separate cell, and that all by divine inspiration made their versions word for word alike; others said that there were two in each cell, accompanied by an amanuensis; but at all events miracle and direct inspiration were supposed to be connected with the translation: hence we cannot wonder that the authority attached to this version in the minds of those who believed these stories was almost unbounded.

The variety of the translators is proved by the unequal character of the version: some books show that the translators by no means competent to the task, while others, on the contrary exhibit on the whole a careful translation. The Pentateuch is considered to be part the best executed, while the book of Isaiah appears to be the very worst.