

during its two thousand five hundred years of authentic history. Nor is it difficult to conceive how such repetitions of the original tradition *should* have taken place. The traditions of the same event preserved by tribes living in even the same tract of country come in course of time considerably to differ from each other in their adjuncts and circumstances; those, for instance, of the various tribes of the Orinoco do so; and should these tribes come to be fused ultimately into one nation, nothing seems more probable than that their varying editions, instead of being also fused together, should remain distinct, as the recollections of separate and independent catastrophes. And thus the several deluges of Grecian mythology may in reality testify, not to the occurrence of several floods, but to the existence merely of several independent tribes, among whom the one great tradition has been so altered and modified ere they came to possess a common literature, that when at length they became skilful enough to place it on record, it appeared to them not as one, but as many. The admirable reflection of Humboldt suggested by the South American tradition seems, incidentally at least, to bear out this view. "Those ancient traditions of the human race," he says, "which we find dispersed over the whole surface of the globe, like the relics of a vast shipwreck, are highly interesting in the philosophical study of our own species. How many different tongues belonging to branches that appear totally distinct transmit to us the same facts! The traditions concerning races that have been destroyed, and the renewal of nature, scarcely vary in reality, though every nation gives them a local colouring. In the great continents, as in the smallest islands of the Pacific Ocean, it is always on the loftiest and nearest mountain that the remains of the human race have been saved; and this event appears the more recent in proportion as the nations are uncultivated, and as the knowledge they have of their own existence has