

the soil beneath the plains of the Nile, but that also the hills bounding the great valley, contained marine shells; and Herodotus inferred from these facts, that all lower Egypt, and even the high lands above Memphis had once been covered by the sea.* As similar fossil remains occur in all parts of Asia hitherto explored, far in the interior of the continent as well as near the sea, they could hardly have escaped detection by some Eastern sages not less capable than the Greek historian of reasoning philosophically on natural phenomena.

We also know that the rulers of Asia were engaged in very remote eras in executing great national works, such as tanks and canals requiring extensive excavations. In the fourteenth century of our era, (in the year 1360,) the removal of soil necessary for such undertakings brought to light geological facts, which attracted the attention of a people less civilized than were many of the older nations of the East. The historian Ferishta, relates that fifty thousand labourers were employed in cutting through a mound, so as to form a junction between the rivers Selima and Sutlej; and in this mound were found the bones of elephants and men, some of them petrified, and some of them resembling bone. The gigantic dimensions attributed to the human bones show them to have belonged to some of the larger pachydermata.†

But although the Brahmins, like the priests of Egypt, may have been acquainted with the existence of fossil remains in the strata, it is possible that the doctrine of successive destructions and renovations of the world, merely received corroboration from such proofs; and that it may have been originally handed down, like the religious traditions of most nations, from a ruder state of society. The system may have had its source, in part at least, in exaggerated accounts of those dreadful catastrophes, which are occasioned by particular combinations of natural causes. Floods and volcanic eruptions, the agency of water and fire, are the chief instruments of devastation on our globe. We shall point out in the sequel the extent of many of these calamities, recurring at distant intervals of time, in the present course of nature; and shall only observe here, that they are so peculiarly calculated to inspire a lasting terror, and are so often fatal in their consequences to great multitudes of people, that it scarcely requires the passion for the marvellous, so characteristic of rude and half-civilized nations, still less the exuberant imagination of Eastern writers, to augment them into general cataclysms and conflagrations.

The great flood of the Chinese, which their traditions carry back to the period of Yaou, something more than 2000 years before our era, has been identified by some persons with the universal deluge described in the Old Testament; but according to Mr. Davis, who accompanied two of our embassies to China, and who has carefully

* Herodot. Euterpe, 12.

† A Persian MS. copy of the historian Ferishta, in the library of the East India Company, relating to the rise and progress of the Mahomedan empire in India, was

procured by Colonel Briggs from the library of Tippoo Sultan in 1799; which has been referred to at some length by Dr. Buckland. (Geol. Trans. 2d Series, vol. ii. part iii. p. 389.)