

The notion of a series of creations and destructions of worlds, which appears in the sacred volume of the Hindoos, which formed part of the traditionary lore of Egypt, and which was afterwards adopted into the poetry and philosophy of Greece, must be considered as a mythological, not a physical, doctrine. When this doctrine was dwelt upon, men's thoughts were directed, not to the terrestrial facts which it seemed to explain, but to the attributes of the deities which it illustrated. The conception of a Supreme power, impelling and guiding the progress of events, which is permanent among all perpetual change, and regular among all seeming chance, was readily entertained by contemplative and enthusiastic minds; and when natural phenomena were referred to this doctrine, it was rather for the purpose of fastening its impressiveness upon the senses, than in the way of giving to it authority and support. Hence we perceive that in the exposition of this doctrine, an attempt was always made to fill and elevate the mind with the notions of marvellous events, and of infinite times, in which vast cycles of order recurred. The "great year," in which all celestial phenomena come round, offered itself as capable of being calculated; and a similar great year was readily assumed for terrestrial and human events. Hence there were to be brought round by great cycles, not only deluges and conflagrations which were to destroy and renovate the earth, but also the series of historical occurrences. Not only the sea and land were to recommence their alternations, but there was to be another Argo, which should carry warriors on the first sea-foray,² and another succession of heroic wars. Looking at the passages of ancient authors which refer to terrestrial changes in this view, we shall see that they are addressed almost entirely to the love of the marvellous and the infinite, and cannot with propriety be taken as indications of a spirit of physical philosophy. For example, if we turn to the celebrated passage in Ovid,³ where Pythagoras is represented as asserting that land becomes sea, and sea land, and many other changes which geologists have verified, we find that these observations are associated with many fables, as being matter of exactly the same kind;—the fountain of Ammon which was cold by day and warm by night;⁴—the waters of Salmacis which effeminate men;—the Clitorian spring which makes them loathe wine;—the Simplegades islands which were once moveable;—the Tritonian lake which covered men's bodies with feathers;—and many similar marvels. And the general purport of

² Virg. *Eclog.* 4.

³ *Met.* Lib. xv.

⁴ V. 309, &c.