

tribes and nations seems to resemble that of individuals. There are characters and events which impress it so strongly, that they seem never to be forgotten, but live as traditions, sometimes mayhap very vague, and much modified by the inventions of an after time, but which, in floating downwards to late ages, always bear about them a certain strong impress of their pristine reality. They are shadows that have become ill-defined from the vast distance of the objects that cast them,—like the shadows of great birds flung, in a summer's day, from the blue depths of the sky to the landscape far below,—but whose very presence, however diffused they may have become, testifies to the existence of the remote realities from which they are thrown, and without which they could have had no being at all. The old mythologies are filled with shadowy traditions of this kind,—shadows of the world's "gray fathers,"—which, like those shadows seen reflected on clouds by travellers who ascend lofty mountains, are exaggerated into the most gigantic proportions, and bear radiant glories around their heads.

There is, however, one special tradition which seems to be more deeply impressed and more widely spread than any of the others. The destruction of well nigh the whole human race, in an early age of the world's history, by a great deluge, appears to have so impressed the minds of the few survivors, and seems to have been handed down to their children, in consequence, with such terror-struck impressiveness, that their remote descendants of the present day have not even yet forgotten it. It appears in almost every mythology, and lives in the most distant countries, and among the most barbarous tribes. It was the laudable ambition of Humboldt,—first entertained at a very early period of life,—to penetrate into distant regions, unknown to the natives of Europe at the time, that he might acquaint himself, in fields of research altogether fresh and new, with men and