

the French and Swedes gave laws to the empire; a treaty, however, salutary in the main, as settling the ruinous quarrels between her contending princes.

We see France, in the minority of Louis XIV., harassed with the disorders of the Fronde, originating in the unpopular administration of Mazarin. After his death, we remark the genius of Louis displaying itself in a variety of splendid enterprises; his views seconded by the abilities of his ministers and generals; while the excellent order of the finances enables him easily to execute the most important designs. The opening to the succession of the Spanish crown, while it increases for awhile the glory of his arms, leads finally to the mortifying reverse of his fortune; and we behold the latter years of this memorable reign as unfortunate, as the former had been marked with splendor and success.

Meantime, two rival powers of high celebrity call our attention to a variety of interesting scenes in the North of Europe. Russia, till now in absolute barbarism, becomes at once, by the abilities of a single man, a powerful and polished empire. Sweden, under the minority of its prince, ready to be torn in pieces by the powers of Russia, Denmark, and Poland, becomes, in a single campaign, the terror of the surrounding kingdoms. We see this prince, a second Alexander, in a career as short and as impetuous, carry those heroic virtues which he possessed to an extreme as dangerous as their opposite vices.

At this period we close our delineation of modern history, with a view of the progress of the sciences, and of the state of literature in Europe, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Such is the plan to be pursued in the following Commentaries. Of the merits or defects of the arrangement, those who possess an extensive knowledge of history, and who have prosecuted that study to its best purposes,—instruction in political and moral science,—are best fitted to form a judgment. To the general reader, I trust it will at least be found to possess the qualities of simplicity and perspicuity.

With regard to chronology, it is necessary to remark that, without entering into any discussion of the merits of the different systems, I have chosen to follow the chronology of Archbishop Usher, or that which is founded on the Hebrew text of the Sacred Writings; and this for the sole reason, that it has been most generally adopted by the writers both of our own and of foreign nations.

CHAPTER II.

Earliest Ages of the World—Early History of Assyria—Of Egypt—Invasion of the Shepherd Kings.

PROFANE History, agreeing with sacred, joins in the establishment of this great truth, which reason itself, independently of authority, must have clearly evinced, that this visible system of things which we term the Universe has had its commencement.

All accounts of the early history of single nations trace them back to a state of rudeness and barbarism, which argues a new and an infant establishment; and we must conclude that to be true with respect to the whole, which we find to be true with respect to all its parts. But to delineate the characters of this early state of society, to trace distinctly the steps by which population extended over the whole surface of the habitable globe; the separation of mankind into tribes and nations; the causes which led to the formation of the first kingdoms, and the precise times when they were formed—are matters of inquiry for which neither sacred nor profane history affords us that amplitude of information which is necessary for giving clear and positive ideas. But while we travel through those remote periods of the history of an infant world, making the best of those lights we can procure, we have the comfort of thinking that, in proportion as man advances from barbarism to civilization, in proportion as his history becomes useful or instructive, its certainty increases, and its materials become more authentic and more abundant.

The Hebrew text of the sacred writings informs us that a period of 1656 years elapsed between the Creation of the world and the Deluge. The Books of Moses contain a brief detail of the transactions of that period, and are the only records of those ages. With regard to the state of the antediluvian world, speculative men have exercised their fancy in numberless conjectures. Various notions have been formed concerning the population of this globe and its physical appearance—probable causes conjectured of the longevity of its inhabitants—inquiries into the state of the arts—and theories framed of that process of nature by which the Almighty Being is supposed to have brought about the universal deluge. These are, no doubt, ingenious and interesting speculations; but they can scarcely be said to fall within the department of history, of which it is the province to instruct by ascer-

tained facts, and not to amuse by fanciful theories. To us, who wish to derive from history a knowledge of human nature as it is at present, and to study those important lessons which it furnishes for the conduct of life, it is of little consequence to know what was either the physical or the political state of the world before the deluge. As so entire a change must have been caused by that event on the face of nature, as totally to extinguish all traces of antediluvian knowledge, and to reduce the world anew to a state of infancy, we are well assured that the manners, customs, arts, sciences, and political arrangements of the antediluvian ages could have had little or no influence on those which succeeded them.

Of the times immediately following the deluge, we have no other original history than that contained in the Books of Moses. The sacred writings inform us, that the family of Noah established themselves in the plain of Shinaar, where they built the Tower of Babel, and that the confusion of their language caused their dispersion into the different regions of the earth.

A view of the physical surface of this habitable globe, parted, as we observe it is, by those great natural boundaries, the chains of mountains, and the rivers which intersect it, affords the most convincing evidence that the earth was intended by the great Architect of all things to be peopled by various tribes and nations, who should be perpetually separated from each other by those eternal barriers, which will ever prevent empires and states from permanently exceeding a just bound of territory. Without those natural boundaries, the limits of kingdoms must have been continually fluctuating; and perpetual discord must have embroiled the universe. An ambitious potentate may, with the accidental concurrence of favorable circumstances, enlarge for a time the limits of an empire, beyond this just proportion; but the *force* of government and laws is weakened as its sphere is extended: and the encroachment being clearly marked and defined by those natural barriers, the lost territory will scarcely fail to be regained; and the revolution of a few years will again bring empires and kingdoms to their ancient limits.

The physical nature, with respect to soil and climate, of the different countries into which the inhabitants of the earth were dispersed, must, in most cases, have determined their manner of life, and influenced the condition of society. If, before their dispersion, mankind had made any progress in the arts, as, after that event, many of those wandering tribes must, from the nature of the countries which they occupied, have betaken themselves to the pastoral life, while others subsisted solely as hunters, the arts among them being totally neglected from finding no call to their exercise; it is no wonder that we observe, soon after the deluge, the greater part of the nations in a state of barbarism, or little advanced beyond that condition. Such of the original tribes, how-

ever, as, without any distant migration, had fixed themselves in the vicinity of their primeval seats, that is, on the borders of the Mediterranean Sea, very naturally retained and cultivated those arts of which their progenitors had been in possession. Thus, Nimrod, the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah, about 150 years after the deluge, is said to have founded Babylon; and Assur, the grandson of Noah, to have built the city of Nineveh, which became the capital of the Assyrian empire: but the Mosaic writings make no more mention of Nimrod, or of Assur, or any of their successors.

Profane historians, on the other hand, make Belus the founder of Babylon, who is therefore supposed to have been the same with Nimrod. His son, Ninus, to whom those historians attribute the foundation of Nineveh, is said to have been the conqueror of India and Bactriana; and under him and his queen Semiramis, who reigned alone after his death, the Assyrian empire is supposed to have attained a very high degree of splendor. The magnificence of Babylon and of Nineveh would indeed give immense ideas of the wealth and power of Ninus and Semiramis; but it is scarcely credible that Nineveh, in the time of its founder, and Babylon, under the son of its founder, should either have been splendid in themselves, or the empire very considerable to which they belonged. It is the conjecture of other historians, that Nineveh and Babylon, till the year 590 after the deluge, were separate monarchies; that Ninus, who reigned at Nineveh, made the conquest of Babylon; and that the date of the Assyrian empire, properly so called, is to be fixed only at the union of these kingdoms. But these are discussions of more curiosity than importance, and we shall not enter into them.

From the death of Ninias, the son of Ninus, down to the revolt of the Medes under Sardanapalus, there is an interval of 800 years, in which there is an absolute void in the history of Assyria and Babylon. The names, indeed, of the supposed sovereigns during that period are preserved, but there are no traces of historical events. Even the catalogue of the names of those princes appears suspicious, from their being taken from the Greek and Persian languages; as, for example, Lamprides, Dercylus, Amyntas, Xerxes, Aramites. This, however, is no conclusive evidence of forgery; since we know how common has been the practice of authors of translating proper names (such, at least, as have characteristic significations) from their original, into the language used by the historian.* By those who support the authenticity of this cata-

* Among the modern writers, Buchanan and the President De Thou have signally impaired the utility of their excellent histories by this most injudicious practice. It is true that the French and English terminations of proper names accord extremely ill with the harmonious flow of classical Latin composition; but this defect might in most cases be remedied by simply giving those names

logue of the Assyrian and Babylonish monarchs, the obscurity of their reigns has been attributed to the indolence, effeminacy, and debauchery in which they were plunged. This, however, is a weak supposition. It is against all moral probability that a great empire should have subsisted without a revolution for 800 years, under a series of dissolute, weak, and effeminate monarchs. That character in the prince is the parent of seditions, conspiracies, and rebellion among the people, instead of a quiet and peaceable subjection; and, accordingly, we find that the kingdom of Babylon, till then united with Assyria, shook off its yoke under the weak and dissolute Sardanapalus. If we are at all to form a conjecture of the state of the Assyrian empire during this great chasm in its history, it must be a very different one; namely, that it was governed by a series of wise, virtuous, and pacific princes, the uniform tenor of whose reigns have furnished no striking events for the mouth of tradition, or for the pen of the historian.

Besides the Assyrians, the Egyptians are the only nation of whom profane history, at this early period, makes any mention: but the commencement of their history is as uncertain as that of the Assyrians. Menes is supposed the first king in Egypt, and according to the most probable theory, which connects the sacred with the profane history, he is believed to be the same person with Misraim, the grandson of Noah, whom there are likewise very probable grounds for supposing to be the deified personage whom the Egyptians venerated under the name of Osiris. Osiris is described as the inventor of arts, and the civilizer of a great part of the world. He raised, as we are told, a prodigious army, and overran Ethiopia, Arabia, and great part of India; appeared in all the nations of Asia, and, crossing the Hellespont, continued his progress through a great part of Europe. This extraordinary man disseminated the arts, built cities, and was universally revered as a god. Returning to Egypt, he was assassinated by his brother Typhon; but his death was revenged by his sister Isis, and his apotheosis solemnly performed.

After Menes or Osiris, Egypt was governed by a succession of illustrious men, whom succeeding ages have characterized as gods and demigods. The country was then divided into four dynasties, —Thebes, Thin, Memphis, and Tanis; the inhabitants of which had made great progress in civilization and the culture of the arts, when they were thrown back into a state of comparative barbarism by the invasion of the shepherd kings, a body of marauders from Ethiopia, who made a partition of the whole country, each of the chiefs governing independently a separate province.* The do-

a Latin termination. The disguise is impenetrable where the word itself is attempted to be translated, as *Plexippus* (Harry Hotspur,) *Sophocardius* (Wishart,) *Megalocephalus* (Malcolm Canmore,) &c.

* Mr. Bruce, in his History of Abyssinia, has made it extremely probable

minion of these shepherd kings is said to have subsisted for 259 years, when they were expelled by Aonosis, a prince of Upper Egypt, and forced to retreat with their adherents into the neighboring countries of Syria and Palestine. What space of time elapsed from the termination put to their dominion by the famous Sesostris, is absolutely uncertain; nor with regard to this prince, can we give any credit to those most hyperbolic accounts either of his foreign conquests or his domestic policy, and the wonderful economy of his government. Yet, though we cannot easily believe with Herodotus that the sovereign of a country which is said to have contained 27,000,000 of inhabitants, could effect an equal partition of all the lands of the empire among his subjects; nor with Diodorus Siculus, that the same prince, with an army of 600,000 men, and 27,000 armed chariots, traversed and subdued the whole continent of Asia and a great part of Europe, we may at least hold it probable that the Egyptians had a sovereign of the name of Sesostris, who distinguished himself in those rude ages, both as a conqueror and a legislator. The reverence paid to the name of Sesostris by the ancient Egyptians, and the honors done to his memory as a great benefactor of his country, sufficiently prove the reality of such a personage.

CHAPTER III.

On the nature of the first Governments, and on the Manners and Customs, Laws Arts, and Sciences of the early Nations.

AMIDST the scanty materials of authentic history in those early ages of the world, it may afford matter of amusing as well as useful speculation, to consider what must have been the nature of the first governments; and to endeavor to discover the genius of the ancient nations from those traces of laws, manners and customs, arts and sciences, which are preserved to us, with the aid of such conjectures as are founded on a fair and just analogy.

The rudest period of society is that in which the patriarchal

that the shepherds who invaded Egypt were a tribe from the Abyssinian coast of the Red Sea, called *Beni*, who had become acquainted with Egypt in the way of commerce, as the carriers of the Cashile merchants, and observing the weakness of the country, while they envied its wealth, subdued it, after three several invasions.—See Bruce's Travels.