

## CHAPTER VII.

Reflections on the first and rudest periods of the Grecian History—Extreme Barbarism of the Aborigines—Circumstances which retarded Civilization—Origin of the Greek Theology—Uncertainty of Mythological Researches—Superstitious Character of the Greeks—Oracles—Games—Effects of them on the National Character.

THE topographical appearance of the country of Greece, when surveyed upon a map, presents to the view a large irregular peninsula, surrounded on the east, south, and west, by the Mediterranean, which deeply indents its coasts, and divided internally by several large chains of mountains, which, with their lateral branches, form so many intersections, that the whole face of the country appears cut into a great number of small valleys, surrounded almost on every side by hills. Hence, while the coasts of the peninsula formed a multitude of bays and harbors, easily accessible to strangers who came thither with a view either to colonize or to make spoil, it must have been extremely difficult for those invaders to penetrate into the interior parts of the country; and troops of an enemy, after the conquest of one canton, would find fresh difficulties, and a war to recommence, at every step of their progress. From the same cause, the internal structure of the country, it would necessarily happen, that even after a colony of strangers had formed a permanent establishment, and begun to spread improvement and civilization around them, the progress of that civilization would be extremely slow. For the inhabitants of the different cantons living altogether detached, and feeling very few wants to incite to intercourse or to union, any improvement which they received would be partial, and very slowly communicated to their neighboring provinces. The conformity, indeed, of the language of the Greeks, would seem to countenance the notion of their having free communication and intercourse; but this general conformity may be accounted for from their having all the same origin; and if the original language was the same, it must, in such a state of barbarism, have long remained without much change, even though the different districts of the country had no intercourse with each other.

And here it may be remarked, that the admirable structure of the Greek language, highly complicated, yet at the same time

wonderfully regular, and at once the most copious and most elegant of the known tongues, is of itself a proof of that tradition which attributes the first civilization of this people to a colony of strangers from one or other of the more polished countries of the East; for this language, such as we find it to have been in the days of Homer and of Hesiod, is a phenomenon altogether inconsistent with the state of society in which it is found, and with the rude and barbarous manners of the people who used it. It must, therefore, have been imported and taught to this people by the colony of a refined and polished nation among whom it had its birth.

That the ancient inhabitants of this peninsula were rude and uncultivated savages, is a fact which the moderns have no reasonable grounds for doubting, when we find it the uniform belief of the nation itself in all periods of its annals, and the common opinion of its best historians. "Who could imagine," says M. Goguet, "that that ingenious people to whom Europe is indebted for all its knowledge, were descended from savages who wandered in the woods and fields, without laws or leaders, having no other retreat but dens and caverns, ignorant even of the use of fire, and so barbarous as even to eat one another?" Why should we doubt of these facts, when we know for a truth that other nations, in times comparatively modern, were upon their first discovery found in a state equally barbarous? The inhabitants of the Marian Islands, when they were discovered by Magellan in 1521, had, till that time, never seen fire, and expressed the utmost astonishment at it. They believed it to be an animal which fixed itself upon wood and fed upon it, and when approaching so near as to be burnt, they thought they were bit by it. The inhabitants of the Philippine and Canary Islands were, at their first discovery, in a state of equal ignorance. There are, it is true, but few countries in which lightning is not seen at times, and its effects perceived; but as those effects are always destructive, a savage would naturally regard the phenomenon with horror; and if a similar effect should by chance manifest itself from the collision of hard substances, he would not readily conceive that it could be turned to useful purposes; and, therefore, instead of preserving the fire, would naturally either endeavor to suppress and extinguish it, or, if he found that impracticable, would fly from it and leave it to its ravages.

That the ancient inhabitants of Greece were *anthropophagi* is no more incredible, than that there are savage tribes at this day in Asia, Africa, and America, who make a common practice of feeding on human flesh.\* We think of this with horror, and execrate

\* The New Zealanders, beyond doubt, are cannibals. — See *Hawkesworth and Cooke's last Voyage in 1777*. They eat, however, only their enemies, and expressed great abhorrence when asked if they eat their friends who had been killed. — [See also *Earle's Residence in New-Zealand, 1833*—*Ellis's Polynesian Researches, 1829*—and *Sir Stamford Raffles on Java*.]

the idea as shocking and unnatural. We, who do not know what it is to want the supplies of a vast variety of aliment, study to excite the satiated appetite by skilful combinations and ingenious refinements of cookery: but we should judge more impartially, if, while we thought of those bloody repasts, we took likewise into view the niggardly provision which nature in many regions of the earth has made for man; the barren deserts which he inhabits, the climate which often locks up or annihilates their scanty produce, and the dreadful extremities to which even civilized man has been known to proceed for the support of life. Necessity only, in the most savage nations, could at first get the better of the strongest instinct; but that once overcome, a habit is soon acquired, and will not be laid aside as long as subsistence remains in any degree precarious.

In a nation so barbarous as we must believe Greece to have been at this period, there were many circumstances which retarded the advances to refinement.

The Titans, the first colony of strangers from the East, might have introduced a degree of civilization, but it could be only temporary. They taught the Greeks agriculture; but the continual wars in which they were engaged among themselves rendered the improvement of the country quite impracticable, for no man had any security for reaping the fruits of his labor. These strangers were extirminated, and Greece, in a few years, relapsed into her original barbarism. The second and third colonies from the East founded a few cities, then termed kingdoms; for every city was a separate state, and we may form a judgment of the nature of these states from this circumstance, that at the time of Cecrops, when Attica consisted of twelve separate states or cities, the inhabitants of the whole district amounted only to 20,000.

The detached situation of the Greeks, of which we have already taken notice, and the natural barriers between the different cantons, gave to the inhabitants a certain spirit of independence, which, even after the foundation of a political union, would very much resist all attempts towards the establishment of general laws, and, consequently, afford the greatest obstacles to general civilization. One powerful engine, best fitted to overcome these obstacles, was the introduction of a national religion, which Greece, as we have already observed, owed to those eastern colonies.

It is a very just remark of an ingenious historian,\* that the theology of any country is an indication of the state of manners when that system was first formed. "By knowing the adventures and attributes of any false deity, we can pronounce with some certainty what must have been the state of society and manners when he was elevated to that dignity. The mythology of Greece plainly

\* Robertson's Historical Disquisition concerning India, Appendix, p. 317

indicates the character of the age in which it was formed. It must have been in times of the greatest licentiousness, anarchy, and violence, that divinities of the highest rank could be supposed capable of perpetrating actions, or of being influenced by passions, which, in more enlightened periods, would be deemed a disgrace to human nature: it must have been when the earth was still infested with destructive monsters, and mankind, under forms of government too feeble to afford them protection, were exposed to the depredations of lawless robbers, or the cruelty of savage oppressors, that the well-known labors of Hercules, by which he was raised from earth to heaven, could have been necessary, or would have been deemed highly meritorious."

What was the original worship of the ancient inhabitants of this country we are entirely at a loss to know; but barbarous as they were, they probably had some notions of religion, and receiving from strangers a new system of theology, of which at first their ideas must have been very confused, they would naturally graft the one upon the other; as we know that in modern times several savage nations have done in blending their own idolatries with the tenets of Christianity. Hence if we still trace the gods of the Phœnicians and of the Egyptians in those of the Greeks, with respect to the great characterizing circumstances of their powers and attributes, it is a very fruitless labor which some learned men have undertaken in attempting to prove a coincidence in all the minute particulars of their fabulous lives, exploits, and metamorphoses. I know of no subject which has afforded so much disquisition, or so many opposite opinions, as the attempts that have been made to reconcile the mythologies of different nations, or to trace up all the absurd fables of the pagan theologies to one common origin. It would be idle to enter deeply into a subject of this nature; yet I think it of consequence to take notice at least of one theory or system with regard to the origin of the pagan mythologies which some very good men have adopted, from a mistaken zeal in the cause of religion. Some of these authors, with wonderful learning, but with much indiscretion, have attempted to show that most of the fables regarding the heathen deities and their illustrious exploits derive their origin from the sacred Scriptures, and are nothing else than the lives and actions of the first patriarchs vitiated and disguised in passing by tradition to barbarous and unenlightened nations. Thus the learned Bochart finds out the patriarch Noah in the pagan Saturn, his son Shem in Pluto, Ham in Jupiter Ammon, and Japhet in Neptune.\* Moses alone is said to have furnished the idea of Apollo, Æsculapius, Priapus, Prometheus, Tiresias, Proteus, Typhon, Perseus, Orpheus, Janus, Adonis; because certain fabulous exploits, attributed

\* Bochart, Thomassin, Cumberland, Yossius, Huet, Fourmont, &c.

to those deities and heroes, bear a resemblance to some of the actions of the Jewish legislator. In like manner they have found all the heathen goddesses in Zipporah, the wife, or in Miriam, the sister, of Moses. One of these learned authors has published a book which he calls *Homer Hebraizing*, in which he alleges that the Iliad and Odyssey are nothing else than a history of the illustrious characters in Scripture under borrowed names. This fondness for reducing all history of remote antiquity to the sacred Scriptures, and of making the inspired volumes furnish theology not only to the Jews, but to all the heathen nations, is of very pernicious consequence; for what indeed else is it than to say, that the sacred oracles, designed to instruct mankind in their highest interests, and the concerns of their eternal welfare, have produced, in most nations, the wildest and most monstrous fictions, which are destructive even of morality, and persuade to vice instead of virtue?

The extreme uncertainty of all mythological explanations of the ancient fables is best evinced by comparing together the different solutions which men of ingenuity have given of the same fable. This, no doubt, is a digression; but nothing is useless which illustrates the history of the human mind. The story of Proteus feeding his sea-calves upon the beach, and counting them at noon, with the extraordinary faculty he had of varying his shape, is explained by the Abbé Banier into an historical fact of a king of Egypt of that name, who is said to have lived about the time of the war of Troy; "a wise and crafty prince," says Banier, "whose cautious temper, guarding him against all dangers, might well pass for the gift of prophecy which is ascribed to him. As it must have been extremely difficult to learn his secrets, there was no impropriety in saying that it was impossible to come at the knowledge of them but by binding him. He was, besides, exceedingly stately, and seldom appeared in public, unless about noon to review his soldiers, which the poets have called counting his flock: and as his subjects, the Egyptians, lived upon the sea-coasts, they were very properly termed sea-calves." Such is the account of Proteus by the Abbé Banier, which, it must be owned, is much less extravagant than many of his explanations. It were easy to contrast this with at least half a dozen different explanations of the same fable by other mythologists, all of them opposite to each other, all equally plausible, or, as some perhaps may think, equally absurd. But I shall content myself here with giving one other explanation of the same fable, by a genius of a superior order, I mean my Lord Bacon, a man whose vigor of imagination was perhaps his most eminent talent; and which, though in general it was under the chastisement of a most solid judgment, seems at times to have eluded the watchfulness of its monitor, and to have escaped into the regions of extravagance. He, too, was fond of discovering in the ancient mythology a great

deal of mysterious and secret wisdom; but his meanings lie for the most part so very deep, that it is extremely improbable they should ever have occurred to any but himself, much less to those who devised the fables.

The fable of Proteus, says Lord Bacon, seems to point at the secrets of nature, and the various states of *matter*. "Proteus, an old man, signifies matter, the most ancient of all things after God himself, which resides as in a cave, under the vast concavity of the heavens. He is represented as the servant of Neptune, because the various operations and modifications of matter are wrought chiefly while it is in a fluid state. The herd or flock of Proteus seems to mean nothing else than the several kinds of animals, plants, and minerals, in which matter appears to diffuse and spend itself: so that, after having formed these several species, and as it were finished its task, it seems to repose, as Proteus, after counting his flock, is feigned to go to sleep. But Proteus, when any attempts were made to bind him, is said to have changed into many different shapes: so matter, if any skilful artist should apply force, and torture it in order to its annihilation, will change and transform itself into a strange variety of shapes and appearances, but nothing less than the power of the Creator can annihilate or truly destroy it. So, at length, running through the whole circle of transformations, and completing its period, it in some degree restores itself, if the force be continued. The prophetic spirit of Proteus agrees excellently with the nature of matter; for he who knows the properties, the changes, and the processes of matter, must of necessity understand the effects and sum of what it does, has done, and can do; though his knowledge extend not to all the parts and particulars thereof."

Such is the solution of the fable of Proteus by Lord Bacon, upon which I shall only remark, that if this fable had any hidden meaning whatever, it is highly improbable that it should have been such as could have occurred to no other but a man possessed of similar talents to those of its interpreter, a great philosophical genius, guided at times by an extravagant imagination.\* The extreme subtilty and refinement of his solution must convince us at least that the parable could never have answered the end of instruction, which Lord Bacon himself supposes to have been the chief use and purpose of those ancient allegories. To dismiss the subject of mythology, I shall only observe, that researches of this kind, however ingenious, however they may exercise and amuse the imagination, are extremely fruitless. No subject requires more acquaintance with history, or demands more labor and re-

\* Balzac says, humorously, "Croyons donc, pour l'amour du Chancelier Bacon, que toutes les folies des anciens sont sages, et tous leurs songes mystères."

search. But the annals of history are ransacked to very little purpose if we establish it for a principle that every extravagant whim or absurdity that was current in any age or nation must have had some foundation in reason. The more we are acquainted with the human mind, the more we shall perceive its weaknesses, its prejudices, its caprices, and its follies.

To return from this digression—the great engine of the civilization of the Greeks was the introduction of a national religion by those eastern colonies; and, inspired with the enthusiasm of all new converts, it is no wonder that superstition was at this time their predominant characteristic. To this age, therefore, and to this character of the people, we must refer the origin of the Grecian oracles, and the institution of the public games in honor of the gods.

With a rude and unenlightened people there is no passion more strong than the desire of penetrating into futurity. It would seem that the less the human mind is aided by experience, or enabled from extensive knowledge to form probable conjectures of the future from the past, the more it is apt to wish for and to believe the possibility of some secret art or method of obtaining such anticipated views. All barbarous nations have their augurs, their sorcerers, or their oracles. The Canadian savages have in every tribe a few crafty impostors, who pretend to foretell future events by visions, which they have in their sleep, and who are thence termed *dreamers*. When the tribe marches to war, these dreamers constantly attend in the rear of the troop, and no measure is ventured upon till they are consulted. The African negroes have their *Obi* men and women, who deal in charms and incantations, and are firmly believed to have the power of dispensing good and evil fortune at their pleasure. The sorceries of the Laplander are well known; and the second-sight of the Scottish highlanders: all proceed from the same source, ignorance and superstition.

A cavern at the foot of Mount Parnassus, near Delphi, was remarkable for exhaling a mephitic vapor, which, like that of the Grotto del Cani in Italy, had the effect of stupefying and slightly convulsing any person who came within its atmosphere. Some ingenious men had the address to turn this natural phenomenon to their own advantage and the profit of the neighborhood. A temple was built on the spot to Apollo, the god of divination. A priestess was procured whom habit soon enabled to undergo the experiment without danger; the raving expressions which the priests probably instructed her to utter, and which they interpreted as they thought fit, were received by the people as oracles; and her visible convulsions gave ample testimony to their being the effect of inspiration. A hollow oak in the forest of Dodona, in which it was possible for a man to conceal himself while the aperture was artfully closed up, was likewise famous for its oracles, and the imposture was no doubt equally beneficial to its priests

and attendants. These were commonly men of some art, who had ingenuity enough to frame equivocal answers to the questions that were put to them; and if the inquirer gave such construction to the response as was most agreeable to himself, it was generally possible for the priests to construe it according to the event. Strange! that men should ever believe that if the Deity should stoop to hold intercourse with his creatures, he would use the mean tricks and subterfuges of a juggler.

Yet these oracles of the Greeks were for many ages in high reputation, and had extensive political consequence. One of the causes which have been assigned for the high reputation of the Amphictyonic Council, and the removal of its seat from Thermopylæ to Delphi, was the interest which the northern states of Greece had in maintaining the veneration for the Delphian oracle, and the preservation of the riches of its temple, with which this council was particularly entrusted. A more remarkable consequence was the institution of the *public games* of the Greeks. The concourse of people to the oracles upon particular occasions (for it was only at stated periods that they were accessible) naturally led to the celebration of a festival and to public games, which, as a religious motive first occasioned their celebration, began soon to be considered as a part of religion.

The celebration of public games was of very high antiquity among the Greeks. Homer makes no mention of the Olympian, or of any other of those which were called the sacred games; but is very ample in the account of the games celebrated in honor of the dead, in his account of the funeral of Patroclus, and describes minutely the several contests of chariot-races, foot-races, boxing, wrestling, throwing the quoit, launching the javelin, shooting with the bow, and fencing with the spear.\* These games seem to have borne a considerable resemblance to the Gothic tournaments. The prizes were of considerable value—a female captive, a war-horse, golden goblets, spears, &c. These we shall see in after times gave place to such rewards as were purely honorary.

The four public, or solemn games of the Greeks, which were particularly termed *legoi* or sacred, were the Olympic, the Pythian, the Nemæan, and the Isthmian. The precise eras when those games were first instituted are extremely uncertain, as well as the persons to whom they owed their origin. With regard to both these points, Archbishop Potter, in his *Archæologia Græca*, has collected all the different opinions. The Olympic games, which were celebrated at Olympia in the territory of Elis, were held every four years, or rather every fiftieth month, or the second month after the completion of four years. And hence have arisen the seeming chronological discordances, when events have been

\* Iliad, 23.

computed both by years and by olympiads; for it has been customary to allow four precise years to an olympiad instead of fifty months. The Greeks did not begin to compute the time by olympiads, from the period when those games were first instituted. They had even subsisted some centuries before they began to reckon by them; and the first olympiad, according to Usher's chronology, begins only 776 years before the Christian era, 29 years before the Babylonian era of Nabonassar, and 149 before the building of Rome.

The amusements of the people in all these public games were of the same nature, and consisted principally in viewing contests of skill in all the athletic exercises. The prizes bestowed on the victors were not rewards of any intrinsic value, as those given at the ancient funeral games; they were originally of the most simple nature. A crown of wild olive or of parsley was accounted the highest reward in the times of virtuous simplicity, when glory was a sufficient incitement to excellence without the sordid allurements of interest; and so powerful is habit in its influence on the mind, that even in the latter ages of Greece, when luxury had introduced corruption of every kind, the victors in those games had no other reward than a garland of leaves. In a political view, these public games were, during the first ages of their institution, of the most important consequence. Independently of their effect in promoting in the youth a hardy and vigorous conformation of body, and that activity and address in martial exercises and in single combat, which, according to the ancient system of war, were of the utmost importance, a most beneficial consequence of those public games was the frequent assembling together of the inhabitants of all the states of Greece, and thus promoting a national union; to which the difference of their governments, and their separate interests, were otherwise opposing a constant resistance. Assembled on these public occasions from motives of pleasure and amusement, to which was joined the notion of performing a duty of religion, and indulging in every species of festivity, they could not avoid considering each other as brethren and fellow citizens. Whatever were the political interferences of the several states, or their national animosities, every grudge of this kind was at least for the time obliterated. Thucydides informs us that all hostile operations between states actually at war were suspended during the performance of those solemnities. Another consequence of those meetings was the dissemination of knowledge, arts, science, and literature; for it must be observed, that although the chief contests in the sacred games were those in the martial and athletic exercises, there were likewise trials of skill in poetry, history, and music; and it is chiefly to these latter exercises of genius that we must attribute the eminence of the Greeks in those sciences above all the nations of antiquity.

## CHAPTER VIII.

Early period of the Greek history continued—Earliest state of agriculture in Greece—Erectheus institutes the Eleusinian Mysteries—Obtains the sovereignty of Attica—Theseus unites the cities of Attica—This the age of the marvellous—End of that period—Expedition of the Argonauts—Course of their voyage—The solstitial and equinoctial points fixed by Chiron—This the foundation of Sir Isaac Newton's chronology—Twofold proof on which it rests—Progress of maritime affairs in Greece—State of the military art—War of Thebes—War of the *Epigonoï*—War of Troy—Ancient system of warfare—The tactic or arrangement of their troops—Subsistence of the armies—Arms—The war of the *Heracidae*—Change of government in Greece—Commencement of the democracy of Athens—Origin of the Greek colonies—Causes of their rapid advancement.

FROM the period of the arrival of the first of those Eastern colonies which formed establishments in Greece, down to the era of the war of Troy, is an interval of above 300 years, in which the Greeks were gradually shaking off their original barbarism, and advancing in civilization and the knowledge of the arts of life. This whole space of time, however, is accounted the fabulous period of the Grecian history. Not that it contains no facts of which the authenticity can be relied on, but that it abounds with many, which, with a basis of truth, have served as the foundation for an immense superstructure of fable. Part of the history of this period I have given in the preceding chapter, in which I have shortly traced the progress of the Greeks from their most barbarous state down to the introduction of letters into Greece by Cadmus. I shall now throw together such facts as are tolerably well authenticated, and may be relied on as the great outlines of the history of what remains of that doubtful period down to the Trojan war. From that era, when it is generally allowed that fiction ceases to mix itself with authentic history, we shall proceed with a greater degree of light, and find the objects of our study gradually rising upon us in point of importance.

Greece, which is not naturally a fertile country, nourishing only a few inhabitants, and these seeking their sustenance, like other savages, from the woods and mountains, did not begin to practise agriculture till about 150 years after the time of Cecrops. At this time Erectheus, either a Greek who had sailed to Egypt, or the leader of a new colony of Egyptians, is said to have introduced agriculture into Attica, and to have relieved that country, then suffering from famine, by the importation of a large quantity of Egyptian grain. The only produce of the native soil at this time