

our notice. Some apprehend it to mean, the wise disposals of Providence, by which the heathen were left to make trial of the power of reason; while others are of opinion, that it relates to the wisdom displayed in the works of creation, but from the indications of which, the wisest sages of pagan antiquity, were never able to derive accurate ideas of the character, or of the moral government of God. Dr. Lightfoot observes that the phrase *the wisdom of God*, is not to be understood of that wisdom which has God for its *author*; but that which has God for its *object*. There were among the heathen "*the wisdom of Nature*; that is *philosophy*, and *the wisdom of God*; that is *divinity*. But the world in its *divinity* could not by wisdom know God." Leaving you, amidst such diversity of sentiment, to adopt that exposition which appears to you the best, permit me

>FIRST.—To direct your attention to the evidence and illustration of the humiliating fact, '*the world by wisdom knew not God.*'

St. Paul, in the first chapter of the epistle to the Romans, in portraying the moral turpitude of the Gentiles, suggests it as a signal aggravation of their idolatry and crimes, that there had been a time when they knew God. Should the carper of revelation here exultingly put the question; how could the apostle consistently affirm that the world by wisdom knew not God, if according to his own admission there was a period when they possessed this knowledge? We repel the impious charge by observing, that the knowledge which he there ascribes to the progenitors of the heathen, was not, as the objection assumes, the result of rational investigation, but emanated as have all the just conceptions concerning God that ever enlightened the human understanding, from *revelation*. Noah and his family possessed the true knowledge of God, so far as it was revealed in the first periods of time; and nothing can be more consonant to reason than to suppose, that the awful catastrophe, from the desolations of which they alone of all the species were exempted, powerfully tended to impress the minds of men with a sense of God, as the creator and governor of the world, and the sole object of religious worship, too deeply to be soon effaced. However scattered, they would carry along with them vivid recollections of the great principles of religion in which they had been instructed by oral tradition. Here we behold the origin of all the correct theological knowledge which pervaded the different nations of the earth, in the first ages subsequent to the deluge. But a proud confidence in their own wisdom, unhappily, soon marked the aberration of mankind, from the pure and luminous principles of Divine Truth. 'Professing themselves to be wise they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things. They changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the creator who is blessed for ever. Amen.'—(Rom. 1.) In attempting to establish the position, that the most vigorous efforts of reason to attain the knowledge of God never succeeded, our proofs shall be drawn, not from hordes of untutored savages, but from those pagan nations that prefer the most distinguished claims to literary renown.

Egypt, the memorable scene of Israelitish depression and triumph, first demands our attention. The early and surprising advances which the Egyptians made in various departments of learning are matters of general notoriety. Plaudits of their eminent industry and success in scientific pursuits, are emblazoned, as well on the sacred as the classic page. Egypt, indeed, was anciently the academy of the world. Hither the most celebrated legislators, poets, and philosophers of Greece, resorted

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