

A
GENERAL HISTORICAL ACCOUNT
OF THE
RISE AND PROGRESS OF NAVIGATION,
From the EARLIEST and most AUTHENTIC PERIOD of INTELLIGENCE.

AS the race of Man have been ordained by Providence for social as well as rational creatures, it seems to have been the grand design of God and Nature, that after having multiplied and replenished the earth, they should hold intercourse with each other, and thereby derive such mutual advantages, as without a miraculous intervention could never otherwise arise to any separate community. It may possibly be objected, that if this were really the design of Heaven, men would not have been scattered at a distance from each other, with intervening wilds, deserts, mountains, and vast oceans to divide them; but upon an examination of the dispensations of Providence, this seeming weighty objection will vanish. Man is a Being capable of improvement, and intended to be constantly employed in exertions either of his corporal or mental faculties. It is for the brute creation alone, to remain, from their first period of existence, in their wilds and forests, till death assimilates them with their original dust. Man has a nobler claim, by arts enabled to remove the apparent obstacles of nature, to visit distant lands, and from experience to reap advantage and useful improvement, and, in all the various changes of the world, still to find employment for his rational faculties, and industrious efforts, thereby displaying those gracious attributes with which Heaven has endued him.

The present appearance of this terraqueous globe is not that which it always exhibited: besides the general deluge so fully described in Holy Scripture, we have authentic accounts of partial deluges, dreadful earthquakes, and other phenomena, which from time to time have wrought amazing changes on the face of the earth, by levelling mountains, elevating valleys, rending asunder vast continents, producing new islands, burying vast tracts of land beneath the ocean, and causing the sea in other places to retire, and the dry land to appear. How far these changes may have conducted to the separation of mankind in some places, and to the associating them in others, is a matter, perhaps, worthy the discussion of the philosophical enquirer. Whether the various nations of the peopled earth were separated by such vast tracts of ocean in the antediluvian world, is more than we can take upon us to determine; but it seems clear that after the general deluge, men were fearful of trusting themselves upon the world of waters even for ages, till by slow degrees they were convinced of the utility, when numbers had experienced the advantages of a certain confined navigation peculiar to those ages, and were thereby encouraged to extend them.

The task would be both prolix and unnecessary to enter now into a detail of the expeditions of all the descendants of Noah, and the chiefs of fabulous times, of which all the accounts are so mixed with fable, that it is scarcely possible for the most accurate investigator to distinguish and separate truth from error. Of this sort are the expeditions of the Cretan Jupiter against the Sidonians, of Perseus into Africa against Medusa, with others, too tedious here to mention. The relation of the voyage of Jason in the ship Argo, said to be the first large vessel built by the Greeks, is likewise immersed in fabulous obscurity: it is only to be concluded that the Argonauts sailed under a brave commander of the name of Jason, to establish some branches of useful commerce at Colchis and elsewhere, and to clear the seas of many troublesome and dangerous pirates.

We have every reason to believe by the authorities of both sacred and profane history, that the Phœnicians were the first, and for a long period of time the most successful of the ancient navigators. We find the King of Tyre, whose subjects were of that nation, assisting King Solomon with gold and curious materials for building the famous temple at Jerusalem.—Though the virtue of the magnetic needle was totally unknown in those days, yet it is morally certain that these bold navigators not only coasted along the neighbouring shores of the Mediterranean, but sailed Southward to Africa, and North as far as Britain, trading for tin to the coast of Cornwall, at a time when the existence of this island was not known to the greater part of the nations inhabiting the continent. The Assyrians, Egyptians and other ancient states, are reported to have had great fleets before the days of David or even of Moses.—The accounts of the naval power of Semiramis are to be suspected as fabulous; that the Egyptians and some other nations have been represented as covering the seas with their fleets, may probably have arisen from the number of Phœnician vessels employed in their service.—The Greeks who learned other arts from them, acquired that of navigation among the rest, and almost as soon as they were formed into states, began to think of making themselves respectable for their fleets, with which they repeatedly defeated those of the Persians, and made themselves masters of the Eastern coasts of the Mediterranean, while the Phœnicians were employed in trading and planting colonies in various other parts of the world.

The famous Carthage, a colony from Tyre, from small beginnings rose to high estimation for her naval power, by which means, in a great measure she was enabled to contend with Rome for the empire of the world. But the indefatigable industry, unwearied application, and boundless thirst of conquest which marked the character of the Romans, caused them at last to triumph. Though at first they were little skilled in maritime affairs, to which their ancient genius had not led them, yet