

the dead. Similar observations might be made on other sacrificial institutions among these renowned nations.

Amidst this boundless thirst for diversion, it cannot be imagined, that the love of truth would be prominently cultivated. We may more reasonably suppose that it was seldom thought of. The mind dissipated in quest of show or of pleasure, would think little of the truth or falsehood of the doctrines offered for its belief, or of the reality of the benefits for which its gratitude was demanded. Provided the primary object of pursuit, the excited delight of the present hour, was not restrained, it was very immaterial for what purpose the feast, the song, the revelry, and the excess were appointed. In such circumstances the mind easily yielded to the sympathies of those around, and gave a ready assent to acclamations of worship which left no time for thought, and brought with them so much pleasant enjoyment.

A present deity! they shout around;

A present deity! the vaulted roofs rebound.

It was a matter of indifference, whether, the being thus deified was, as in those verses of Dryden, and in the case mentioned Acts xii. 22, a present sovereign, or an imaginary invisible personage, to whom their fears or their wishes had given birth. In both and in all similar cases, a regard to truth, was equally discarded.

There is scarcely any subject in which mankind are naturally so intolerant as in their diversions. In cultivated ages this may be less apparent, as men learn by experience to make allowance for each other's diversities of humor. But among rude men, a face that would attempt to frown at the public amusement, would be hunted and pelted down. No such face durst show itself. The want of sympathy with the universal joy, would appear an instance of malignity not to be endured. The situation of a person who disavowed these pastimes in an ancient nation, may be known from the condition of one among ourselves who disapproves of the theatre or the race-course, and would dare to be present at such an exhibition for the purpose of reproving it. It is our happiness to have it in our power to choose our recreations. They, in many cases, had no alternative.

One of the most marked features of the superstitions of rude nations, whether ancient or modern, was an utter contempt for truth. Truth in theology, if we can give that name to their opinions, was, and is yet held in no estimation. It was not so much through absolute ignorance, that they erred, though there was much of that also, but through the entire disregard in which

truth was held. The era of the diffusion of Christianity, is to be considered not only as the era when a true doctrine prevailed, but when the importance of truth, whatever it might turn out to be, came to be admitted. Henceforth, truth, wherever it was found, was to be considered as of primary importance.

It ought not to be forgotten, that political motives had a powerful and extensive influence on the absurd exhibitions of the heathen temple. If the converts to Christianity, or the adherents of Judaism, could have stretched their consciences so far as to offer sacrifices at the statue of Cæsar; their absence from the festivals of Mars and Apollo, would have been more readily excused. While thousands of them risked their lives and endured the hardships of the severest campaigns to defend the life of their emperor, or to swell the triumphs of his reign, yet, if they refused to present the unhalloved incense at his shrine, they might within the lapse of a few months, be exposed on a gibbet, or devoured by wild beasts before the assembled citizens. No doubt the insecurity of the title by which most of the Emperors held their crown, and the danger they ran of being displaced by more successful candidates, contributed greatly to produce and to augment this grievous species of intolerance.

These hints as to the growth and prevalence of one of the most enormous instances of human folly and depravity, that the world has witnessed, are presented for the consideration of those who have more time for the prosecution of this momentous, though not very pleasing inquiry. The slightness of some of these causes, such as the love of diversion and the desire of sympathy, will form, it is presumed, no objection with those who have narrowly considered the subject. From a slight spark, scarcely visible to the eye, the greatest conflagrations have arisen.

W.

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