

would not fall down and worship it should be deemed as offerings to his god; and which fate, the three noble Hebrew prophets were subjected to, though they were preserved in the face of Babylon's idol, and rescued from his supposed omnipotence, by one who walked with them, and who was "like the Son of God." "The mode of worship was by offerings to his temple, victims to the fire, with genuflections, and agonizing prayers. An illustration of the mode of supplication, when all offerings had failed to bring the response, we find in the history of Elijah. The worship of Bel or Baal had spread over Israel; and that the question of superiority might be decided between the true and the false God, the prophet challenged the idolatrous priests to try the respective powers of their Gods. Baal represented the sun, or fire; then let the decision be by fire. The prophet challenged them in their strongest position, "the God that answereth by fire let him be God." The priests cried "from morning even till noon, O Baal, hear us." Elijah mocked them in bitter sarcasm, and that, *singing with no heaven-sent fire, excited them to frenzy.* The desperation of defeat, and being forsaken by their god made them cry with importunity, leap on the altar, and cut themselves with knives and lances, and present the horrible spectacle of gashed and blood-cored men.

The Babylonian Bel was derived from the same false idea, and held the same idolatrous position, as did the Ammon of the Egyptians, the Baal of the Midianites, the Moloch, Milcom, or Molech of the Canaanites; the Chemosh of the Moabites; the Herakles or Hercules of the Tyrians; the Jupiter of the Greeks, and the Jove of the Romans.

The female divinity, Mylitta, or queen of heaven, had temples dedicated to her, also, but her rites were chiefly observed in groves and on high hills. These are too gross to permit of detail, and it is enough to say, that they consisted of the most licentious orgies, and her sacred places, as they were called, were scenes of unbounded and unblushing prostitution. This supreme goddess of the Babylonians was the same, with the same rites, as the Egyptian Isis; the golden calf that the Israelites made at Sinai, and to which they paid homage in music, dances, and lustful revelry; the same as the Phœnician Ashtoroth or Astarte; the Euphrasian Diana; the Grecian Juno, and the Roman Venus. Thus the primitive Sabæian idea came down and covered the ancient heathen world, and though the names of the two chief deities differ in different nations, yet no one can fail to see the close resemblance that everywhere prevailed.

We now turn to Persia. The religion of the Persians was, at first, the purest of all forms of idolatry. It was the worship of the sun, as the Supreme Being, and fire was the emblem, and the only visible thing they religiously recognised in their temples. But such a simple form did not long continue, and other firmamental bodies were added and deified. Their religious notions were certainly, at first, the most intellectual and refined of all the heathen; but even with the wisdom of Zoroaster, and when, with a great mind, he attempted to bring light out of darkness, and truth out of false, yet his creed, however ingenious, failed to satisfy. The experience of ages has proven, that mankind, with human reason only to guide them, can never remain stationary in an intellectual idolatry, and so it was in Persia, and in defiance of all the wisdom of the magi. Their recognition of a great power, symbolised by fire, left them still with an unknown God, and therefore there was no salutary influence operating on their moral being and social relations; and their religious notions ended, like all the others, in a multifarious and debasing idolatry. They began with a Supreme Being, but, losing revelation, they deified the sun, and stars, fancies, and passions gradually introduced other objects; and at last, ancient Persia became a nation with idols crowded in its temples, and obscenity in their courts; with polygamy in the households, despots on the throne, and oppression and turbulence in the state.

Let us glance at the religion of Greece. There we find idolatry in all its intellectual majesty; with sagacity to correct its errors, and shew—if they could—a more excellent way; with historians to narrate the legends and characters of the gods; and with poets to write and sing poems to their honor. At first it was the worship of the sun and moon—by the names of Jupiter and Juno—but rapidly, idol was added to idol. The very intellectuality of the Greeks made them increase their idol catalogue, for they were satisfied with none, and they sought for, and made more. They were lost to idolatry, and knew not how to extricate themselves; and their only

hope was in having more gods, that, perchance, they might find the true one at last. From every known country idols and forms of worship were imported; and religion thus became a search, rather than a conviction to the wise, and a degrading and unintelligible observance to the ignorant. The very magnitude of their idolatry perplexed them, and they became lost in the imaginative and superstitious labyrinths which they created, and were obliged to extend in hope of release, though, in fact, only to the more completely lowered. The philosophers reasoned, and asked, what, and where is truth? but they were perpetually baffled. They believed that there was a God, the true God, but they knew not how, or where, to find him, and at last had to come to the humiliating confession of ignorance, and in the very capital of their wisdom and their schools, acknowledge the inability of reason to discover what reason itself taught them must be true—for their reason led them by induction to see its own insufficiency—and in token of defeat, and also of a faith that no ray of revelation had enlightened, they erected an altar, and dedicated it to "The Unknown God." Such was the religion of Greece; it made its priests traffickers in popular superstitions; its sages sceptics; and its people slaves.

Now let us look at Rome. Greece was called Ithine—Rome was masculine. At first the religion was a simple, unostentatious idolatry, and evidently brought from the East; but just as her arms conquered, and her power extended, and her fame increased, so did her idolatry. She seemed to glory in gathering all the idols of the known world for her worship. Greece gathered from the East, and Rome gathered from Greece. She had gods and goddesses—of heaven and hell, earth and sea, love and lasciviousness, peace and war, plenty and famine, music and grief. She deified many of her celebrated warriors and emperors, and installed them in her pantheon. *Every sense, passion, and power, was personified, and idolised.* She had her temples, with their priests, augurs, and vestal virgins. The religion at length became even a terror to the nation, as every passion or vice could be made sacred, by the declared devotion of it to the divinity to which it was professed to be paid, and thus a man could bring his crimes under the shelter of the temple, and, by the plea of religion, have a license to unlimited licentiousness. The more learned declared that they did not believe it, only, they openly acknowledged it because the mass of the people must have a religion, and that the superstition of the people made them more subservient as subjects. There was the *theologia philosophica*, which was the infidelity of the learned, as regarded all gods; and there was the *theologia civilis*, which was the imbecillation on the ignorant, of a superstitious reverence for all. Thus the priest maintained his apparent sanctity, the augur his mysterious prophetic intelligence, and the vestal virgin her mock-modesty, and all concealed their smiles at the credulity of the populace. Thus Seneca says, "It becomes us to pry to the great mutitudes of common gods, which, during a long period, a diversified superstition has collected, with this sentiment, that we are convinced that the reverence displayed to them, is a yielding to custom rather than what is due to real truth. The philosopher will observe prayer, as commanded by the civil law, and not as glorifying to the gods." Thus the idolatry, which was tenaciously held by the mass of the people, was kept up by the powerful and the influential; as a peace establishment, and in which, as political economists—but as theologians—they had an interest. Ancient Rome—proud Rome—"exalts what human power and philosophy can do, in making a religion for man, and the real spectacle we see is, that her very religion encouraged by poetry and incense, and did more to brutalize her than if she had adopted—had it been possible—pure oldism, and had never had a temple or a god."

From these brief notices of the leading characteristics of ancient heathen religion, we arrive at two indisputable facts.—First—that all ancient idolatry: had one great common origin. There was certainly, at first, the knowledge of the true God, but "when they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations;" and "changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator." The natural mind and imagination everywhere ran in the same track, and ever intuitively conceived the same idolatrous ideas, or willingly copied and adopted those which were originally propounded; for we uniformly find that the idolatry of all nations—though wide apart in point of time and distance—bore a great and remarkable family likeness.—Second—we find