

THE FIRST CENTURY OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA.*

A N O N Y M O U S.

THE Roman power had for some time been consolidated under the vigorous rule of Augustus Cæsar: the kingdom of Judæa, as yet independent, though among the subservient allies of Rome, was still governed by Herod the Great, when a woman in humble station gave birth to a child which she herself regarded as a supernatural being, but which others, naturally enough, concluded to be the son of the honest carpenter to whom she had been lately married. Some singular events marked the epoch; but the affairs of the poor are rarely much inquired into by the rich and the great: and even when the slaughter of the young children at Bethlehem was enough noised abroad to be reported, though erroneously, to Augustus, and drew forth a witticism from the emperor,|| the character of Herod and his deeds of insane cruelty were so generally known, that few would concern themselves much to look for a cause. The king died, and the massacre of a few children was probably almost [forgotten among the many bloody and tyrannical acts, which for some slight cause, or none at all, he had at various times been guilty of.†

* See "Small Books on Great Subjects," No. XIX. Published by Pickering, London, 1851.

|| "When he (Augustus) heard that among the children of two years old whom Herod the king of the Jews had commanded to be put to death in Syria, he had likewise killed his own son, he observed that 'it was better to be Herod's hog than his son.'"—*Macrob. Saturnal.* lii. c. 4.

† When this king found himself to be dying, he ordered a number of persons of the first families to be confined in the circus at Jericho, where he then lay, and gave orders to his sister and her husband to execute them the moment that he expired, thus hoping to prevent the rejoicings which he was well assured would be made when the news of his death became public. It is hardly needful to say that the command was not obeyed; but it may serve to show the character of the man.