



THE HOST OF HEAVEN.

"And worshipped all the host of heaven."—2d Kings, xvii. 16.

At a time far remote, the stars awakened feelings of adoration. The pagan Arabs were gross idolaters. Though assuming a variety of forms, the basis of their religion was star worship—the primitive superstitions of most eastern nations. In the spacious and level plains of Chaldea, where the nights are delightfully cool and serene, the people would naturally be led, especially in their pastoral state, to contemplate the heavenly bodies with peculiar attention. To this country the first rudiments of astronomy are generally ascribed, and there, too, the earliest form of idolatry, the worship of the host of heaven, began to spread.

Among ancient fables is the following:—"As Abraham was walking by night from the grotto where he was born, to the city of Babylon, he gazed on the stars of heaven, and among them, on the beautiful planet Venus. 'Behold,' said he within himself, 'the God and Lord of the universe!'—but the star set and disappeared, and Abraham felt that the Lord of the universe could not thus be liable to change. Shortly after, he beheld the moon at the full. 'Lo,' he cried, 'the Divine Creator, the manifest Deity!'—but the moon sank below the horizon, and Abraham made the same reflection as at the setting of the evening star. All the rest of the night he passed in profound rumination. At sunrise he stood before the gates of Babylon, and saw the whole people prostrate in adoration. 'Wondrous orb!' he exclaimed, 'thou surely art the creator and ruler of all nature! but thou, too, hastest, like the rest, to thy setting!—neither, then, art thou my creator, my Lord, or my God.'"

Such a conclusion, however, was an exception to the general opinions of fallen mankind. From viewing the stars as the visible types of a Divinity, man believed them to be endowed with instincts like his own—animated by his understanding, and subject to his passions. To this succeeded a general persuasion of their influence over the productions of the earth, and the circumstances of its people. It was believed that the stars were the dispensers of weather, which led to the idea of their being inhabited by angels, or beings of an intermediate nature between man and the Supreme. The Arabs paid them therefore, divine honours, because of the alleged benefits they procured through their intercession.

"Thanks be to God, that such a state of idolatry is not ours! The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth." May we so improve it, that it may lead us to the presence and glory of Him who is light, and with whom is no darkness at all!—Vis.

## THE PUNJAB—SIKH RELIGION.

The name Punjab is derived from two Persian words—*punj* (five) and *aub* (water) with reference to the five rivers which flow through it. From the Indus to the Sutlej, east to west, its length is about five degrees, twenty minutes, and its breadth from south to north about four degrees, forty-five minutes. The rivers now mentioned, and the Cashmere mountains, may be regarded as the natural boundaries; but, politically, the western frontier has been carried beyond the Indus, to Peshawur, in Cabul. It is extremely fertile, the climate salubrious. The population of the Punjab (including Cashmere) has been estimated at about 5,000,000 by European travellers; by the natives at considerably more. They may be divided into Hindoos and Mohammedans; the former being as three to one, and, at the same time, better formed and more muscular, from the superiority of their diet. The army amounts to about 70,000 regulars, and 40,000 irregulars, drilled and disciplined after the European mode. And large it need be, if it were only to keep down the ryots (the poor cultivators of the soil) who are sadly oppressed. The European officers have been of great use to the Maharajahs; but they are not liked by the natives: indeed they are not fond of subordination to anybody, and still less of the severe discipline necessary to form steady troops.

The military officers, viz., the sirdars, or territorial chiefs, are born to command; and, what is worse, they are also the only judges in their respective districts. In this respect, they resemble our feudal lords of yore. They are almost universally charged with tyranny and corruption; and there is no reason to doubt its truth. Most of the penalties consist in fines—a rich harvest for these functionaries; but sometimes mutilation is adopted—though not, as we may readily conceive, in regard to delinquents who have the means of bribing the judge.

But it is to the religious state of the country that this paper is to be directed.

"The Sikh religion does not boast of a very high antiquity. Previous to the close of the fifteenth century, the whole of the people inhabiting the Punjab were either followers of Hindooism, devoutly believing in the mythology which, to the present moment, is held in reverence by the millions spread over British India, or disciples of Mohammed from conviction, or the proselytizing influence of Persian and Afghan conquerors. But in the early part of the eighteenth century arose one of those remarkable men who, in all ages and countries, have been destined by the simplest means—the mere effort of mind—to effect a complete reform in the principles and practices of religious faith. Nanac Shah, the son of a salt merchant in a very small way of business, and from his childhood a devout Hindoo, became, at a very early age, strongly imbued with a sense of the virtue of charity, and did not scruple, when launched into a commercial life, to apply the capital with which he had been provided to the relief of wandering faquirs. He was then sent to attend upon cattle in the fields; but this did not prevent his practising austerities, and leading a life of such remarkable purity, that people of rank did homage to him, and urged his father to put him again into business. It was, however, all in vain. Nothing could conquer his utter disregard of worldly goods. He gave to the poor all that he earned, and at length formally renounced secular occupations, and became a faquir, wandering over India, and teaching the doctrines which his reflective mind satisfied him had their foundation in truth. The unity and omnipresence of God were the tenets he enforced; and the immediate object which his teaching professed to have was to reconcile the conflicting faiths of the Hindoo and the Mohammedan. An enemy of discord, he treated the convictions of others with great deference, though he firmly maintained that they were founded in error; and, coupling this course of teaching with an extremely simple and devout manner of life, he neither created cabals among the people whom he visited, nor raised up personal enemies and persecutors. The result was a very extensive conversion of his countrymen from the Brahminical and Mohammedan religions to a belief in pure deism. The new disciples of Nanac called themselves Sikhs—a term derived from the Sanscrit, and applicable to the followers of any particular teacher. It has remained with the people to this moment. At length, after