

principally consisted in the adoration of the host of heaven. It has been asserted, that men were first prompted to idolatry, by a consciousness of their need of a mediator to recommend them to the Divine favour; and that contemplating the heavenly bodies, under the influence of this conviction, as the magnificent residences of beings of a superior order, they offered sacrifice and prayers to these in order to excite them to intercede with God in their behalf. This hypothesis would be less improbable, had we any just reason to believe that the worship of those sidereal deities was ever associated with any distinct conception of the Supreme Being, or with any intended reference to him. But of this there is no evidence. The most rational supposition there seems to be, that after men had lost the knowledge of the true God, becoming vain in their imaginations, they allowed their admiration of the august and elevating spectacle, presented by the expanse of heaven, to rise to such a pitch, that in process of time they regarded the celestial orbs as so many deities arrayed in light, constantly inspecting and governing the affairs of mortals. It was thus that they were induced to venerate them with divine honours, and use such expedients as they deemed most efficacious to propitiate their favour: they had no ulterior design. Here all their views terminated.—The high antiquity and seducing attractions of this superstition are apparent from the notices of it contained in the sacred Scriptures. Job, who flourished before Moses, exculpates himself from the charge of idolatry in these terms—*‘If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above.’*—(Job 31. 26, 27, 28.) The same idolatrous practice prevailed in the days of the prophet Ezekiel—*‘At the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs towards the temple of the Lord, and their faces towards the east; and THEY WORSHIPPED THE SUN towards the east.’*—(Ez. 8. 16.) The heavenly bodies were not the only objects of the adoration of the Persians: they worshipped the whole circuit of heaven—

‘Hoc sublime candens quem invocant omnes Jovem.’

‘This glowing height which all adore as Jove.’

As also the winds and water; and they had the utmost religious veneration for fire, which they considered as the emblem of the sun, and the principle of all things.

A considerable reformation was effected in the religion of the Persians, by the philosophic impostor Zoroaster; who, in order to give the greater sanction to his doctrines, pretended to a divine commission, and feigned to have brought sacred fire from heaven; and that he had deposited it on an altar of the first temple, which he caused to be erected in the city of Xiz, in Media; from which it was communicated to all the other temples in which the Magian rites were observed. He interdicted the use of images, and introduced some changes in the ceremonial of fire-worship. But the doctrine for which he was most famous, related to two eternal and independent beings who, according to his theory, were the great agents of all the good and evil in the world. ‘Among those,’ says Plutarch, ‘who admitted two principles—the one good, the other bad, was the famous Zoroaster. One of these gods he named *Oromazes*, the other *Arimanius*; and said that one had a relation to light and knowledge, the other to darkness and ignorance. He taught that the first was to be sacrificed to, to obtain favours, and the other to

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