

INTRODUCTION.

HITHERTO, Indian opinion, on abstract subjects, has been a sealed book. It has been impossible to extract the truth from his evasive replies. If asked his opinion of religion in the abstract, he knows not the true meaning of the term. His ideas of the existence of a Deity are vague, at best; and the lines of separation between it and necromancy, medical magic, and demonology are too faintly separated to allow him to speak with discrimination. The best reply, as to his religious views, his mythology, his cosmogony, and his general views as to the mode and manifestations of the government and providences of God, are to be found in his myths and legends. When he assembles his lodge-circle, to hear stories, in seasons of leisure and retirement in the depths of the forest, he recites precisely what he believes on these subjects. That restlessness, suspicion, and mistrust of motive, which has closed his mind to inquiry, is at rest here. If he mingles fiction with history, there is a little of the latter, and it is very easy to see where history ends and fiction begins. While he amuses his hearers with tales of the adventures of giants and dwarfs, and the conflicts of Manito with Manito, fairies and enchanters, monsters and demons, he also throws in some few grains of instruction, in the form of allegory and fable, which enable us to perceive glimpses of the heart and its affections.