

No. 1.

THE UNITY OF ORIGIN OF THE HUMAN RACE, PROVED BY THE UNIVERSALITY OF CERTAIN SUPERSTITIONS CONNECTED WITH SNEEZING.

Τοις πταμοι θεον γρομεθα.—Arist. in Problem.

A century ago, in fashionable society, to omit to say, "God bless you," when a person sneezed, was regarded as a gross breach of etiquette. Most persons who have travelled in secluded parts of the United Kingdom, or even in the British Colonies, have noticed that this custom still survives among the humbler classes. It is to be found throughout Europe, as well as in other parts of the world.

Probably no custom has excited more fruitless discussion in all ages, among the learned. Homer mentions it in his *Odyssey*; Aristotle wrote on the subject, and in vain endeavored to explain its existence among his countrymen, who, he tells us, revered it as something sacred,—*Τοις πταμοι θεον γρομεθα*, and used to exclaim, *Ζευ σωσον*, Jupiter preserve you! Apuleius refers to it, and Pliny has a problem on the subject, "*Cur sternutantes saluantur.*" Tiberius observed, and rigidly exacted the custom. The Jewish Rabbies were equally puzzled by its existence among the Hebrews, who to this day exclaim, "*Tobim Chaim.*" (a long life to you!) on such occasions. The Rabbies invented a fable as to Jacob, in order to solve the mystery, in the same manner that Greek philosophers, who were almost equally imaginative, gravely announced the origin to have been in an incident connected with Prometheus. The explanations are too absurd to be referred to here. But this custom was not confined to Europe, or to Judea. It is found to this day on the most remote parts of Asia, and among the most secluded nations of Africa.

But even these three continents are not the limits within which we find this singular and irrational custom.

I have been surprised at finding that it is observed by the natives of the new world. De Soto, in his wanderings in Florida, which he discovered, noticed that when a Sachem sneezed the savages around him bowed down, and invoked the Sun to save him. But we may find it even in the secluded islands of Polynesia. It is the custom in Otaheite to invoke the protection of heaven when a person sneezes.