

to consummate their studies ; and here was that lustre borrowed with which they afterwards illumined and exalted their country. It is mentioned in the sacred volume, as a high eulogium of the learning of Moses, that '*he was learned in all the learning of the Egyptians ;*' and in the same Divine records it is represented as decisive of the pre-eminence of Solomon's wisdom that '*it excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.*' Here, then, if in any part of the heathen world, we might naturally expect to find the sublime science of theology assiduously cultivated, and corresponding in the degree of its improvement to other branches of knowledge. But the expectation is vain. The cloud that environs the uncreated glory of God, still presented its dark side to Egypt ; and, as in the day of Israel's Redemption, shed an involving gloom over the land. Those noble powers of genius, which they so successfully exerted in speculations of science, and proudly displayed in miracles of art, were prostrated in blind and superstitious adoration before imaginary deities. Osiris and Isis—supposed to be the sun and moon, but by some mythologists thought to comprehend all nature—were among the principal objects of their religious veneration. The accounts of these divinities transmitted to us are legendary and absurd. Osiris is said to have been slain by the perfidious cruelty of his brother Typhon ; and the Egyptians attributed the inundations of the Nile to the profusion of tears which Isis shed, in deploring that melancholy event. They also worshipped Ammon, who was afterwards the Jupiter of the Greeks. This celebrated deity was, in all probability, an apotheosis of Ham, by whose posterity Africa was peopled. He had two magnificent temples : one in the desert of Lybia, in which were an hundred priests : here was an oracle of wide-spread fame, till its reputation was forfeited by obvious falsehood and disgusting flattery. The other was at Thebes, the capital of Upper Egypt, and the vestiges of its ancient grandeur are said to be still visible.—It may be observed, that no species of idolatry was more common throughout all pagan antiquity than the worship of the serpent. Satan appears to have taken a peculiar degree of malignant pleasure, in erecting this appropriate and significant emblem of himself into an object of devotional homage. Some of these animals were worshipped by the Egyptians as household gods ; others they distinguished with more public honours. *Eliau* tells us of a serpent worshipped in a tower at Melitus, in Egypt ; he had a priest and officers to attend him ; and he was served every day on a table or altar, with flour kneaded up with honey, which the next day was found to be eaten up. The cat, the crocodile, the sparrow-hawk, and even the herbs of their gardens, were treated with reverence, equal to that which they paid to their most illustrious gods. So just are the reflections of Bishop Stillingfleet—'*Had we no other demonstration of the greatness of man's Apostacy and Degeneracy, the Egyptian theology would be an irrefragable evidence of it. For who could but imagine a strange lowness of spirit, in those who could fall down and worship the basest and most contemptible of creatures ? Their temples were the best hieroglyphics of themselves—fair and goodly structures without, but within, some deformed creature enshrined for adoration.*'*

According to the opinion of some eminent moderns, the religion of the Persians originally recognised one Supreme Being only—the creator and governor of the universe. But this has been too gratuitously asserted, to challenge our unhesitating assent. Be that however as it may, it is well known that they, in common with all the other eastern nations, were immemorably addicted to the Sabian superstition, which

* Origines Sacrae.