

the work of more than one author and period), at about 880 years before Christ ; but this opinion is regarded by many eminent Sanscrit scholars, and amongst the rest, by Professor Wilson, as quite conjectural. That the Cosmogony, however, is the most ancient part of the whole, and chiefly derived from the Vedas, is indisputable. Although it has been disfigured by many absurd fictions, such as the story of the first seed which became an egg, in which Brahma, or the creative spirit, was born, who divided his own substance and became half-male and half-female, with many other strange inventions, and far-fetched metaphysical subtilities, we cannot study this pretended revelation and believe that it was a pure effort of the unassisted imagination. It was certainly not composed without regard to opinions and theories founded on the observation of *nature*, and so far its source may truly be said to have been in part divine.

In astronomy, for example, we find doctrines propounded, which we know must have been deduced by reasoning from observed facts. Thus for instance it is declared, that, at the North Pole, the year was divided into a long day and night, and that their long day was the northern, and their night the southern course of the sun ; and to the inhabitants of the moon, it is said, one day is equal in length to one month of mortals.* If such statements cannot be resolved into mere conjectures, we have no right to refer to mere chance the prevailing notion, that the earth and its inhabitants had formerly undergone a succession of revolutions and catastrophes interrupted by long intervals of tranquillity.

Now there are two sources in which such a theory may have originated. The marks of former convulsions on every part of the surface of our planet are obvious and striking. The remains of marine animals imbedded in the solid strata are so abundant, that they may be expected to force themselves on the attention of every people who have made some progress in refinement ; and especially where one class of men are expressly set apart from the rest for study and contemplation. If these appearances are once recognized, it seems natural that the mind should conclude in favour, not only of mighty changes in past ages, but of alternate periods of repose and disorder ; — of repose, when the fossil animals lived, grew and multiplied — of disorder, when the strata in which they were buried became transferred from the sea, to the interior of continents, and were uplifted so as to form part of high mountain-chains. Those modern writers, who are disposed to disparage the former intellectual advancement and civilization of Eastern nations, may concede some foundation of observed facts for the curious theories now under consideration, without indulging in exaggerated opinions of the progress of science ; especially as universal catastrophes of the world, and exterminations of organic beings, in the sense in which they were understood by the Brahmins, are untenable doctrines.

We know that the Egyptian priests were aware, not only that

* Menù, Inst. c. i. 66, and 67.