

exert a powerful influence on the mind of the philosopher. He may find, in the monuments of former changes on the earth's surface, an apparent confirmation of tenets handed down through successive generations, from the rude hunter, whose terrified imagination drew a false picture of those awful visitations of floods and earthquakes, whereby the whole earth as known to him was simultaneously devastated.

*Egyptian Cosmogony.*—Respecting the cosmogony of the Egyptian priests, we gather much information from writers of the Grecian sects, who borrowed almost all their tenets from Egypt, and amongst others that of the former successive destruction and renovation of the world.\* We learn from Plutarch, that this was the theme of one of the hymns of Orpheus, so celebrated in the fabulous ages of Greece. It was brought by him from the banks of the Nile; and we even find in his verses, as in the Indian systems, a definite period assigned for the duration of each successive world.† The returns of great catastrophes were determined by the period of the Annus Magnus, or great year,—a cycle composed of the revolutions of the sun, moon, and planets, and terminating when these return together to the same sign whence they were supposed at some remote epoch to have set out. The duration of this great cycle was variously estimated. According to Orpheus, it was 120,000 years; according to others, 300,000; and by Cassander it was taken to be 360,000 years.‡

We learn particularly from the *Timæus* of Plato, that the Egyptians believed the world to be subject to occasional conflagrations and deluges, whereby the gods arrested the career of human wickedness, and purified the earth from guilt. After each regeneration, mankind were in a state of virtue and happiness, from which they gradually degenerated again into vice and immorality. From this Egyptian doctrine, the poets derived the fable of the decline from the golden to the iron age. The sect of Stoics adopted most fully the system of catastrophes destined at certain intervals to destroy the world. Those they taught were of two kinds;—the Cataclysm or destruction by deluge, which sweeps away the whole human race, and annihilates all the animal and vegetable productions of nature; and the Ecpyrosis, or conflagration, which dissolves the globe itself. From the Egyptians also they derived the doctrine of the gradual debasement of man from a state of innocence. Towards the termination of each era the gods could no longer bear with the wickedness of men, and a shock of the elements or a deluge overwhelmed them; after which calamity, Astrea again descended on the earth, to renew the golden age. §

The connection between the doctrine of successive catastrophes and repeated deteriorations in the moral character of the human race, is more intimate and natural than might at first be imagined. For, in a rude state of society, all great calamities are regarded by the people

\* Prichard's Egypt. Mythol. p. 177.

also Prichard's Egypt. Mythol. p. 182.

† Plut. de Defectu Oraculorum, cap.

‡ Prichard's Egypt. Mythol. p. 182.

12. Censorinus de Die Natali. See

§ Ibid. p. 193.