

as judgments of God on the wickedness of man. Thus in our own time, the priests persuaded a large part of the population of Chili, and perhaps believed themselves, that the fatal earthquake of 1822 was a sign of the wrath of Heaven for the great political revolution just then consummated in South America. In like manner, in the account given to Solon by the Egyptian priests, of the submersion of the island of Atlantis under the waters of the ocean, after repeated shocks of an earthquake, we find that the event happened when Jupiter had seen the moral depravity of the inhabitants.* Now, when the notion had once gained ground, whether from causes before suggested or not, that the earth had been destroyed by several general catastrophes, it would next be inferred that the human race had been as often destroyed and renovated. And since every extermination was assumed to be penal, it could only be reconciled with divine justice, by the supposition that man, at each successive creation, was regenerated in a state of purity and innocence.

A very large portion of Asia, inhabited by the earliest nations whose traditions have come down to us, has been always subject to tremendous earthquakes. Of the geographical boundaries of these, and their effects, I shall speak in the proper place. Egypt has, for the most part, been exempt from this scourge, and the Egyptian doctrine of great catastrophes was doubtless derived from the East.

One extraordinary fiction of the Egyptian cosmogony, and which we also find in the first chapter of Menù before cited, was the supposed intervention of a masculo-feminine principle, to which was assigned the development of the embryo world, somewhat in the way of incubation. For the doctrine was, that, when the first chaotic mass had been produced, in the form of an egg, by a self-dependent and eternal being, it required the mysterious functions of this masculo-feminine artificer to reduce the component elements into organized forms.

The Oriental philosophers were evidently desirous of imagining some analogy between the method employed by the Author of nature in the first creation of the earth and its inhabitants, and the laws which now govern the birth of new individuals by generation. In like manner we may discern, in several geological systems of modern date, an attempt to fancy some analogy between the agents now employed to destroy, renovate, and perpetually vary the earth's surface, and those whereby the first chaotic mass was formed, and brought by supposed nascent energy from an embryo to a habitable state.

By how many shades the several theories constructed on these principles may differ from the mysteries of the "Mundane Egg" of Hindoo and Egyptian fable, I shall not inquire. Some of my contemporaries, perhaps, might not sit as patiently as did the Athenian audience, when the fiction of the chaotic egg, engrafted by Orpheus upon their own mythology, was turned into ridicule by Aristophanes. That comedian introduced his birds singing, in a solemn hymn, "How

* Plato's *Timæus*.