

These central points involuntarily remind us of the largest among the sparkling stars of the firmament, those eternal suns in the regions of space, the intensity of whose brightness we certainly know, although it is only in the case of a few that we have been able to arrive at any certain knowledge regarding the relative distances which separate them from our planet.

The hypothesis regarding the physical knowledge supposed to have been revealed to the primitive races of men—the natural philosophy ascribed to savage nations, and since obscured by civilization—belongs to a sphere of science, or, rather, of belief, which is foreign to the object of the present work. We find this belief deeply rooted in the most ancient Indian doctrine of Krischna.* “Truth was originally implanted in mankind, but, having been suffered gradually to slumber, it was finally forgotten, knowledge returning to us since that period as a recollection.” We will not attempt to decide the question whether the races, which we at present term savage, are all in a condition of original wildness, or whether, as the structure of their languages often allows of our conjecturing, many among them may not be tribes that have degenerated into a wild state, remaining as the scattered fragments saved from the wreck of a civilization that was early lost. A more intimate acquaintance with these so-called children of nature reveals no traces of that superiority of knowledge regarding terrestrial forces which a love of the marvelous has led men to ascribe to these rude nations. A vague and terror-stricken feeling of the unity of natural forces is no doubt awakened in the breast of the savage, but such a feeling has nothing in common with the attempt to prove, by the power of thought, the connection that exists among all phenomena. True cosmical views are the result of observation and ideal combination, and of a long-continued communion with the external world; nor are they a work of a single people, but the fruits yielded by reciprocal communication, and by a great, if not general, intercourse between different nations.

As, in the considerations on the reflection of the external world on the powers of the imagination at the beginning of this section of the present work, I selected from the general history of literature examples illustrative of the expression of an animated feeling for nature, so, in *the history of the contemplation of the universe*, I would likewise bring forward from the general history of civilization whatever may serve to

* Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Ueber eine Episode des Maha-Bharata*, in his *Gesammelte Werke*, bd. i., s. 73.