having ſeen it afar off, were perſuaded of, and embraced ; and confessed that they were ſtrangers and pilgrims upon earth.”

That ſuch persons looked for “ a better country, even a heavenly one,” in a future ſtate, cannot be queſtioned ; for they knew well how sin and death had entered into the world, and they muſt have underſtood the promiſe made to their original progenitor, and repeatedly renewed to them­ſelves, to include in it a deliverance at ſome period from eve­ry conſequence of the firſt tranſgreſſion. They were to all intents and purpoſes Chriſtians as well as we. They in­deed placed their confidence in a Redeemer, who in the fulneſs of time was to appear upon earth, while we place ours in a Redeemer that has been already manifeſted ; they expreſſed that confidence by one mode of worſhip, we expreſs it by another ; but the patriarchal worſhip had the same end in view with the Chriſtian— the attainment of everlaſting life in heaven.

The generality of men, however, appear not, in the early age of which we now write, to have extended their views beyond the preſent life. From the confuſed remains of an­cient tradition, they acknowledged indeed ſome ſuperior power or powers, to whom they frequently applied for di­rection in their affairs ; but in all probability it was only for direction in temporal affairs, ſuch as the cultivation of the ground, or their tranſactions with each other. In the then ſtate of things, when no part of the world was overſtocked with inhabitants, and when luxury with its conſequences were everywhere unknown, virtue and vice muſt have pro­duced their natural effects ; and the good man being happy here, and the wicked man miſerable, reaſon had no data from which to infer the reality of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments. Thoſe who were bleſſed with the light of re­velation undoubtedly looked forward to that ſtate with a holy joy ; but the rest worſhipped ſuperior powers from worldly motives. How many of thoſe powers there might be, or how far their influence might reach, they knew not. Uncertain whether there be one Supreme Governor of the whole world, or many co-ordinate powers preſiding each over a particular country, climate, or place—gods of the hills and of the valleys, as they were afterwards diſtinguiſhed—they thought that the more of theſe they could engage in their intereſt the better. Like the Samaritans therefore, in after times, they sought, wherever they came, the “ man­ners of the god of the land,” and ſerved him, together with their own gods.

Thus was the world ready to lose all knowledge of the true God and his worſhip, had not he been graciouſly pleased to interpose, and take effectual care to preſerve that know­ledge in one nation, from which it might be conveyed to the rest of mankind at different times, and in greater or leſs de­grees, as they ſhould be capable of receiving it. To this purpoſe he made way for the removal of Jacob and his fa­mily to one of the moſt improved and poliſhed countries of the world ; and introduced them into it in a manner ſo advan­tageous, as to give them an opportunity of imparting much religious knowledge to the natives. The natives, however, were groſs idolaters ; and that his choſen people might be as far as poſſible from the contagion of their example, he placed them upon the borders of Egypt, where, though they multiplied exceedingly, they were by their very oc­cupation @@\* stll kept a ſeparate people, and muſt have been rendered, by a long and ſevere oppreſſion, in a great degree averse from the manners and religion of their neighbours. This aversion, however, ſeems to have gradually become leſs and leſs ; and before they were miraculouſly redeemed from their houſe of bondage, they had certainly lost all correct notions of the unity of God, and the nature of his worſhip, and had adopted the greater part of the ſuperstions of their taſk-maſters. Of this we need no other proof than what is implied in the words of Moses@@\*, when he said unto God, “ Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel,and ſay unto them, the God of your fathers hath sent me unto you ; and they ſhall say unto me, What is his name ? what ſhall I ſay unto them ?” Had not the deſtined lawgiver of the Hebrews been aware that his countrymen had adop­ted a plurality of gods, this difficulty could not have occur­red to him ; for *names* are never thought of but to diſtinguiſh from each other beings of the same kind ; and he muſt have remembered, that in Egypt, where the multitude of gods was marſhalled into various claſſes, the knowledge of their names was deemed of great importance. This we learn likewiſe from Herodotus, who informs us@@\*, that the Pelaſgi, after settling in Greece, thought it neceſſary to consult the oracle of Dodona, whether it would be proper to give to their own gods the names of the Egyptian divinities ? and that the oracle, as might have been ſuppoſed, aſſured them that it would. Indeed the Hebrews during their reſidence in Egypt had acquired ſuch an attachment to the idolatrous worſhip of the country, that it appears never to have left them entirely till many ages afterwards, when they were carried captive into Babylon, and ſeverely puniſhed for their repeated apoſtacies ; and ſo completely were they in­fatuated by theſe ſuperſtitions at the era of their exodus, that, as the prophet Ezekiel informs us@@\*, they rebelled againſt God, and would not caſt away their abomina­tions, or forſake the idols of Egypt, even in the *very day* that the hand of Omnipotence was lifted up to bring them forth of that land in which they had been ſo long and ſo cruelly oppressed. In ſuch a ſtate of things, to have ſuffered them to remain longer in Egypt, could have ſerved no good purpoſe ; and therefore to fulfil the promiſe which he had given to Abraham, God determined to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians by means which ſhould con­vince both them and their offspring of his own ſupremacy over heaven and earth.

As Moles was the person appointed to deliver God’s mesſage to Pharaoh, and to demand of him leave for the Iſraelites to go three days journey into the wilderneſs to ſerve the God of their fathers, it was neceſſary that he ſhould be endowed with the power of making miracles to evince the reality of his divine miſſion. Without a conviction that his claims were well-founded, neither Pharaoh nor his own countrymen could reasonably have been expected to liſten to the propoſals of a man who, though bleſſed in his youth with a princely education, had come directly on his embaſſy from the humble employment of a ſhepherd, which he had for many years exerciſed in the country of Midian. To prove that he was really ſent by God, any viſible and un­doubted controul of the laws of nature would have been abundantly ſuſſicient ; but he was to prove not only this truth, but alſo the unity of the Divine nature ; and the mi­racles which he was directed to work were executions of judgments againſt the very gods of Egypt@@\*.

When Pharaoh firſt turned a deaf ear to his requeſt, tho’ enforced by the converſion of a rod into a ſerpent, at the -command of Jehovah he ſmote with the ſame rod upon the waters in the river, which were inſtantly converted into blood, and occaſioned the death of all the fishes that swam in them. To any people this miracle would have been a proof of Divine agency ; but it was in a particular manner calculated to open the eyes of the blind and infatuated Egyptians, who conſidered the Nile as one of their greateſt gods, and all the fiſhes that it contained as ſubordinate di­vinities. they called that noble river sometimes *Sirius,* ſometimes Osir*is,* sometimes Can*obus* (ſee Canobus), and

@@@[m]\* Gen. xlvi. 33, 34.

@@@[m]\* Exod. iii.

@@@[m]\* Lib. ii. cap. 52, 53.

@@@[m]\* Ch. xx.

@@@[m]\* I. Exod. xii. 12.