

world from which an impious caviller might presume to question the divine omniscience, and have arrogance enough to correct the workmanship of the infinite Creator. How much, might such a caviller exclaim, is the surface of the earth deformed with barren heaths and sandy deserts! To how much better purpose might the sandy deserts of Arabia and Africa be applied, than by leaving them in useless, dreary, barren desolation—a black spot of imperfection on this fair globe. How often are the hopes of the year scorched and destroyed from the irregular distribution of heat and rain! *How often does the rain fall uselessly upon these*, leaving the neighbouring fields parched and dry, while hunger, misery and death ravage among the helpless inhabitants! The imagination can conceive an order of things in which the dews and rains would descend just where and when they might be wanted, and can picture to itself an arrangement much more conducive to the enjoyment of animated beings—a golden age in which the miseries of our iron days would be unknown. But, it is presumptuous and unwarrantable for *reason* to speculate in such idle dreams. The task would be interminable and unproductive of any good. And if such a mode of *conjecturing* be discarded in natural history, why should it be tolerated in religion whether natural or revealed; and if natural religion be recognized by all except atheists and madmen, notwithstanding the abstruseness or even incomprehensibility of many of its doctrines, why may not revealed religion be received, although attended with similar difficulties, especially since such might have been expected *a priori* both from the nature of the subject and the limited powers of the human mind.

It might be easy to adduce the testimony of the wisest men in all ages in regard to the limited extent of human knowledge and the unsatisfactory nature of human inquiry. Insurmountable obstacles appear at the very threshold of almost every inquiry, and even in those subjects which are best known, after we are removed a few steps from the mere surface of things, we are left in impenetrable darkness. Instances are at hand in every science. The causes of things are all unknown. A few facts comprise the sum of human knowledge. Even in regard to the commonest actions and concerns of life, in which we ourselves are the agents, we are surrounded with the same obscurity. At the commencement of any undertaking, how rarely do we know the success that shall attend it, and often indeed, it is beyond the reach of conjecture. If there were any branch of science in which perfect knowledge could be attained it would be an anomaly in the subjects of human thought.

The mathematical sciences are commonly mentioned as branches in which perfect certainty is to be attained, and this is true in regard to some parts of them; but it is well known that in the higher branches of analysis, the certainty is by no means so great, and even in cases where the results are true and uniform, there has been, and still is, much diversity of opinion, in describing the rationale of the process by which they are attained. To talk of quantities *infinitely small*, or to institute a *comparison of infinities*, is as unintelligible as the most mysterious doctrines of psychology; the correctness of the conclusions procures a reception for the reasoning, or rather the language of the reasoning, and why should not the practical consequences of the other operate also in their favour—and the difficulties of both be absorbed in the utility, till the means of investigation become more perfect.

Yet there are many men who contend, that were the scriptures a revelation from God, they would only contain matter easy to be understood by all those for whose benefit they were designed; for a revelation that cannot be understood is obviously no revelation at all. In answer to this objection it may be stated that the leading doctrines and precepts of Christ are so plainly stated in the sacred scriptures that they are not likely to be greatly misunderstood by any honest mind to which they are proposed. The cream of this objection, however, is not yet touched, for it is intended to insinuate that because there are doctrines in scripture, which though plainly enough expressed, are yet incomprehensible, (and because these are precepts for which we can see no reason,) therefore they do not bear the stamp of a divine revelation, for they are not commensurate with our capacities, and cannot receive our belief. This objection is founded on false ideas and ambiguous language. In one sense it is true; for if I have no understanding at all of the terms of any proposition, I cannot believe it, yet I may have an indefinite idea of the terms, which though neither clear nor full, may still be a sufficient basis for belief. Thus I have no precise idea of unlimited space. The term is merely negative; yet as I cannot limit space by any effort of imagination, I have sufficient reason to believe that it is unlimited. The same remark will apply to all the divine attributes. We can have no adequate conception of these—we cannot measure them in their full extent; yet, as we have some conception of similar qualities in finite beings, and as in transforming these to the divine character, we are unable to conceive of them as imperfect or limited, we have sufficient reason to believe that they are infinite.