

ration, but it served to gain them proselytes, and this silenced every scruple. Had they been honestly sincere in this exalting reason, they would have hailed every source or avenue, by which it could be instructed or improved, instead of gratifying that natural arrogance, self-sufficiency, and perverseness, which it so frequently manifests when applying to the most important and interesting inquiries.

From mistaking the true province of this admirable faculty, for admirable it must always be, when attending to things within its competence, it has been called upon to judge of the nature, as well as evidence of religion, and as it found some doctrines beyond its comprehension, it has frequently chosen to deny their truth.

Now it should be recollected, that many things may be above or beyond the power of reason fully to comprehend and explain, which are true in fact; for, of this we have numberless instances around us. It knows not the nature or essential properties either of spirit or of matter, although we know that they exist: it comprehends not the nature of the soul, or that of its union with the body. Even in matters seemingly more familiar, we are equally ignorant. What is heat and cold? How did we get life? what power supports it? How do our limbs instantly obey our will? How does our food nourish the body? Reason can give no answer. Why then should we be offended at meeting with some difficulties in the Holy Scriptures?

The province of reason, when applied to the knowledge of Divine truth, appears therefore to have been greatly misunderstood. Here it expected to explain every thing, or to reject, as fallacious, what it cannot explain. What presumption! When directed to religious truth, its business is to consider and ascertain the truth of the evidences of a divine revelation; to examine the proper and obvious meaning of Scripture; to weigh the different parts one with another; to deduce proper inferences, and to guard against contradictions and false conclusions. But it is not the province of reason to determine the extent and firmness of our belief by our capacity to comprehend the whole nature of the object revealed. In fine, it judges of the certainty of the revelation, but not of its nature. Kept within these limits, reason may, with great propriety, be deemed a light from heaven; but when it overleaps them, it becomes, as Bayle justly remarks, a principle of destruction, not of edi-