

derive their knowledge from the actual observation of the workmanship of God in creation;—they did not attentively observe what was actually spread out before them, that they might truly ascertain its properties and interpret its laws;—but they set about inventing theories of their own, based for the most part upon the hasty and inaccurate observation of natural phenomena. Thus their philosophical systems were no better than crude puerilities, and these, be it observed, were not the puerilities of the untaught multitude, but of the learned,—the men of mightiest intellect,—men who in some other departments of knowledge had merited an imperishable fame. They failed, however, of obtaining truth in natural science because they substituted their own theories for the right interpretation of the facts that nature presented. Their philosophy, falsely so-called, was nothing better than a dream, and the more ingenious and beautiful the dream, the more hopeless the condition of the dreamer. Happily, the era of mis-directed philosophy has nearly passed away, and the inquirer now comes to the study of nature itself, that he may know what God has done.

But much must yet be changed before the analogous error be corrected, in reference to the still more momentous question, what hath God commanded? How few, comparatively, either in their theory or their practice, appeal to the authority of God on this point! What multitudes appeal to standards of morality, which diverge as far from the divine rule of rectitude as the philosophical theories to which we have adverted diverge from the right interpretation of nature. Thus, how many around us, even amidst all the light which revelation sheds upon the question, "What doth the Lord require of thee?" continue to turn away from that light to the delusive

meteors that spring up from the corruptions of society. They hold it enough for them to say, as a reason for their continuance in some particular practice, although it be a manifest infringement of some moral principle, or even of some express moral precept, "the people all around me do the same thing; the most respectable classes do it continually, and have no doubt about the propriety of it;" it would be deemed quite an unfashionable and unmannerly thing to express any scrupulosity about the matter: it is held to be a sufficient reason to say that the custom prevails among very respectable people, and any attempt to test the morality of the custom by a higher standard than common or fashionable opinion, might run the chance of being treated as a very vexatious or puritanical innovation.

We might appeal to history and observation for an illustration of this point. The law of the Sabbath, for instance, in its spirit and principle, is by no means ambiguous. It is designed to secure to the whole human family, one day in seven, for their moral improvement, and the private and public worship of God: the entire day is to be consecrated to this object, and every thing not congenial with it, except the works of necessity and mercy, is expressly prohibited, as at variance with the statutes and morality of God's kingdom; and by several explications of the principles of this law, contained in the Holy Scriptures, it is extended, as, indeed, from its very nature as a moral principle, it must be, to our whole trains of thought and feeling. Now, the prevalent and approved customs of society have often been directly at variance, not only with the moral principles involved in the institution, but with the express precepts which, in the divine law, have been embodied. Thus, in those nations of Christendom where Romanism has the prevailing influence, this divine institute has been