

wide intervals of time, in a period exceeding fifteen hundred years, composed in different languages and in different states of the same language, by men of various habits, and talents, and conditions of life. It is obvious that all these circumstances ought to be taken into account in order to the just interpretation of their writings, and that many obscurities may arise from the neglect of this. Every person acquainted with different languages knows how nice a thing it is to transmute the beauties, and energy, and precise signification of one language into another; and this difficulty may be supposed greater in regard to dead languages in proportion to their antiquity: and if so, it must press most heavily upon translations from Hebrew, the most ancient language of which we have any information. Now it does often happen that obscurities in the translation are removed by a critical acquaintance with the original languages, by a knowledge of the antiquities, manners and customs of the several ages in which the books were written, and of the nations to which they were addressed. Besides, an extensive acquaintance with men and things, of the motives by which they are actuated, with the various moral and physical causes by which they are in any degree affected, may all be rendered subservient to the elucidation of heavenly truth, and prepare us for receiving due advantage from it. Indeed, it may be asserted, that the higher our intellectual powers are improved, and the more extensive our knowledge is in every subject of human thought, the better qualified will we be, if we are actuated by a sincere love of truth, and with humble piety, for receiving this light from heaven. These strengthen the intellectual vision, and enable us to take in a wider range of objects, and to examine these objects with greater accuracy, which are proposed to the understanding, whether they belong to the province of reason or faith.

Perhaps it may be objected to this, that a revelation which requires such high attainments to understand, and to profit by it, in any considerable degree, can never be intended for the general good of man, as it can never be expected that the generality of men, in the present condition of the world will ever possess these attainments. This objection has in reality very little weight, and it applies equally to the most useful sciences and arts of life. If the mariner were to refuse to practice the rules of navigation because he did not know the demonstrations on which they are founded, there would be an end to navigation and commerce. If the patient refused to follow the prescriptions of his physician till he was instructed as to the com-

position and nature of the various medicines appointed for him, and their mode of producing the desired effect, death might overtake and punish him for his scepticism. This objection applies also to the whole scheme of providence as it regards human affairs. Why has the Creator assigned to one man a more capacious mind than he has bestowed upon another? Why has he granted to one man leisure and means for improvement in knowledge, while the multitude are wholly employed in manual occupations? How is it permitted in a world superintended by an impartial Governor, that the few exercise dominion over the many? He who would advance as argument against christianity that it cannot be from God, because to the multitude it is known only in part, may with equal reason, object to the scheme of providence, and must maintain consistency by plunging into atheism—into the unfathomable abyss of universal scepticism. This unequal distribution of religious knowledge cannot be otherwise in the present constitution of things. As long as the child must know less than the man, and the aged man more than the stripling—as long as men are unequal in mental vigour, and bestow attention and diligence in various degrees—as long as the constitution of human society requires a division and commutation of labor—so long must these inequalities remain. Hence those who have no leisure to inquire into the evidences and more difficult parts of scripture, must be guided in a great measure by their instructors, as they are by their governors, legislators, generals and physicians. And although there be much mystery in religion, yet the principal parts, the essential doctrines of it are so plain, that the most knavish or ignorant instructor cannot mislead any individual very widely from practical truth, if he only possess his Bible and common understanding.

This assertion might be the more confidently made were men only to apply themselves to the study of that blessed book in a proper temper of mind. Many of the difficulties that attend the study of revealed truth, arise from the want of a temper and frame of mind suited to the investigation of it. Men are not easily brought to discern truths which are opposed to prevailing passions and inclinations; and yet it must frequently happen from the ignorance and depravity of man, that a revelation which is pure and divine will oppose his passions. And it might as well be expected that a man destitute of taste and imagination should relish the beauties of poetry, as that a man of sensual and immoral habits should relish or perceive the beauties of morality and religion. The