

which we will discuss as briefly as the nature of the case will admit, and in language so simple that we trust every capacity will be able to understand it. And first we must say a few words about

WATER.

Water is one of the four primary elements, and, in the opinion of many Philosophers, it is superior to fire, air and earth.* In fact they say that besides its many other wonderful properties it contains within it the essence of the other elements. Water consists of a chemical union of oxygen and hydrogen. Eight parts out of nine in water are oxygen, and one-ninth part is hydrogen, if we regard weight. But, by measure, two-thirds of water are hydrogen. Oxygen, as is well known, is so important, that no animal or vegetable could live without it. Remove oxygen, and we should all cease to exist. Oxygen is a constituent of stones and earth, and it forms about a fifth part of the atmosphere. A very great portion both of animal and vegetable substances consists of hydrogen, which likewise is inflammable, although it does not support (as the chemists say) combustion or respiration. Thus we see how comprehensive are the properties of water. It is as it were the blood of the earth. Those deep fountains of water which are hidden in the secret abyss of the earth may be said to be the heart of the globe; for as the human heart, the reservoir of the life-giving current, sends the blood by innumerable veins, &c., to every part of the body, to nourish, sustain and enliven it, so the watery fountain in the midst of the earth sends forth through countless channels, mysterious tubes, and winding veins, those refreshing streams which are so essential to man's life and happiness: which enliven and fertilize the soil, refresh the earth, clothe it with trees and herbs and flowers, furnish drink for the thirsty sun, and aliment for the genial clouds. Wonderful element indeed is water: wondrous are its properties, and its

* S. Cyril of Jerusalem in his 3rd Catechet. Instruct. on Baptism, says: 'Water is something great, and of the four principal elements of the world, the most beautiful (*Kolliston*). The habitation of the angels is heaven; but the heavens are from the waters. The earth is the abode of men, but the earth also is from waters. . . . The beginning of the world is water; the beginning of the gospels is the Jordan.'