

by internal or external evidence, that is, until we discover from the nature of the thing itself that it is agreeable to truth, or until we are satisfied of its truth from unexceptionable testimony. But when a thing is *contrary* to reason, no evidence whatever, not even miracles, could it be supposed possible that they would be wrought on such an occasion, could compel our assent, for to believe it is a thing inconsistent with our present constitution. If, therefore, it could be shewn in a pretended revelation that it contained propositions *contrary* to reason and obviously absurd, it is plain we must reject it on this ground, whatever external evidence it might presume to have.

But the enemies of the christian revelation have never been successful in proving that it contained any doctrine contrary to reason. And although many attempts have been made to prove some of its mysterious truths to be such, and on such obscure ground there is much room for ingenuity to work upon, yet they have never been able to prove them irrational, though many of them are incomprehensible; and so long as this is the case, and while they remain supported by an external evidence so satisfactory they may be made the objects of a rational and an enlightened faith; and the more so, that this external evidence is so powerfully corroborated by the internal proofs of a divine origin. For although there be much that is dark in the sacred writings, yet there are so many sublime and rational doctrines, and so many precepts are contained in them of transcendent excellence as afford a strong presumption that what we do not understand possesses a similar character, though the reasons of it at present are hid from us. In ordinary affairs, men cordially believe and act upon such presumptions. If the acts of any administration have been, upon the whole, wise and beneficial, although in some particular exigence, measures may be pursued apparently unreasonable and injurious; yet, a good and wise man will find no difficulty in supporting these, or at least suspending his judgment till the whole evidence of the procedure is before him. And why may not men act thus in regard to the mysterious truths of religion, when to do so, is attended with the greatest safety in every point of view?

It would be tedious to enumerate all the doctrines of the christian revelation which are not distinctly comprehensible, or the general difficulties, of a removable kind, which enumber the mind in studying that sacred record. The ideas presented are often too vast and overwhelming for the limited faculties of man, weakened and debased as they are, with the impurities of a sensual and

corrupted character. How indistinct are our highest conceptions of the divine nature and attributes of that being which never began—that nature which can never change—that wisdom which sees all things from eternity and gains no accession—that power which nothing can resist—and of that essence which is every where diffused, and yet every where perfect and entire! How obscure is our idea of the union of the three divine persons in one Godhead, and of the different parts which these united beings took in the scheme of redemption—the union of the divine with the human nature in the person of our Saviour. How dark and incomprehensible are these truths, and how easy would it be to add to their number from the sacred volume. But how imperfect and limited are our views of things in which we are more concerned, and which we may suppose are more within the range of our powers. How little do we know of that part of the divine administration of which we ourselves are the subjects! What do we know of the nature of our own spirits and of their connection with the grosser parts of our frame? How dim and wavering is our intellectual vision when we take a glimpse of the invisible world of spirits, aided though we be by the discoveries of faith. These ideas are far removed from our perceptions. When we try to fix our attention upon them, we feel as if we were looking into a gloomy cavern filled with dim and shadowy images—venerable and awful indeed, but more venerable and more awful from their obscurity, than from any distinct impression which they make upon our minds. But such obscurities were to be expected from the high elevation of the subject, from the natural imperfection of our capacities, and from that engrossment with sensible objects incident to our present condition—an engrossment which tends to unfit us for these abstract and spiritual contemplations. Many of these difficulties seem to be of a nature which cannot be surmounted till we become disembodied spirits, when an increase of capacity and a change of relation to such objects may render them more clear and intelligible. Such a hope is held out to us in scripture. What we know not now, we may know hereafter, and those things that are now seen darkly as in a glass, we may then see, as face to face, and know even as we are known. Yes, it is pleasing to hope, for the hope is founded on the promise of God, that as we rise higher in the scale of being—in immortal existence, as we approach nearer to the throne of God and of the Lamb, the clouds and darkness which surround it may be gradually dispelled, and although the distance between the supreme and self-existent God, and any created