

confined. Protestants, in our own age and country, have been by no means exempt from displays of this weakness. The followers of Richard Brothers, and Joanna Southcott, and the miraculous healers, and even of Edward Irving, shew that the race is not extinct, even in England, while the belief in good and bad omens, the efficacy of spells and charms, the reality of ghosts and apparitions, the mighty power and prophetic intelligence of the stars, is in some instances as strong though not so general in extent, as in the fifteenth century.—Natural phenomena, too, as well as religious truth, have also been contemplated through the same perverting medium. The following curious instance of popular prejudice, is recorded by the late Mr. Parkinson in his very instructive work on *The organic Remains of a former world*: “Our landlady, taking up a stone resembling those she had seen in the road, but much smaller—this, said she, is a petrified snake, with which this part of the country abounds. These were fairies, and once the inhabitants of these parts, who, for their crimes, were changed first into snakes, and then into stones. Here, said she, shewing us a stone of a conical form, is one of the fairy night-caps, now also become a stone. Do, madam, observe; is it possible that lace-work so beautiful as this, should ever be worked by human hands? This, said she, and that, are pieces of the *bones of giants*, who came to live here when the race of fairies was destroyed. These bones, she informed us, were frequently dug up in several parts of the country, as well as innumerable *thunderbolts*, some of which she shewed us, stating that these were the very thunderbolts with which these people were, in their turn, also destroyed.” Many of us can recollect hearing stories in some respects similar, though there is no doubt that increasing knowledge is

continually diminishing the number of those who receive and perpetuate errors through the impulse of blind or hasty credulity. It is not ignorance alone, or even imbecility of mind, that gives rise to credulity; for instances are to be met with of learned men, of strong minds and cultivated talents, who have manifested this imperfection. In these cases there may probably be some defect of balance among the mental powers, some undue predominance of imagination or fancy over the other faculties. John Wesley and Dr. Johnson were examples of this class—a comparatively small one;—and their credulity was confined within narrow limits, and extended but to few objects.

Scepticism is the opposite disposition or habit; it disbelieves or doubts when ample evidence is brought before it to command its assent. Among the causes which produce it may be mentioned the pride of singularity, impatience, perverseness, and the latent indulgence of corrupt passions. It is a most uncomfortable state of mind, and if practically acted upon to its utmost extent, would put an end at once to all decision and exertion. It is sufficiently unreasonable and injurious in common enquiries and the daily affairs of life; but in religion it is not less destructive to the soul than it is absurd in itself. Under the pretence that truth is unattainable by so short-sighted a creature as man, the sceptics inculcated the necessity of keeping the mind in perpetual hesitation and suspense upon all points of enquiry, examining every thing and determining nothing—for ever hovering about truth, but never daring to alight upon any thing as possessing this attribute. Nothing, then, is to be believed, or cared about as worthy of belief. The withering and pernicious influence of such a notion is equally obvious and degrading. “We see many people,