

which a wise and good Father instructs a little child in matters of the highest importance to be distinctly understood? Now, in reply, we may concede, that the truths of religion, so far as necessary to salvation, are, by the mercy of God, made level to the humblest capacity, and we thank him for the many delightful instances which present themselves of persons who would in vain have attempted to grapple with the mysteries of science, giving evidence that they have become acquainted with the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, which to know is life eternal, still it admits of no dispute, for experience abundantly demonstrates it, that there is much in the scriptures which men of the highest talent, the greatest learning, and the most diligent research, have not yet been able satisfactorily to unfold; and that the doctrines of the gospel, when followed out in their ramifications and bearings, transcend the loftiest faculties of man. Indeed, it is not difficult to account for the indispensable need which there is for earnest and patient application, in order to even a moderate and tolerable acquaintance with the subjects comprehended in a course of theological study. Let it be remembered, first of all, that the scriptures are written in foreign languages, one of which, as a spoken tongue, has long been extinct, and each of which pertained to a people far distant from ourselves, both in time and in place, and characterised not only by manners and customs, but by modes of thought and expression wholly dissimilar to our own. Next, that the subjects to which these scriptures chiefly refer, though not very much of an abstract or metaphysical description, are still far removed from those affairs of sense and of time with which we are chiefly familiar. Further, that many of them embrace the idea of infinity, and relate, in fact, to that transcendently glorious Being whom no created intelligence can by searching find out unto perfection, and concerning whom, when we venture to speak, except in the very terms he himself has taught us, we are exceedingly apt to darken counsel by words without knowledge. Further still, be it remembered, that many of the doctrines of scripture respecting ourselves as guilty, depraved, and abominable in the sight of God, as ruined, deserving only of eternal damnation, and incapable of effecting, in whole or in part, restoration and deliverance for ourselves, and, consequently, as capable of attaining to holiness and happiness only through free and sovereign grace, and entirely by virtue of the merits of another—all this, and much more of the same nature, is mortifying to our pride, and opposed to our prejudices; and hence we are constantly in danger of contemplating it through a medium which gives us false and distorted representations. In a word, be it remembered, that our minds, as blinded by sin, labour under strong moral disqualifications for fairly and fully appreciating a system so pure and holy as that which has come forth from Him whose word declares that he is a consuming fire. The conclusion from the whole, then, is, that theology demands, as well as deserves, the most close and assiduous attention and application.

But, possibly, it may next be alleged, that if the subject be so pre-eminently grand and interesting, it is attended with these countervailing disadvantages, that our conceptions of its doctrines are necessarily vague and indefinite, and that the grounds on which our conclusions rest, are precarious and uncertain. Now to this we entirely demur. To admit, indeed, that our views are necessarily limited, is only saying that our faculties are finite and feeble. To allow that it is only inconceivably small portions of the whole truth which we know, is just saying, that while our faculties are such, the doctrines in question partake of the nature of the subjects to which they relate, and stretch out into immensity. But truth, though partially known, may be distinctly known to that limited extent, and known, in some cases, with absolute and infallible certainty. An illustration may be borrowed from the exactest of the sciences, that styled Mathematics, because supposed especially to deserve the name of learning. The tyro who has mastered only two or three of the first propositions in geometry, has, doubtless, exceedingly limited notions of the science. Indeed the most advanced of its cultivators, is probably scarcely beyond the boundaries of the entire domain of truth, respecting the relations of number, figure, and quantity. Still, if our tyro has mastered those few elementary propositions, his conceptions of what they include are perfectly definite and distinct; and the evidence on which he believes them to be true, is absolutely and infallibly certain. Its force must be admitted by every intelligence in the universe. Even so in Theology our views may be clear and correct, so far as they extend; and there is nothing in the case to prevent the evidence on which we

proceed, from being perfectly sound and satisfactory, suited to the nature of the subject, and fitted to produce a sound and stable belief.

Let us advert for a moment to the grounds on which our doctrine in Theology are based. And, at the outset, it is almost superfluous to remark, that we have the same faculties to exercise, and the same logic to apply, in reference to the proper as in this sacred department as in any of the sciences. We have also all the facts of nature around—creation and providence—and all the inward phenomena of consciousness, to be used in whatever way they can be legitimately made available. We have besides, what in the sciences is wanting, and this is a great peculiarity of our case, we have the inspired Scriptures as our chief indicator of truth, and in them also we find the simplest and most certain evidence on which this truth is to be surely believed, so much as we know them to be God's own true and faithful word. But this, it will be said, is just confessing and glorying in the very thing which is alleged against us, namely, that we stand on reason, and slavishly yield implicit faith to a mere formula which has fallen into our hands. Now, while this is a very common and prevalent idea amongst a certain class of would-be-philosophers, we are prepared to demonstrate that nothing can be wider of the truth. Instead of abandoning reason, we never for a moment refuse to listen to its dictates. For, first of all, by the best exercise of reason of which we are capable, we have satisfied ourselves, on strict and rigorous grounds, that the Scriptures actually are what they claim to be—the word of God; and secondly, by the exercise of the same reason, we satisfy ourselves that such and such, is the meaning of that word, and then, by a process of reasoning, the simplest imaginable, we conclude that what reason has shown to be contained in a record which reason is satisfied is the testimony of the God of truth, reason cannot refuse to acknowledge to be truth, however different a supposition reason might have made as probable, had that clear and simple train of evidence been wanting. The enlightened theologian, then, is not less determined than any of the votaries of science, to hold by the guidance of reason. But while the Christian Divine affirms, and the infidel Philosopher denies, that the Scriptures are supernaturally and authoritatively the word of God, and are therefore the most perfect directory of belief, the question, Which of the two has here the truth on his side? must first be determined before the conclusion is come to, that we are the party who abandon reason, and believe without evidence. Nor does it affect this argument to say, that we also rely on the teaching of the Holy Spirit. For we utterly repudiate all idea of the Spirit's teaching, which goes in any degree to supersede the exercise of our own faculties. We expect it only to aid and guide us in our own mental operations. It follows, therefore, that if there be, as we firmly hold, any reality in the influences of the Holy Ghost—if there be any dependence to be placed on the declaration, that the Father giveth the Holy Ghost to them that ask him—if we be warranted to rely on the Spirit of Truth to lead us into the truth, then just so far we have the advantage over the mere cultivators of science, inasmuch as we have our own faculties unfettered and unimpaired just as they have, and, moreover, this special assistance which they want. And if, on the other hand, as many of them would maintain it be fanaticism and delusion for us to imagine that any such aid is to be hoped for, still we are, at least, on a level with themselves—they and we having in common the natural powers of our own minds, to employ in the investigation of truth.

We glory in the Scriptures, then, as the infallible standard of truth; yet we hold by the adage, *μὴν ὅτιον τῇ ἀληθείᾳ*. To Truth alone must we sacrifice. In fact, we do homage at no other altar than that which we hold to be the altar of truth. For, first, we are satisfied it is a truth that the Bible is the word of God, and next we are satisfied it is a truth that the Bible contains the articles to which we subscribe; and in coming to these conclusions we trust we have freely exercised our own faculties and availed ourselves of all sorts of legitimate arguments to guide us to sound and satisfactory results. Neither do we at all suppress or dread the freest inquiry and discussion. "Prove all things" is the direction of our great oracle itself, and firmly do we believe that "Truth like a torch, the more it's shook it shines." The aids of all learning and science too, we earnestly invoke. Theology, as of old, still claims these as her handmaids. And in regard to all genuine discoveries of any kind whatever, we are prepared to say, in the words of our sublimest poet,