

The first object in the universe to excite our admiration is the Sun, that imparts light, heat, and life to all creatures. Who can give me a satisfactory account of him? The astronomer will calculate to me his immense distance from our earth, and the enormous and almost inconceivable bulk of his sphere. He will account to me for the manner in which he gives the day and the night, and varies the seasons of the year. And, when he has done so, is he sure that all this is more than mere plausible conjecture? Still has he not explained to me the nature of that ocean of fire, which is ever burning without being consumed: which is every moment losing such an immense flood of its substance, without suffering the least visible diminution for so many ages. How then is he fed with his fuel; or how is his substance, so much impaired, instantly renewed.

What more satisfactory account can be give me of the Moon, planets, and stars? What are those irregular spots scattered over the surface of the Moon? Those belts observed with the telescope on the disk of Jupiter, which so often change their situation and appearance? That prodigious fiery ring that encircles Saturn? What are these bodies themselves? Perhaps so many worlds inhabited like ours; and by what sort of creatures, and for what end? What is that comet just now blazing above our heads? * Whence this stranger wandering among the host of heaven. Whither does he tend with such amazing rapidity, and in a direction so different from that of all the rest? Alas! all the astronomer's knowledge here ends but in queries unresolved. His mind is lost in a world of conjecture; and after all his learned disquisitions and demonstrations, he must end by acknowledging his profound ignorance of all these things.

But if we alight from these sublime contemplations, in which we can only amuse ourselves with endless vague suppositions, and come to examine those objects which lie more within the sphere of our observation, are we more able to account for them? No, not even for those which we view close around us; which we see, touch, taste, and smell.

What is that earth, on which we tread? How wonderful and unaccountable its substance, from which all the creatures existing here below derive their subsistence; which affords to all the plants and trees their various juices, without ever confusing or blending them improperly; or giving to one what belongs to another. What is that air, which we breathe? that invisible fluid, so essentially necessary for life; which sweeps in every direction round the surface of our globe, is inhaled in their watery caverns by the inhabitants of the deep: insinuates itself into every thing: even penetrates into the bowels of the earth, and by its sudden expansion, and prodigiously incalculable elastic force, shakes at times whole kingdoms from their very foundations? What is the distinct nature of this fluid? Chymists may weigh, dissect, and decompose it; and, at every step they make

in their curious and useful researches, they discover new mysteries, nor can they ever say they have arrived at the *ne plus ultra*, the primary elements of things. The same may be said of the fire and water; both fluids, like the air, though all the three so very distinct and different from one another. The fire in particular, the most subtle of all fluids, the very nature of which is to disencumber itself of all other substances, to rise aloft, and to dissipate itself freely in the ethereal void: how is it so closely imprisoned nevertheless; and, contrary to its seeming essential activity and mobility, shut up in an inert state in almost every substance; particularly in the flint, and in steel and combustibles of every kind? By this stupendously restrictive law Almighty God has chained down this most volatile of all the elements; and has put it every where in our power to call forth when we please that light and heat, so absolutely necessary for us in our present state of existence: and were he but for one moment to suspend this law, we should instantly see this world in a blaze, and the prophecy fulfilled of the final conflagration of the universe.

Who has yet been able to account in a satisfactory manner for the *Aurora Borealis*, or Northern Lights; for the lightning and thunder? If they are, as seems probable, of the same nature with the electric fluid, are we for all this the wiser? Or is not the electricity itself as inexplicable a mystery! What shall we say of the mineral and vegetable worlds, which offer such a boundless field of investigation to the chemist and botanist? The magnet or loadstone, for instance, who can explain the cause of its powerful attraction of certain bodies, and why in the needle it constantly points to the north and south poles? Who can also account for the variation observed on the mariner's compass?—Who has sufficiently unfolded the nature of the polypus plant, which some have thought the link between the animal and vegetable kingdoms? What is it that makes the sensitive plant shrink back from the hand that has touched it.

But without singling out the most remarkable and curious objects, let us, in considering the most common and ordinary, explain, if we can, the mechanism, for instance, of a single plant. Let us tell how it searches and finds in the earth its own proper congenial aliment. How this aliment, like ours, is circulated through its body, made up of a stalk covered with a porous bark like skin, through which it perspires; and filled with small tubes, like veins, through which the nutritive juices flow, like the blood in living creatures, towards all its parts, the leaves, flowers, and fruits; thus feeding, supporting, and maturing the whole: and how a portion of dead matter can have such an animal power in it. But who shall attempt to explain the animals themselves, the birds, fishes, insects, and all living creatures; every one of which taken singly, and each smallest part of it, is to us a mystery quite inexplicable, from the elephant down to the mite, and from the mite to the smallest animalcula which we discover with the microscope. All and each of

these is a wonder unaccountable, their vital principle, linked with their earthly parts, their instinct, propagation, use, form, or mechanism; in a word, every thing that regards them.

Here, indeed, is enough to humble the wisest and most learned philosophers; who, by the by, are always the first to see and acknowledge their ignorance. But at any rate it ought to shut for ever the mouths of those, whom real ignorance and a want of reflection trains to such self-sufficiency, as to wish to subject every thing to their feeble understanding; to think to scan with their puny reason the highest mysteries of religion; to sound the unfathomable depths of the knowledge power, wisdom, goodness, and justice of God, and would measure their faith in revealed truths by their own so limited intellects. As well might they think to contain in the hollow of a thimble the immense bulk of the rolling ocean.

Yet such is the presumption and arrogance, I should rather say folly and madness of our modern infidels. For why do they question the mysteries of the Christian faith? Not surely for want of sufficient authority, for I will venture to say, that nothing which they believe, if they believe any thing upon record, has such weighty authority on its side. For what weightier authority can there possibly be, than the free and uncontrouled testimony of all nations in every age to articles, which it were against their comfort or interest in this world or in the next, to forge or maintain. To these mysteries, which reason itself in part discovers, the most worthy and learned of mankind have in all ages assented. But by our free-thinkers, who style themselves philosophers, though least of all men they deserve that name, they are deemed absurd fables. And why? because, as I said, they cannot comprehend them. They, who cannot explain to me the nature of a mite, the wing of a fly, the leaf of a flower, a blade of grass; they who must confess themselves a perfect mystery even to themselves: will define to me the nature of the Deity! Will tell me precisely what he is in himself, and what he is not: what he can and what he cannot do! It is truly honorable for religion to have none for her adversaries, but persons so very unreasonable and extravagant.

Original.

JERUSALEM AND ROME.

O the depth of the riches, wisdom, and knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments; and how unsearchable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord; or who has been his Counselor?

Of all the nations that figure in history, down from the earliest periods to the present time, none so particularly claim our attention as the Jewish and Roman; for, in contemplating the important events that have taken place in both these states from their origin to their end, we discover in their contrasted fates a particular design throughout, and a special purpose; towards the fulfilment of which, all hu-

* In this age of wonders, two comets have lately made their appearance; one in 1503, and another in 1511.