

Indeed the opinion that we cannot believe a thing because we cannot comprehend it, has arisen like many other unfounded notions from the pride and ignorance of man. Were the human mind able to grasp *all truth*—were it the case, that every thing which the human mind is unable to comprehend cannot be true—and were the understanding of man the only measure of truth, there would be some foundation for the opinion. But is this the case? If any man were to plead that his own understanding was the limit of truth what would be the consequence? Many things which are known certainly to one, would be pronounced untrue and incredible by another, and in the end there would be no such thing as a standard of truth in the world; every man would have his own, and if he acted on his own convictions, his physician would be dismissed when his practice happened to differ from the prejudices of his ignorant patient, force would be necessary to compel all men to obedience when the views of the governor did not coincide with those of the subject, and anarchy and misery would embroil society.

Happily, however, such a miserable state of things can never ensue, for the principle is false from which it might arise; and we now maintain in opposition to it, that truth is truth unchanged in its character, whether a man understand it or not, and all truth is an object of belief, if we are only assured of the fact, even although we can offer no explanation of it. Thus if an acorn and an oak are shewn to me, and it be affirmed on proper testimony, that the one is produced from the other, I may firmly believe it, though neither the individuals who give the testimony, nor I, know any thing of the cause or mode how the acorn grows up into the gigantic oak. Were this not the case, there could be no such thing as knowledge, for knowledge consists in the belief of such facts—the ultimate causes lie too deep for human sagacity to discover. What is known for example, respecting electricity, magnetism, light, chemistry, or any other of the phenomena of nature, but an accumulation of facts? When these facts are observed to occur uniformly in the same circumstances it is called a *law*, and sometimes in careless discourse, this law is called a *cause*, as gravitation, for example, is said to be the cause of planetary motion; but it is quite obvious, that that term denotes no more than the uniformity of the effect. The same may be said of all the phenomena and laws of nature. But shall we not believe these as *facts*, because we are ignorant of their causes, or unable to explain the reasons of them? It is plain that we do; and hence men believe many things, the rationale of which they cannot explain. These remarks may

be applied to the difficulties of revelations. They are stated to us as facts, and we can believe them upon satisfactory evidence, although we may have no adequate notions of the thing or be unable distinctly to comprehend it. Thus though we know only in part, we may know with certainty.

Perhaps it may appear contradictory to the definition that is commonly given of faith or belief, that it is a *rational act* to affirm that we can believe any thing that is *above reason*. But it is not; for we have already shewn that a thing may be true, and therefore credible, though we cannot comprehend the manner of it, and that, upon rational and satisfactory evidence of its truth, it may become an object of our faith. The evidence for the truth of any thing may be derived from two sources. First, either from something internal in the thing which may be compared and found to agree with other known truths, and this is properly called knowledge. Secondly, when the internal knowledge of the thing is unattainable, as in the case of incomprehensible things, that is, things which we have no means at present of comparing with other things already known; in which case we are not able to judge of their truth or understand them—then, still, we may be assured of their truth by external evidence of credible witnesses. And if this evidence be complete and satisfactory, the fact or truth which it supports may become an object of our belief, although we may be quite unable to give any explanation of it. Objects of this kind are objects of belief, and if they are contained in revelation they are called objects of religious faith; and as any thing that can be understood by comparison with other known things may become the objects of our knowledge, so any truth or fact that can be distinctly proved by proper evidence, however incomprehensible, if it be not absolutely contrary to reason, may become an object of our faith. In this last case, we only believe the existence of the fact, and nothing more; the reason of it is not an object of our knowledge, and cannot therefore be an object of our faith. Thus it is, that faith is not, as some pretenders to reason have argued, a blind act, out of the province of reason, and strongest in weak and credulous minds. We have shewn that it is founded on evidence of which reason is the only judge, and of which it must judge and approve before a rational assent or a true belief can be produced in the mind.

And here it may be proper to observe that there is a clear distinction to be made between things that are *above reason*, and things that are *contrary* to it. In the first case all we have to do is to suspend our judgment till the thing be proved either