

family had become very numerous, or had extended far beyond the spot where they were first planted, in less than two thousand years; especially when we recollect how few were the children of patriarchs whose age amounted to many centuries, and how very probable it is that the extreme wickedness of most of the antediluvians tended to their extinction rather than their multiplication. Why, then, for the sake of destroying man, occupying probably only a limited portion of one continent, was it necessary to depopulate all other continents and islands, inhabited only by irresponsible animals, who had no connection with man? If the Scriptures unequivocally declare that such was the fact, we are bound to believe it on divine testimony. But if their language admits of a different interpretation, it seems reasonable to adopt it.

And here I am willing to acknowledge that the language of the Bible on this subject seems, at first view, to teach the universality of the flood, unequivocally. "The waters," it is said, "prevailed exceedingly upon the earth, and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered." Again: "Behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die." If such language be interpreted by the same rules which we should apply to a modern composition, it could in no way be understood to teach a limited deluge or a partial destruction. But in respect to this ancient record, two considerations are to be carefully weighed :

In the first place, the terms employed are not to be judged of by the state of knowledge in the nineteenth century, but by its state among the people to whom this revelation was first addressed. When the earth was spoken of to that people, (the ancient Jews,) they could not have understood it to embrace a much wider region than that inhabited by man, because they could not have had any idea of what lay beyond those limits. And so of the phrase "heaven," it must have been co-extensive with the inhabited earth only. And when it was said that all animals would die by the deluge, they could not have supposed the declaration to embrace creatures far beyond the dwellings of men, because they knew nothing of such regions. Why, then, may we not attach the same limited meaning to these declarations? Why should we suppose that