

attempting the investigation of the surface of the earth; for the conviction that it was surrounded by an impassable ocean could not have acted as an inducement to attempt its navigation, but fear would have prevailed over curiosity, and the hopes of every man must have been centred in the society of which he happened to be a member. All the benefits that have resulted from the distribution of the human race over the surface of the earth would have been retarded, commerce would everywhere have been restricted, and civilization have been unknown, if this hypothesis had not been disproved. It will therefore appear, that the reception of error in philosophical inquiries, while it retards the advancement of knowledge, must entirely prevent all the beneficial practical results which are the consequents of ascertained philosophical truth.

A casual or imperfect observation of phenomena might in the present day lead an ignorant observer to imagine the earth an extended plane, but a careful investigation could scarcely fail to convince him that his first impressions were erroneous. We can conceive an individual determined to judge for himself, and, having no attachment to any opinion that does not commend itself to his mind, to trace the phenomena he observed to their cause, and approach to a demonstration of the true form of the earth. "Wherever I stand," he might say, "there is a vast extent of space above me, and beneath my feet an impassable mass of matter; and hence I know that the earth is limited, at least on one side. But the sun rises in the east, and sets in the west, and this it does day after day; and when it disappears, I observe the moon and the stars to take the same revolution from one extremity of the hemisphere to the other; and I may deduce from this appearance, that the earth is not indefinite in extent, but is an entirely independent body, and, having limits, it must have figure. But I have often observed that when I stand upon a flat and extensive country, or in a vessel at sea, I appear to be placed in the centre of a distinct circular line, which is not, however, the limit of my vision; for lofty objects, such as the steeples of churches, and the topmasts of vessels, are distinctly seen beyond it; and when I ascended an eminence, the lower parts of the same objects came into view. Such a phenomenon as this," the inquirer might say, "can only be accounted for by supposing that those portions