

question ; and nowhere so much as at this turning-point, are both the uses and the defects of natural theology so conspicuously blended.

27. Natural theology, then, however little to be trusted as an informer, yet as an inquirer, or rather as a prompter to inquiry, is of inestimable service. It is a high function that she discharges, for though not able to satisfy the search, she impels to the search. We are apt to undervalue, if not to set her aside altogether, when we compare her obscure and imperfect notices with the lustre and the fulness of revelation. But this is because we overlook the virtue that lies in the probabilities of a subject—a virtue, either, on the one hand, to fasten the attention ; or, on the other hand, to condemn the want of it. This we hold to be the precise office of natural theology—and an office too, which she performs, not merely as the theology of science among those who listen to her demonstrations in the academic hall ; but which she also performs with powerful and practical effect, as the theology of conscience, throughout all the classes of our general population. It is this initial work which makes her so useful, we should say so indispensable, as a preliminary to the gospel. Natural theology is quite overrated by those who would represent it as the foundation of the edifice. It is not that, but rather the taper by which we must grope our way to the edifice. The stability of a fabric is not greater than the stability