

To those who have studied the phraseology of Scripture, there is no rule of interpretation more certain than this, that *universal terms* are often used to signify only a *very large* amount in number or quantity. The following passages, taken chiefly from the writings of Moses, will serve as instances.—“And the famine was upon all the face of the earth;—and all the earth came to Egypt, to buy from Joseph, for the famine was extreme in all the earth:”* yet it is self-evident that only those countries are meant which lay within a practicable distance from Egypt, for the transport of so bulky an article as corn, carried, it is highly probable, on the backs of asses and camels.—“All the cattle of Egypt died;” yet the connexion shows that this referred to some only, though no doubt very many, for, in subsequent parts of the same chapter, the cattle of the king and people of Egypt are mentioned in a way which shows that there were still remaining sufficient to constitute a considerable part of the nation’s property.†—“The hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field;” but, a few days after, we find the devastation of the locusts thus described; “They did eat every herb of the land and all the fruit of the trees, which the hail had left.”‡—“All the people brake off the golden ear-rings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron:”§ meaning undoubtedly a large number of persons, but very far from being the whole, or even a majority, of the people; as we may reasonably infer from the circumstance that the stroke of punitive justice, for this act of idolatry, fell upon only three thousand persons, but the entire number of the Israelites at that time was a million and a half, and of them six hundred thousand

* Gen. xli. 56, 57.

† Exod. ix. 6, 10, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25; xiv. 26, 28.

‡ Ib. x. 5, 15.

§ Ib. xxxii. 3.