

of sheer neglect, or by actual murder; and the mutual destruction of grown persons would be very great. It is an instance in confirmation of this reasoning, that no children of Noah are mentioned till he was five hundred years old; and that, a century later, his three sons, each having a wife, had no children. Now, we cannot but suppose that the family of Noah was, at least, among the most virtuous of those which then existed; and therefore was, upon the whole, more likely to have become numerous than the generality of others. From the whole, I humbly think it reasonable to infer, that the human population had not spread itself far from its original seat, the country of Eden; that its number was really small; and that it was in a course of rapid progress towards an extreme reduction, which would have issued in a not very distant extinction.

The difficulties also seem to be insuperable, with respect to the animals saved in the ark, on the supposition that every species had its representatives. But why may we not derive our explanation of this part of the statement, from the general rule of the Hebrew and Hebraistic diction, with respect to universal terms? A confirmation of the principle we may find in the description of Peter's emblematical vision, presenting to him, "all the four-footed animals of the earth, and the wild beasts, and the creeping things, and the birds of the heaven."* The design of this revelation was to convince him that the Mosaic distinction into clean and unclean was by the gospel abolished: therefore, a representation of some principal animals, under each of the two divisions, and those such as were well known to the apostle, would be all that was needed. To assume a literal universality would involve the idea of a crowding and compressing

* Acts. x. 12,—πάντα τὰ τετράποδα—.