

6. *Neglect of Physical Reasoning in Christendom.*—If the Arabians, who, during the ages of which we are speaking, were the most eminent cultivators of science, entertained only such comparatively feeble and servile notions of its doctrines, it will easily be supposed, that in the Christendom of that period, where physical knowledge was comparatively neglected, there was still less distinctness and vividness in the prevalent ideas on such subjects. Indeed, during a considerable period of the history of the Christian Church, and by many of its principal authorities, the study of natural philosophy was not only disregarded but discommended. The great practical doctrines which were presented to men's minds, and the serious tasks, of the regulation of the will and affections, which religion impressed upon them, made inquiries of mere curiosity seem to be a reprehensible misapplication of human powers; and many of the fathers of the Church revived, in a still more peremptory form, the opinion of Socrates, that the only valuable philosophy is that which teaches us our moral duties and religious hopes.⁷ Thus Eusebius says,⁸ "It is not through ignorance of the things admired by them, but through contempt of their useless labor, that we think little of these matters, turning our souls to the exercise of better things." When the thoughts were thus intentionally averted from those ideas which natural philosophy involves, the ideas inevitably became very indistinct in their minds; and they could not conceive that any other persons could find, on such subjects, grounds of clear conviction and certainty. They held the whole of their philosophy to be, as Lactantius⁹ asserts it to be, "empty and false." "To search," says he, "for the causes of natural things; to inquire whether the sun be as large as he seems, whether the moon is convex or concave, whether the stars are fixed in the sky or float freely in the air; of what size and of what material are the heavens; whether they be at rest or in motion; what is the magnitude of the earth; on what foundations it is suspended and balanced;—to dispute and conjecture on such matters, is just as if we chose to discuss what we think of a city in a remote country, of which we never heard but the name." It is impossible to express more forcibly that absence of any definite notions on physical subjects which led to this tone of thought.

7. *Question of Antipodes.*—With such habits of thought, we are not to be surprised if the relations resulting from the best established theories were apprehended in an imperfect and incongruous manner.

⁷ Brucker, iii. 317.

⁸ *Præp. Ev.* xv. 61.

⁹ *Inst.* l. iii. init.