

The philosophical notions of up and down are too much at variance with the obvious suggestions of our senses, to be held steadily and justly by minds undisciplined in science. Perhaps it was some misunderstood statement of the curved surface of the ocean, which gave rise to the tradition of there being a part of the sea directly over the earth, from which at times an object has been known to fall or an anchor to be let down. Even such whimsical fancies are not without instruction, and may serve to show the reader what that vagueness and obscurity of ideas is, of which I have been endeavoring to trace the prevalence in the dark ages.

We now proceed to another of the features which appears to me to mark, in a very prominent manner, the character of the stationary period.

CHAPTER II.

THE COMMENTATORIAL SPIRIT OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

WE have already noticed, that, after the first great achievements of the founders of sound speculation, in the different departments of human knowledge, had attracted the interest and admiration which those who became acquainted with them could not but give to them, there appeared a disposition among men to lean on the authority of some of these teachers;—to study the opinions of others as the only mode of forming their own;—to read nature through books;—to attend to what had been already thought and said, rather than to what really is and happens. This tendency of men's minds requires our particular consideration. Its manifestations were very important, and highly characteristic of the stationary period; it gave, in a great degree, a peculiar bias and direction to the intellectual activity of many centuries; and the kind of labor with which speculative men were occupied in consequence of this bias, took the place of that examination of realities which must be their employment, in order that real knowledge may make any decided progress.

In some subjects, indeed, as, for instance, in the domains of morals, poetry, and the arts, whose aim is the production of beauty, this opposition between the study of former opinion and present reality, may not be so distinct; inasmuch as it may be said by some, that, in these subjects, opinions are realities; that the thoughts and feelings which