

ledge : though the stride is here too vast, as it may seem, for the limited faculties of man ever to take. Nor can it be said that man is dwarfed and humiliated by such attempts :—that they teach him nothing but his own insignificance, and so are the reverse of ennobling. The greatness of nature is not synonymous with the littleness of man. That only is little which cannot rise to great conceptions.

(6.) Enough, perhaps, has been said to justify an attempt to lay before our readers the actual state of our positive knowledge of these subjects ; of the methods by which it has been attained ; and of the history of their development ; and to give them a distinct conception of the several links which connect the *British standard inch* with the distances of the fixed stars, and of the sort of intermediate units we have to deal with in the inquiry. It fortunately happens that we shall not need for our purpose any resort to abstruse considerations, or have occasion for any illustrations which are not of the simplest kind.

(7.) In every country having the slightest pretensions to civilization there is preserved, with more or less care, some rod, bar, ruler, or other *standard*, the material incorporation of the national idea of the most ordinary unit of length ; and its representative, when it is required to test the correctness of one in vulgar use, or to multiply and disseminate copies of itself for purposes of ordinary mensuration. Thus, among the Jews, we find (Exodus xxx. 2) the cubit* identified as equal to either of the

* This cubit is presumed to be identical with the Egyptian cubit, still preserved, of the Nilometer.