

A study which embraces so extensive a range of objects, and which involves questions of such momentous interest to mankind, must necessarily be arduous, and requires for its successful prosecution the strenuous exertions of the human intellect, and the combined labours of different classes of philosophers during many ages. The magnitude of the task is increased by the very success of those previous efforts: for the difficulties augment as the objects multiply, and the eminence on which the accumulated knowledge of centuries has placed us only discloses a wider horizon, and the prospect of more fertile regions of inquiry; till at length the mind, conscious of the inadequacy of its own powers to the comprehension of even a small part of the system of the universe, is appalled by the overwhelming consideration of the infinity that surrounds us. The reflection continually presents itself that the portion of creation we are here permitted to behold is as nothing, when compared with the immensity of space, which, on every side, spreads far beyond the sphere of our vision, and, indeed, far beyond the powers of human imagination. Of the planetary system, which includes this earth, our knowledge is almost entirely limited to the mathematical laws that regulate the motions of the bodies which compose it, and to the celestial mechanism which patient investigation has at length discovered to be that most admirably calculated to preserve their harmony and maintain their stability. Still less have we the means of penetrating into the remoter regions of the heavens, where the result of our investigations respecting the myriads of luminous bodies they contain amounts to little more than the knowledge of their existence, of their countless numbers, and of the immeasurable distances at which they are dispersed throughout the boundless realms of space.

Measured on the vast scale of the universe, the globe we inhabit appears but as an atom; and yet, within the compass of this atom, what an inexhaustible variety of objects is contained; what an endless diversity of phenomena is presented; what wonderful changes are occurring in rapid and perpetual