

political and moral changes, the downfall of empires, or of distinguished men, by the destruction of the heavens and the earth, and the growing pale and darkening of the sun and moon. But in all these cases the figurative character of the description is most obvious; while in the passage from Peter its literal character is equally obvious. Take, for example, this statement: "By the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth, standing out of the water and in the water; whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished. But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

I believe no one has ever doubted that the destruction of the world by water, here described, refers to Noah's deluge. Now, how absurd to admit that this is a literal description of that event, and then to maintain the remainder of the sentence, which declares the future destruction of that same world by fire, to be figurative in the highest degree! For if this destruction mean only the destruction of Jerusalem, or any other great political or moral revolution, the language is one of the boldest figures which can be framed. Who, that knows any thing of the laws of language, does not see the supreme absurdity of thus coupling in the same sentence the most simple and certain literality with the strongest of all figures? What mark is given us, by which we may know where the boundary is between the literal and the metaphorical sense? From what part of the Bible, or from what uninspired author, can a parallel example be adduced? What but the strongest necessity, the most decided *exigentia loci*, would justify such an anomalous interpretation of any author? Nay, I do not believe that any necessity could justify it. It would be more reasonable to infer that the passage had no meaning, or an absurd one. But surely no such necessity exists in the present case. Understood literally, the passage teaches only what is often expressed, though less fully in many other parts of Scripture; and even though some of these other passages should be involved in a degree of obscurity, (and I am not disposed to deny that some obscurity rests upon one or two of them,) it would be no good reason for transforming so plain a description into a highly-wrought figurative representation; especially when by no ingenuity can we thus alter more than one part of