

INTRODUCTION.

REFLECTIONS ON THE DIFFERENT DEGREES OF ENJOYMENT PRESENTED TO US BY THE ASPECT OF NATURE AND THE STUDY OF HER LAWS.

IN attempting, after a long absence from my native country, to develop the physical phenomena of the globe, and the simultaneous action of the forces that pervade the regions of space, I experience a two-fold cause of anxiety. The subject before me is so inexhaustible and so varied, that I fear either to fall into the superficiality of the encyclopedist, or to weary the mind of my reader by aphorisms consisting of mere generalities clothed in dry and dogmatical forms. Undue conciseness often checks the flow of expression, while diffuseness is alike detrimental to a clear and precise exposition of our ideas. Nature is a free domain, and the profound conceptions and enjoyments she awakens within us can only be vividly delineated by thought clothed in exalted forms of speech, worthy of bearing witness to the majesty and greatness of the creation.

In considering the study of physical phenomena, not merely in its bearings on the material wants of life, but in its general influence on the intellectual advancement of mankind, we find its noblest and most important result to be a knowledge of the chain of connection, by which all natural forces are linked together, and made mutually dependent upon each other; and it is the perception of these relations that exalts our views and ennobles our enjoyments. Such a result can, however, only be reaped as the fruit of observation and intellect, combined with the spirit of the age, in which are reflected all the varied phases of thought. He who can trace, through by-gone times, the stream of our knowledge to its primitive source, will learn from history how, for thousands of years, man has labored, amid the ever-recurring changes of form, to recognize the invariability of natural laws, and has thus, by the force of mind, gradually subdued a great portion of the physical world to his dominion. In interrogating the history of the past, we trace the mysterious course of ideas yielding the first glimmering perception of the same image of