

LECTURE FIRST.

THE PALÆONTOLOGICAL HISTORY OF PLANTS.

PALÆONTOLOGY, or the science of ancient organisms, deals, as its subject, with all the plants and animals of all the geologic periods. It bears nearly the same sort of relation to the *physical* history of the past that biography does to the civil and political history of the past. For just as a complete biographic system would include every name known to the historian, a complete palæontologic system would include every fossil known to the geologist. It enumerates and describes all the organic existences of all the extinct creations,—all the existences, too, of the present creation that occur in the fossil or semi-fossil form ; and, thus co-extensive in space with the earth's surface,—nay, greatly more than co-extensive with the earth's surface,—for in the vast hieroglyphic record which our globe composes, page lies beneath page and inscription covers over inscription,—co-extensive, too, in time with every period in the terrestrial history since being first began upon our planet,—it presents to the student a theme so vast and multifarious, that it might seem but the result, on his part, of a proper modesty, conscious of the limited range of his powers, and of the brief and fleeting term of his life, were he to despair of being ever able effectually to grapple with it.