

GLACIAL PERIOD.

THE two cataclysms, of which we have spoken, surprised Europe at the moment of the development of an important creation. The whole scope of animated Nature, the evolution of animals, was suddenly arrested in that part of our hemisphere over which these gigantic convulsions spread, followed by the brief but sudden submersion of entire continents. Organic life had scarcely recovered from the violent shock, when a second, and perhaps severer blow assailed it. The northern and central parts of Europe, the vast countries which extend from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean and the Danube, were visited by a period of sudden and severe cold: the temperature of the polar regions seized them. The plains of Europe, but now ornamented by the luxurious vegetation developed by the heat of a burning climate, the boundless pastures on which herds of great Elephants, the active Horse, the robust Hippopotamus, and great Carnivorous animals grazed and roamed, became covered with a mantle of ice and snow.

To what cause are we to attribute a phenomenon so unforeseen, and exercising itself with such intensity? In the present state of our knowledge no certain explanation of the event can be given. Did the central planet, the sun, which was long supposed to distribute light and heat to the earth, lose during this period its calorific powers? This explanation is insufficient, since at this period the solar heat is not supposed to have greatly influenced the earth's temperature. Were the marine currents, such as the *Gulf Stream*, which carries the Atlantic Ocean towards the north and west of Europe, warming and raising its temperature, suddenly turned in the contrary direction? No such hypothesis is sufficient to explain either the cataclysms or the glacial phenomena; and we need not hesitate to confess our ignorance of this strange, this mysterious, episode in the history of the globe.

There have been attempts, and very ingenious ones too, to explain these phenomena, of which we shall give a brief summary,