

CHAPTER XVII.

EARLY MAN.

THE science of the earth has its culmination and terminus in man ; and at this, the most advanced of our salient points, as we look back on the long process of the development of the earth, we may well ask, Was the end worthy of the means? We may well have doubts as to an affirmative answer if we do not consider that the means were perfect, each in its own time, and that man, the final link in the chain of life, is that which alone takes hold of the unseen and eternal. He alone can comprehend the great plan, and appreciate its reason and design. Without his agency in this respect nature would have been a riddle without any solution—a column without a capital, a tree without fruit. Besides this, even science may be able to perceive that man may be not merely the legatee of all the ages that lie behind, but the heir of the eternity that lies before, the only earthly being that has implanted in him the germ and instinct of immortality.

Whatever view we may take of these questions, it is of interest to us to know, if possible, how and when this chief corner stone was placed upon the edifice of nature, and what are the precise relations of man to the later geological ages, as well as to the present order of nature, of which he is at once a part, and its ruler and head. Let us put this first in the form of a narrative based on geological facts only, and then consider some of its details and relations to history.

The Glacial age had passed away. The lower land, in great part a bare expanse of mud, sand, and gravel, had risen from