

HISTORY OF GEOLOGY AND PALÆONTOLOGY.

INTRODUCTION.

FIRST PERIOD—GEOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE AGES OF ANTIQUITY.

IN all ages there have been men who have given serious thought to the historical aspect of our terrestrial home, to its origin and its development; but any clear conception of the beginning of the Earth—based, that is, upon scientific facts—was as remote from the most cultured nations of antiquity as it is at the present day from the barbarous races of mankind. The polymorphous myths of the Creation represent the varying ideas which were formed regarding natural phenomena; the limit of the spiritual field of vision determined the wider or more circumscribed flights of imagination. The wide chasm between the childish Saga of Creation handed down by the Bushmen, Australians, Eskimos and Negroes, and the grand poetic conceptions of the Aryan-Germanic races of Europe, conveys to us the immense difference at that time in the condition of culture and intellectual capacity of these peoples.

Tradition has preserved to us the cosmogenetic and geogenetic views of the civilised races of the Mediterranean countries and of Asia, and these arouse our admiration by their poetry and philosophic depth. But there was no trace either of exact observation of natural phenomena, or of logical deduction from such observations.

Amongst the ancient stories of the Creation the Babylonian and Jewish accounts are pre-eminent for their intuitive skill and for the excellence and conciseness of their language. The