CHAPTER IX.

ON THE GENETIC VIEW OF NATURE.

1. Statics and dynamics of living forms.

WHILST the great influence of such leaders in scientific thought as Cuvier, De Candolle, and Humboldt on the Continent, and of Richard Owen in this country, was mainly exerted in spreading the morphological view of nature, describing on a large scale or in minuter detail the typical recurring forms which natural objects or natural scenery present to the eye of the unbiassed observer, another school of naturalists was secretly busy in following up the changes to which all the things of nature seem continually subjected. They were as much impressed with this restless movement of everything as the others were with the continual recurrence of certain definite forms—be they geometrical or artistic. The general ideas which underlay their researches were not new,—they were probably older and more familiar [1] than

[1] Cosmogonies of all sorts abound in almost every literature, ancient or modern, whereas Cosmography, accurate, painstaking, and reliable, is of comparatively recent date. The first attempt to give a purely descriptive picture of nature as a whole, beginning with the larger features of the universe and ascending through terrestrial, inanimate and animate, phenomena to the central and crowning phenomenon of human life, was A. von Humboldt's 'Kosmos'; and it is interesting to note how averse the author was to introduce genetic expositions. In fact, it has been truly remarked that Humboldt's influence went to