

in forming combinations, in instructing himself in the science of facts, in exercising himself in the art of writing; and at the end of this period, the first volume of the Natural History appeared, to astonish Europe. In speaking of this work, which every man has read, which almost every man has admired, which occupied, with the labour of composition and the preliminary studies, the whole life of Buffon, we shall take truth for our guide (for why vainly seek to flatter by praise which will exist but a day, a name that is destined to live for ever?) and avoiding, if it be possible, the influence of every cause which can operate upon the often temporary opinion of contemporaries, we shall endeavour to anticipate the opinion of posterity.

The general theory of the globe which we inhabit, the disposition, nature, and origin of the substances which present themselves to our view, the grand phenomena which take place either on its surface or in its bosom; the history of man and the laws which determine his formation, his development, his life, and his destruction; the nomenclature and description of quadrupeds or of birds, the examination of their faculties, the delineation of their manners; such are the objects upon which the genius of Buffon exercised itself.

We know, from exact observations, only a very small part of the surface of the globe; we have never penetrated into its interior, unless guided by the avaricious hope of drawing from thence something useful to our wants, or valuable to our pride and luxury; and when Buffon wrote his theory of the earth, our knowledge respecting it was still less than it now is, though even yet imperfect. It might therefore be regarded as presumptuous to form at that time a general theory of the globe, when it would be so even at present. But Buffon knew man too well not to feel that a science, which presents nothing but individual facts, or general results under the form of simple conjectures, would attract but little common minds, which are too weak to support the incumbrance of doubt. He knew that Descartes had drawn man to the study of philosophy by the boldness of his systems; that he had torn them from the yoke of authority, by laying hold of their imagination, managing their indolence, and that afterwards, being free from all fetters, and possessed of an avidity to know, they had themselves chosen the true road. He had also seen in the history of sciences, that the