

that the epoch of their greatest progress had almost always been that of celebrated systems; because these systems, exalting at once the activity both of their adversaries and their defenders, all the objects are submitted to our discussion, in which the spirit of party is so keen in demanding proofs from the opposite side, that these proofs necessarily become multiplied.

Thus the most austere philosophy may pardon a naturalist for indulging his imagination, provided that his errors have contributed to the progress of science, from the very necessity of detecting them; and if the hypotheses of Buffon on the formation of planets be contrary to those very physical laws of which he was, in France, one of the first and most zealous defenders, yet truth, however severe in condemning these hypotheses, must still applaud the art with which the author formed them.

The objection of some critics, new observations, and facts formerly known, but which had escaped his attention, compelled our author to abandon some parts of his theory of the earth. But in his epochs of nature, a work intended to exhibit his new ideas, and to modify or to defend his principles, he seems to increase in boldness in proportion to the losses which his system had sustained; to defend it with new energy when he was thought to be reduced to the necessity of abandoning it, and to balance by the grandeur of his ideas, by the magnificence of his style, and by the weight of his name, the authority of united philosophers, and even that of facts and calculations.

The theory of the earth was followed by the history of man, who has received or usurped its empire. Nature has covered with an impenetrable veil the laws which operate in the reproduction of beings; Buffon endeavoured to raise it, or rather, to conjecture what it concealed. In the fluids, in which other naturalists had seen animals, he perceived only organic molecules; the general elements of every animated being. The infusions of various animal substances, and those of grains, presented the same molecules in greater or less abundance; they provide therefore equally for the reproduction of beings, for their growth and for their preservation; they existed in the aliments with which they were nourished, circulated in their liquors, and united to each of their organs to repair the loss that might have been occasioned. When these organs have the flexibility of infancy, the organic molecules combining