

CHAP. X.

STATE OF GEOLOGICAL THEORY.

ALL branches of the study of nature, in their progress from the period of observation to that of generalisation and theory, appear destined to endure the same storm which astronomy has weathered ; and, like that noble science, to come forth renewed and purified in the struggle ; strengthened by popular applause, and fertile of public benefit.

To quicken the inertness of prejudice, and rouse the despair of ignorance, among the masses of mankind, may appear unnecessary for the "advancement" of science, which must ever be intrusted to a few superior minds ; but the opinion which would separate the acquisition from the diffusion of knowledge is no less erroneous than ungenerous, since the highest and most comprehensive truths in natural science are but the concentration of common phenomena, the laws of common experience. In the determination of these phenomena, in the correct association of them into laws and systems, immense preliminary labours must be undergone before the most powerful intellect, however deeply versed in abstract science and the philosophy of causation, can ascend to that comprehensive view of a whole series of dependent truths which constitutes a general theory.

Perhaps no term of importance in estimating the state of science is employed in more various and inconsistent senses than this word theory, which few branches of human knowledge have ventured to claim, but which is actually used as a term of reproach by men entirely ignorant of them. When correctly used, with the