

fiance of all consistency, shift his ground when addressing the vulgar ; and, admitting the true nature of the shells collected in the Alps and other places, pretend that they were Eastern species, which had fallen from the hats of pilgrims coming from Syria. The numerous essays written by him on geological subjects were all calculated to strengthen prejudices, partly because he was ignorant of the real state of the science, and partly from his bad faith.* On the other hand, they who knew that his attacks were directed by a desire to invalidate Scripture, and who were unacquainted with the true merits of the question, might well deem the old diluvian hypothesis incontrovertible, if Voltaire could adduce no better argument against it than to deny the true nature of organic remains.

It is only by careful attention to impediments originating in extrinsic causes, that we can explain the slow and reluctant adoption of the simplest truths in geology. First, we find many able naturalists adducing the fossil remains of marine animals as proofs of an event related in Scripture. The evidence is deemed conclusive by the multitude for a century or more ; for it favours opinions which they entertained before, and they are gratified by supposing them confirmed by fresh and unexpected proofs. Many, who see through the fallacy, have no wish to undeceive those who are influenced by it, approving the effect of the delusion, and conniving at it as a pious fraud ; until, finally, an opposite party, who are hostile to the sacred writings, labour to explode the erroneous opinion, by substituting for it another dogma which they know to be equally unsound.

The heretical Vulcanists were soon after openly assailed in England, by imputations of the most illiberal kind. We cannot estimate the malevolence of such a persecution, by the pain which similar insinuations might now inflict ; for although charges of infidelity and atheism must always be odious, they were injurious in the extreme at that moment of political excitement ; and it was better, perhaps, for a man's good reception in society, that his moral character should have been traduced, than that he should become a mark for these poisoned weapons.

I shall pass over the works of numerous divines, who may be excused for sensitiveness on points which then excited so much uneasiness in the public mind ; and shall say nothing of the amiable poet Cowper†, who could hardly be expected to have inquired into the merit of doctrines in physics. But in the foremost ranks of the intolerant are found several laymen who had high claims to scientific reputation. Among these appears Williams, a mineral surveyor of Edinburgh, who published a "Natural History of the Mineral Kingdom," in 1789 ; a work of great merit for that day, and of

* As an instance of his desire to throw doubt indiscriminately on all geological data, we may recall the passage where he says, that "the bones of a reindeer and hippopotamus discovered near Etampes did not prove, as some would have it,

that Lapland and the Nile were once on a tour from Paris to Orleans, but merely that a lover of curiosities once preserved them in his cabinet."

† The Task, book iii. "The Garden."