

## LECTURE V.

### THE WORLD'S SUPPOSED ETERNITY.

IN our attempts thus far to elucidate the religion of geology, our attention has been directed to those points where this science has been supposed to conflict with revelation; and I trust it has been made manifest that the collision was rather with the interpretation than with the meaning of Scripture; and that, in fact, geology, instead of coming into collision with the Bible, affords us important aid in understanding it aright. We now advance to a part of the subject which has a more direct bearing upon natural religion. And here, if I mistake not, we shall find the illustration of religious truth from this science, as we might expect, more direct and palpable.

The subject to which I wish first to call your attention is the world's eternity, or the external existence of matter. This was the universal belief of the philosophers of antiquity, and, indeed, of most reasoning minds where the Bible has not been known. The grand argument by which this opinion was sustained is the well-known *ex nihilo nihil fit*, (nothing produces nothing.) Hence men inferred that not even the Deity could create matter out of nothing; and therefore it must be eternal. Most of the ancient philosophers, however, did not hence infer the non-existence of the Deity. But they endeavoured to reconcile the existence of eternal matter with an eternal Spirit. They supposed both to be self-existent and co-existent. From this rational thinking principle they supposed all good to be derived; while from the material irrational principle all evil sprung. Plato taught that God, of his own will, united himself with matter, although he did not create it, and out of it produced the present world, so that it was proper to speak of the world as created, although the matter was from eternity. Aristotle and Zeno taught that God's union with matter was