

## LECTURE IX.

### THE HYPOTHESIS OF CREATION BY LAW.

IN all ages of the world, where men have been enlightened enough to reason upon the causes of phenomena, a mysterious and a mighty power has been imputed to the laws of nature. A large portion of the most enlightened men have felt as if those laws not only explain, but possess an inherent potency to continue, the ordinary operations of nature. Most men of this description, however, have thought that to originate nature must have demanded the special exercise of an infinite and all-wise Being. But a few, in every age, have endeavoured to exalt law into a Creator, as well as Controller, of the world. The hypothesis has assumed a great variety of forms, and until recently few have attempted to draw it out in all its details, and apply it to all nature. Among the ancient philosophers it was based on the eternity of matter, and made the foundation of a system of rank atheism. Starting with the position, as an axiom, that nothing produces nothing, in other words, that creation out of nothing is impossible, Democritus maintained that all existence was the result of two necessary and self-existent principles, namely, space, infinite in extent, and atoms, infinite in number. The latter have been eternally in motion, in directions varying from right lines; and their necessary collisions have produced the various forms of organic and inorganic nature. To produce animals and plants, it was only necessary that the atoms should be suitably arranged. The only animating principle was the rapid agitation of atoms.

In modern times, very few philosophers have ventured to solve the whole problem of the universe by any self-acting, self-producing power in nature. La Place limited himself to the mode in which the great bodies of the universe were produced by the vortical movements of nebulous matter;