



INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

No branch of knowledge is more interesting or useful than that which teaches the physical constitution of the world in which we live, the appearances by which we are surrounded, and the laws which govern them. It cannot, however, be denied, that this subject has been greatly neglected, and that many educated men are as ignorant of the cause and influence of natural phenomena as though they had no interest in the provisions established for the support of animated being. This ignorance may be in part traced to erroneous systems of education ; but it is also in some degree owing to a false estimate of the difficulties to be overcome in acquiring scientific knowledge, and an inadequate conception of its importance. It may not, therefore, be inconsistent with the character of this work, that we should present the reader with a few personal and relative motives to an acquaintance with the appearances of the material world, and the causes from which they flow ; or, in other words, with the physical sciences.

Physical science, in its widest acceptation, embraces the investigation of matter in all its conditions and combinations. The entire material world comes under its cognizance. It not only considers the phenomena by which we are assured