

CHAPTER VII.

A RAY OF LIFE.

DURING the progress of that primeval age which witnessed the war of elements that I have already sketched, there was little opportunity for the unfolding of organic existence. The atmosphere was unfit for respiration; and the waters, if not too highly heated, were nevertheless charged with impurities destructive to both vegetable and animal life. It was a dreary and monotonous age, with nothing of that which now beautifies and diversifies the face of nature. The same sunlight fell upon the heaving waters of that tenantless and gloomy sea, and the same tide-wave performed its everlasting circuit round the globe. There was little diversity of weather or climate. The continents and mountain ridges, which give birth to oceanic and atmospheric currents, had not yet appeared above the wave. But there must have been a succession of seasons. The winter's sun, as now, went early to his couch, and his tardy rising belated the December mornings. His unequal favors to the different latitudes necessitated the trade winds and the great equalizing currents of the ocean. The higher density of the primeval atmosphere rendered it more retentive of the solar heat, and thus contributed greatly to diminish the rate of terrestrial cooling by radiation into space. Evaporation proceeded at a rapid rate, and condensation and precipitation were correspondingly copious. It was probably a stormy period, like the showery season which succeeds the protracted storm of the vernal equinox.