

## CHAPTER III

SCIENTIFIC Cosmogonists—Descartes, Leibnitz. Speculations of De Maillet and Buffon. Early illustrated works on fossil plants and animals—Lang, Scheuchzer, Knorr, Walch, Beringer.

FROM the middle of the seventeenth to the middle of the eighteenth century there appeared at intervals on the Continent a series of cosmogonists of a very different stamp from those alluded to in the last chapter. They were men who took a broad view of the world and endeavoured to trace its origin and progress in the light of what was then known of the laws of Nature. The earliest of these illustrious writers was the distinguished philosopher Descartes (1596-1650) who, in his *Philosophiae Principia*, published in 1644, gave an exposition of what he conceived to have been the origin and history of our globe. He supposed the various planetary bodies to have been originally glowing masses like our sun. The earth in his view consists of three distinct regions. In its centre lies a nucleus consisting of incandescent self-luminous matter, like that of the sun. The middle zone is composed of an opaque solid substance which was at first very liquid. The outer region, comprising all the materials of which we have actual cognisance, consists