

CHAPTER V.

On Inductive Habits; or, on the Impression produced on Men's Minds by discovering Laws of Nature.

THE object of physical science is to discover such laws and properties as those of which we have spoken in the last chapter. In this task, undoubtedly a progress has been made on which we may well look with pleasure and admiration; yet we cannot hesitate to confess that the extent of our knowledge on such subjects bears no proportion to that of our ignorance. Of the great and comprehensive laws which rule over the widest provinces of natural phenomena, few have yet been disclosed to us. And the names of the philosophers, whose high office it has been to detect such laws, are even yet far from numerous. In looking back at the path by which science has advanced to its present position, we see the names of the great discoverers shine out like luminaries, few and scattered along the line: by far the largest portion of the space is occupied by those whose comparatively humble office it was to verify, to develope, to apply the general truths which the discoverers brought to light.

It will readily be conceived that it is no easy matter, if it be possible, to analyse the process of thought by which laws of nature have thus been discovered; a process which, as we have said, has been in so few instances successfully performed. We shall not here make any attempt at such an analysis. But without this, we conceive it may be shown that the constitution and employment of the mind on which such discoveries depend, are friendly to that belief in a wise and good Creator and Governor of the world, which it has been our object to illustrate and confirm. And