(30.) Now, in this research, there would seem one great question to be disposed of before our inquiries can even be commenced with any thing like a prospect of success, which is, whether the laws of nature themselves *have* that degree of permanence and fixity which can render them subjects of systematic discussion; or whether, on the other hand, the qualities of natural agents are subject to mutation from the lapse of time. To the ancients, who lived in the infancy of the world, or, rather, in the infancy of man's experience, this was a very rational subject of question, and hence their distinctions between corruptible and incorruptible matter. Thus, according to some among them, the matter only of the celestial spaces is pure, immutable, and incorruptible, while all sublunary things are in a constant state of lapse and change; the world becoming paralyzed and effete with age, and man himself deteriorating in character, and diminishing at once in intellectual and bodily stature. But to us, who have the experience of some additional thousands of years, the question of permanence is already, in a great measure, decided in the affirmative. The refined speculations of modern astronomy, grounding their conclusions on observations made at very remote periods, have proved to demonstration, that one at least of the great powers of nature—the force of gravitation—the main bond and support of the material universe, has undergone no change in intensity from a high antiquity. The stature of mankind is just what it was three thousand years ago, as the specimens of mummies which have been examined at various times sufficiently show. The intellect of Newton, Laplace, or La Grange, may stand in fair competition with that of Archimedes, Aristotle, or Plato; and the virtues and patriotism of Washington with the brightest examples of ancient history.

(31.) Again, the researches of chemists have shown that what the vulgar call corruption, destruction, &c., is nothing but a change of arrangement of the same ingredient elements, the disposition of the same materials into other forms, without the loss or actual destruction of a single atom: and thus any doubts of the perma-