

views within limits far more restricted, and to subjects much more within the reach of our capacity, than either the creation of the world or its assumption of its present figure. These, indeed, were favorite speculations with a race of geologists now extinct ; but the science itself has undergone a total change of character, even within the last half century, and is brought, at length, effectually within the list of the inductive sciences. Geologists now no longer bewilder their imaginations with wild theories of the formation of the globe from chaos, or its passage through a series of hypothetical transformations ; but rather aim at a careful and accurate examination of the records of its former state, which they find indelibly impressed on the great features of its actual surface, and to the evidences of former life and habitation which organized remains imbedded and preserved in its strata indisputably afford.

(315.) Records of this kind are neither few nor vague ; and though the obsolescence of their language, when we endeavor to interpret it too minutely, may, and no doubt often does, lead to misapprehension, still its general meaning is, on the whole, unequivocal and satisfactory. Such records teach us, in terms too plain to be misunderstood, that the whole or nearly the whole of our present lands and continents was formerly at the bottom of the sea, where they received deposits of materials from the wearing and degradation of other lands not now existing, and furnished receptacles for the remains of marine animals and plants inhabiting the ocean above them, as well as for similar spoils of the land washed down into its bosom.

(316.) These remains are occasionally brought to light ; and their examination has afforded indubitable evidence of the former existence of a state of animated nature widely different from what now obtains on the globe, and of a period anterior to that in which it has been the habitation of man, or rather, indeed, of a series of periods, of unknown duration, in which both land and sea teemed with forms of animal and vegetable life, which have successively disappeared and given place to others,