

spherical bodies, revolving round certain luminaries; and that these bodies occur in every variety of condition, from that of a diffuse luminous vapour, to opaque solid globes like our own. All the materials of which the earth is composed may exist either in a solid, fluid, or gaseous state; and simply by a change of temperature, or by electro-chemical agency, every substance may undergo a transition from one state to the other. Water existing as ice, fluid, or vapour, and separable into two invisible gases, offers a familiar example of a body constantly exhibiting these changes; and mercury, of a metal which, although generally fluid, or melted, becomes, when exposed to a very low temperature, a solid mass like silver. The relative position of land and water, and the inequalities on the surface of the earth, are subject to constant changes, which are regulated by certain fixed laws. The principal causes of the degradation of the land are atmospheric agencies, variations of temperature, and the action of running water, by which the disintegrated materials of the land are carried into the bed of the ocean. The mud, sand, and other detritus thus produced, are consolidated by certain chemical changes which are in constant activity, both on the land and in the depths of the ocean, and new rocks are thus in the progress of formation. But the conjoint effect of these disintegrating agencies is unremitting destruction of the land; and were there no conservative process, the whole of the dry land