

Christ, to consider the first sentence in the Book of Genesis as an independent proposition ; and the succeeding portions as taking up our habitable earth at a crisis of its existence, and describing a series of operations by which God was pleased to make it fit for the exercise of his wisdom and goodness in relation to a new order of creation : and consequently that those persons have no right to charge us with impiety, even if our interpretation were erroneous ; since we stand upon the same ground with so many eminent Christians, who were led to their conclusions by reasons purely critical, and without the least tincture of geological knowledge.

Some of the ancient Christian writers, usually called the Fathers of the Church, intimate this' idea, under the opinion that the first verse states generally the creation of matter, out of which the formations and distributions of the six days were afterwards educed. It is evident that the former idea is distinct and separable from the latter ; though it is not probable that Clemens of Alexandria, Origen, and others who adopted the sentiment, conceived of the commencement of the former order of action as having preceded that of the latter, by any long interval. Augustine, in two passages, though he does not always maintain consistency, writes copiously upon this interpretation ; representing the former state of the earth as being to the latter what the seed of a tree is to the root, the trunk, the branches, leaves, and fruit.* Basil says : " It is probable that something existed before this world ; which we may conceive of in our understandings, but of which no narrative has been left."† Chrysostom lays down, as a principle for the interpretation of the beginning of Genesis, that Moses designed to write

* De Genesi, contra Manichæos, lib. i. cap. 6. Confessiones, lib. xii. cap. 17, 29.

† Homil. I. in Hexahemeron ; Op. tom. I. p. 7, Par. 1619.