

CHAPTER VII.

GEOLOGICAL HISTORY.

THE natural history of the land which is now Yorkshire goes very far back beyond the remotest point of time which can be assigned or conjectured for the first appearance of its human inhabitants. Still farther back we seek the geological history of the successive steps by which the ancient ocean gave birth and place to that land. There is an immensity of the past during which the forces of nature were employed by the Ruler of Nature in preparing a suitable place for the comfortable existence of intelligent man, even as there is an immensity of the future, in which we may hope that existence will be prolonged, that intelligence enlarged.

Even as the life of an individual man occupies but a small space on the scale of time which measures the duration of his race, the whole period during which mankind have existed on the earth is but a small part of the slowly elapsed ages of nature. If history enables us to measure back with confidence a hundred generations of men without reaching the origin of the human race, geology recalls to our view many successive assemblages of organic life in which man had no part, and which followed one another after intervals of time immensely longer than those which separated Sesostris and Alexander; Nearchus and Columbus; the advent of Cæsar and the Conquest of William.

How much longer we cannot say; for the great periods disclosed by geology are of a *different order* from those measured by chronology; they are the durations of distinct systems of life, suited to peculiar conditions of nature, and can only be faintly