

INTRODUCTION.

IT is my purpose to write the History of some of the most important of the Physical Sciences, from the earliest to the most recent periods. I shall thus have to trace some of the most remarkable branches of human knowledge, from their first germ to their growth into a vast and varied assemblage of undisputed truths; from the acute, but fruitless, essays of the early Greek Philosophy, to the comprehensive systems, and demonstrated generalizations, which compose such sciences as the Mechanics, Astronomy, and Chemistry, of modern times.

The completeness of historical view which belongs to such a design, consists, not in accumulating all the details of the cultivation of each science, but in marking the larger features of its formation. The historian must endeavor to point out how each of the important advances was made, by which the sciences have reached their present position; and when and by whom each of the valuable truths was obtained, of which the aggregate now constitutes a costly treasure.

Such a task, if fitly executed, must have a well-founded interest for all those who look at the existing condition of human knowledge with complacency and admiration. The present generation finds itself the heir of a vast patrimony of science; and it must needs concern us to know the steps by which these possessions were acquired, and the documents by which they are secured to us and our heirs forever. Our species, from the time of its creation, has been travelling onwards in pursuit of truth; and now that we have reached a lofty and commanding position, with the broad light of day around us, it must be grateful to look back on the line of our vast progress;—to review the journey, begun in early twilight amid primeval wilds; for a long time continued with slow advance and obscure prospects; and gradually and in later days followed along more open and lightsome paths, in a wide and fertile region. The historian of science, from early periods to the present times, may hope for favor on the score of the mere subject of his narrative, and in virtue of the curiosity which the men