


## Introduction.

---

E propose to ourselves, in the following pages, a task of equal interest and importance ; namely, to describe the EARTH AND SEA, the present condition of the land and the seas, and the aspects which they have now assumed. Considering it, in the first place, as an individual planet, we shall fix its position in the universe, its distance from the sun, and its other relations with that radiant orb—the source of heat, and light, and life. We shall afterwards unroll the picture of the different countries of the globe. We shall ascend the mountains to their wrinkled summits, to their peaks enshrouded in eternal snows. We shall investigate the awful and imposing phenomena of the volcano and the earthquake ; we shall descend into the burning craters, to examine closely the mouths of those colossal shafts which bring the surface of the earth into communication with its interior ; we shall plunge our eager glances into the incandescent waves which boil in their seething depths. We shall track the great rivers to their sources, and follow them throughout their impetuous careers. We shall penetrate into the subterranean grottos ; those vast internal recesses, those immense and shadowy hollows, where hang the multiform and many-sided crystals which have never sparkled with the fires of day. We shall rapidly traverse the area of the two hemispheres, to learn how the uniform and regular action of the sun, modified by the accidents of the soil, determines the climates, and prepares the conditions necessary for the sustenance of life among organized beings. We shall finally extend our survey over the vast bosom of the waters, and investigate the different aspects of that ocean, which is one and yet manifold, and which varies so strangely from the warm circle of the equatorial seas to the frozen regions of the polar latitudes.

It has needed the accumulated efforts of many generations to collect the mass of details which we shall here examine ; it has needed thirty centuries of labour and research to render possible such a description of the earth as we are about to offer