

## CHAPTER III.

## THE ORDEAL BY FIRE.

IT required a century to gain the credence of the world to the suggestion of Fracastoro. This point gained, it took a century and a half to overthrow the popular belief that the inhumation of fossil remains was all effected at the time of the Mosaic deluge. But few observations of the nature of those already cited had, at this period, been made. With our present knowledge of the oscillations which are going on in the comparative level of continents and oceans, he would seem to be beyond the reach of argument who can still deny that our beautiful prairies have, for ages instead of months, been the bed of a sea which rolled its surges from the Adirondacks on the east to the Sierra Nevada on the west. Admitting the deluge of Noah to have been universal, were the agencies in operation during the one hundred and fifty days of its continuance sufficiently energetic to accumulate sediments twenty miles in thickness in that brief period? Such a conclusion is contradicted by all our observations, instead of being sustained by them. These stratified rocks cover nineteen twentieths of the earth's surface; and the material for them has been ground from the rocky shores of ancient islands and continents by the beating of the waves. If they have thus been distributed by the action of water, it has been a slow process. Admitting, then, the Noachian deluge to have been universal, and to have covered the mountains—since they also are made of fossiliferous strata, even to the altitude of eight thousand feet—is it likely