

CHAPTER XXXIV.

POPULAR BELIEFS IN PERIODICAL CATASTROPHES TO THE
UNIVERSE.

WHENCE come we, and whither are we tending? Whence this ponderous globe which we inhabit? What vicissitudes has it undergone? What is its final destination? And when the drama of the world is closed, what then? Whence this magnificent system of a visible universe? and of what inscrutable purposes does it form a part? What is that which is first of all—the cause of all—self-existent, uncreated, without beginning and without end?

These are grand problems—the most stupendous with which the human mind can grapple. We can not presume to offer their final solution, but we may venture to inquire what light is thrown upon their solution by the converging rays of all the sciences.

These are problems which have engaged the attention of thoughtful minds in every age of the world. If we look into the pages of ancient philosophy, we find it every where occupied with inquiries into the origin and destiny of the universe—the different orders or kinds of existence—the absolute existence, on which all other being depends—the nature of Deity and of man, and their relations to each other and to other grades of existence. These have been the great, ever-present, obtrusive mysteries with which the human mind has always been grappling. On the shores of classic Greece we find Thales, Pythagoras, Zeno, Epicurus, Plato, and a long and brilliant line of thinkers ponder-