

## CHAPTER V.

### *THE DAWN OF LIFE*

**D**O we know the first animal? Can we name it, explain its structure, and state its relations to its successors? Can we do this by inference from the succeeding types of being; and if so, do our anticipations agree with any actual reality disinterred from the earth's crust? If we could do this, either by inference or actual discovery, how strange it would be to know that we had before us even the remains of the first creature that could feel or will, and could place itself in vital relation with the great powers of inanimate nature. If we believe in a Creator, we shall feel it a solemn thing to have access to the first creature into which He breathed the breath of life. If we hold that all things have been evolved from collision of dead forces, then the first molecules of matter which took upon themselves the responsibility of living, and, aiming at the enjoyment of happiness, subjected themselves to the dread alternatives of pain and mortality, must surely evoke from us that filial reverence which we owe to the authors of our own being; if they do not involuntarily draw forth even a superstitious adoration. The veneration of the old Egyptian for his sacred animals would be a comparatively reasonable idolatry, if we could imagine any of these animals to have been the first that emerged from the domain of dead matter, and the first link in a reproductive chain of being that produced all the population of the world. Independently of any such hypotheses, all students of nature must regard with surpassing