

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GENESIS AND MIGRATIONS OF PLANTS.

IF, for convenience of reference, we divide the whole history of the earth, from the time when a solid crust first formed on its surface and began to be ridged up into islands or mountains in the primeval ocean, into four great periods, we shall find that each can be characterized by some features in relation to the world of plants.

That Archean age, in which the oldest known beds of rocks were produced—rocks now greatly crumpled by the first movements of the thin crust, and hardened and altered by heat and pressure—has, it is true, little to tell us. But, as elsewhere stated, even it has beds of Carbon in the form of Graphite—veritable altered coal seams—which the analogy of later formations would lead us to believe must have been accumulated by the growth of plants. This growth is indeed the only known cause capable of producing such effects. If we should ever be fortunate enough to find beds of the Laurentian series in an unaltered state, we may hope to know something of this old flora. Nor need we be surprised if it should prove of higher grade and more noble development than we should at first sight anticipate. If there ever was a time when vegetation alone possessed the earth, and when there were no animals to devour or destroy it, we might expect to find it in its first and best estate, perhaps not comparable in variety and complexity of parts with the flora of the modern world, but grand in its luxuriance and majesty. Of such discoveries, however, we have no certain indication at present.