

AMERICAN GEOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION AND NOMENCLATURE.

I. INTRODUCTION.

THE movement in favor of the uniformity of nomenclature, started by the International Geological Congress, although premature, calls for some remarks on the actual standing of American classifications. I shall confine myself to stratigraphy and the history of American nomenclature; the eruptive rocks being left apart.

Classification and nomenclature are necessities of the first order, and require of those attending to them knowledge and practical experience of rare and very difficult attainment. Mistakes are sure to result inevitably to all persons not well acquainted with all the different sides of the question, and errors are always attended with loss of time and loss of confidence; for, without an exact chronological order of all the strata, geology falls back into an inextricable labyrinth, a mass of incoherent and undigestible facts put together at haphazard. Nothing is so much wanted and so difficult to establish as a good classification, and the use of a cosmopolitan nomenclature acceptable, easily accessible and understood by all geologists.

In America the progress of nomenclature has been very steady although slow, being much embarrassed by interested persons, who have assumed to dictate authoritatively what they thought were the chronology and divisions of American stratigraphy; retarding for years, by all the means at their disposal, the acceptance of observations and classifications made by geologists better qualified and trained.

A summary of the discoveries and the opposition made to their acceptance is necessary.

II. PRIMITIVE OR AZOIC SERIES.

The study of the crystalline rocks in Europe does not lead one to classify them into stratigraphical systems with geographical names, notwithstanding the attempt of Dr. Hicks for the British