

tion, and to stop the moment that these sure threads broke, or escaped from their hands.

A short time afterwards Buffon proved by fact the possibility of the burning mirrors of Archimedes and Proclus. Tzetzes has left a description which shows that he employed a system of plane mirrors. The attempts made by Kircher with a small number of mirrors left no doubt upon this subject: Dufay had repeated this experiment; Harsecker had even begun a machine constructed upon the principle: but Buffon may claim the honour among the moderns of having shewn the extraordinary experiment of combustion excited at a distance of two hundred feet; an experiment which had never been seen before, except at Syracuse and Constantinople.

In 1739 Buffon was nominated intendant of the garden of the king. The duties of this place fixed for ever his taste, which had hitherto been divided among different sciences; and without renouncing any, it was only in relation to natural history that he now permitted himself to contemplate them.

Obliged to study the details of this science so vast, to go through the immense compilations in which were collected the observations of all countries and of all ages, his imagination soon formed the idea of painting what others had described; his mind accustomed to form combinations, perceived a whole, when others only saw a part.

He dared, therefore, to conceive the project of assembling all these facts, and of drawing general results which might become the theory of nature, while the observations are only her history; to give interest and life to that of animals, by mixing a philosophical picture of their manners and customs to descriptions embellished with all the colours which eloquence could bestow; to create in fact for philosophers, for all men who have exercised their mind and heart, a science which did not before exist.

The immensity of this plan did not repel him; he doubtless foresaw that an assiduous labour every day, during a long life, could only execute a part; but it was requisite to set the example, and to give the impulse. The difficulty of imparting interest to so many inanimate or insipid objects did not deter him; he had already that consciousness of talent, which, like the moral one, never deceives when interrogated in earnest and suffered to dictate an unbiassed answer.

Ten years were employed in preparing the materials,