

the beginning of spring, and that the ibis stopped their progress; but he does not say that he witnessed their combats, nor that he had seen these winged serpents in a perfect state. The whole of his testimony consists then in having observed a mass of bones, which might have been those of this multitude of reptiles and other animals which the inundation destroyed every year, and whose carcasses it would naturally convey to the points where it stopped, to the borders of the desert, and which would accumulate more abundantly in a narrow defile.

Yet it is in consequence of this idea of the combat of the ibis with the serpents, that Cicero gives a hard and horny beak to this bird.(1) Having never been in Egypt, he figured to himself that it must be so by analogy.

I am aware that Strabo says, that some part of the ibis resembles the stork in shape and height,(2) and that this author ought to have known this well, since he assures us that in his time the streets and crossways of Alexandria were so filled with them, that they were a serious inconvenience; but he spoke from memory. His testimony cannot be received when he contradicts all others, and particularly when the bird itself is there to disprove it.

In like manner I shall not concern myself about a passage of Ælian,(3) who states (like the Egyptian embalmers) that the intestines of the ibis were ninety-six cubits in length. The Egyptian priests of all classes have given such extravagant descrip-

(1) *Avis excelsa, cruribus rigidis, corneo proceroque rostro.* ic. de Nat. Deor. lib. i.

(2) Strab. lib. xvii.

(3) Ælian, Anim. lib. x. cap. 29.