

BRITISH ZOOPHYTES.

CHAPTER I.

HISTORY OF ZOOPHYTOLOGY.

THE natural productions about to occupy our attention, have been denominated Zoophytes because, according to some physiologists, they partake of the nature both of vegetables and animals, and connect the two kingdoms of organized matter; or because, as others define the term, having the outward semblance of sea-plants, they are yet in reality the formations of little animals or polypes that nestle in the cells or tubes of the zoophyte, to which they are organically and indissolubly connected.

Little more than a century has elapsed since the first discoveries were made, on which these opinions are founded. Previously to that time zoophytes were considered the undoubted subjects of the vegetable kingdom, naturalists being obviously led to this allocation of them by their arborescent appearances, in which it were vain to trace any likeness to any common animal forms,—and by their permanent fixedness to the objects from which they grow, for zoophytes are attached by means of a disk or tubular fibres much in the same way that marine plants are, while the capability of moving at will from place to place was deemed to be the principal character of distinction between the two classes of animated beings. The zoologist claimed none of them, if we except the Actiniæ or animal-flowers, for his province and study, but left them without dispute to botanical writers; and if any of these, in reference to a very few zoophytes of the least arborescent character, hazarded a whispered conjecture that they were wrongly classed, it died away in the ut-