

ACALEPHS IN GENERAL.

CHAPTER FIRST.

HISTORY OF OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE ACALEPHS.

SECTION I.

PERIOD OF ARISTOTLE AND THE ROMAN NATURALISTS.

It is one of the most instructive studies to trace the efforts of the human mind in its successive attempts to understand the phenomena of Nature. This study is particularly attractive when it is pursued in connection with a subject which has taxed the ingenuity of man for a long series of ages; and it may well be said, that, except Astronomy, no other field affords so much material for such investigations as Zoölogy, on account of the early attention paid by philosophers to the study of animated beings. From Aristotle to this day we have an uninterrupted series of writers who have recorded their views of the nature of animals, and thus enable us to ascertain what successive steps have been made towards a more extensive acquaintance with, and a more accurate appreciation of, the nature, the affinities, the structure, and the mode of development, of the whole animal kingdom. And while thus following up the long record of the progress of human knowledge in this direction, an attentive observer cannot fail to be struck with the similarity noticeable between the earlier views presented by the older writers on these topics, and the impression he himself is likely to have received when contemplating for the first time the same objects. Not less striking is the coincidence between the sum total of the information gradually obtained in course of time, and the successive steps made by those who have approached these studies without a previous