

acquaintance with the labors of their predecessors. The study of the Acalephs, under which name naturalists now include the so-called jelly-fishes or sea-blubbers or sun-fishes, and the animals allied to them, affords a striking example of this correspondence between the gradual progress every one must make who attempts to understand their nature, and the successive stages of the science relating to these animals as recorded in the works of the authors of past ages. When we first observe a jelly-fish, it appears like a moving fleshy mass, seemingly destitute of organization; next, we may observe its motions, contracting and expanding, while it floats near the surface of the water. Upon touching it, we may feel the burning sensation it produces upon the naked hand, and perhaps perceive also that it has a central opening, a sort of mouth, through which it introduces its food into the interior. Again, we cannot but be struck with their slight consistency, and the rapidity with which they melt away when taken out of the water. But it is not until our methods of investigation are improved; and when, after repeated failures, we have learned how to handle and treat them, that we begin to perceive how remarkable and complicated their internal structure is; — it is not until we have become acquainted with a large number of their different kinds, that we perceive how greatly diversified they are; — it is not until we have had an opportunity of tracing their development, that we perceive how wide the range of their class really is; — it is not until we have extended our comparisons to almost every type of the animal kingdom, that we can be prepared to determine their general affinity, the natural limits of the type to which they belong, the distinctive characteristics of their class, the gradation of their orders, and the peculiarities that may distinguish their families, their genera, and their species. We cannot, therefore, expect to find, in the older writers upon Zoölogy, any thing like a natural classification of these animals. Even Aristotle, whose keen mind has thrown so much light at such an early period upon the natural affinities of the higher animals, has failed entirely to recognize the relations which exist between them and the star-fishes and sea-urchins. All that he, and other naturalists, up to a very recent period, tell us about them, amounts to little more than the first impression they make on those who see them for the first time, without attempting to compare them with other animals.

For this reason I have thought it desirable to introduce a brief account of all that has been written upon the subject of Acalephs, as far as the condition of the libraries in this part of the world will permit it, not only with a view of thus recapitulating the successive stages of our knowledge of these beings, and comparing them with our daily experience in attempting to unravel all the mysteries connected with their history, but also with a hope of accounting for the very questionable terminology used at present by all naturalists in describing the parts of these singular beings.