

CHAPTER SECOND.

THE NATURAL FAMILIES OF THE CTENOPHORÆ.

SECTION I.

FAMILY CHARACTERS IN GENERAL AMONG CTENOPHORÆ.

SINCE it is probable that hereafter the natural families of animals may be characterized by a distinct category of structural features, and with greater precision than before, in accordance with suggestions I have already made in the first volume of this work (p. 155), I will only add here a few remarks upon the manner in which I conceive that this should be done in the class of Acalephs. The characteristics of the families require a thorough revision throughout the animal kingdom; for, of late, it has been customary among naturalists simply to select some prominent genus among those which appeared closely related, and, giving its name a patronymic termination, to call family almost any kind of combination of genera associated under such a head, sometimes even without assigning to such would-be families any characters at all. There are many hundred families now recorded in descriptive works of Zoölogy which have no better foundation than this, and a great many more to which characters are assigned in no way bearing upon the features upon which natural families may be founded. This state of things should no longer be tolerated; or, at least, if such loose proceedings cannot be prevented in our science, they should no longer be received as contributions to its advancement. It is one thing to give a family name to an arbitrary association of animals, and quite another thing to investigate the structural features upon which a family may be founded. If the essential character of a family consists in the typical form of its representatives, it becomes a scientific problem in Zoölogy to ascertain what are the structural features which determine their peculiar pattern; and I hold, that, to characterize a natural family correctly, it is