

regard to the botanical contributions which the curious may unearth from the works of Aristotle, Theophrastus, Dioscorides, Pliny, and Galen.

The textual obscurities of the works inherited from the ancients involved a loss of time and energy quite out of proportion to the whole value of the legacy. Instead of observing or experiment-^{Mediaeval}ing, the inquirer wasted his ingenuity in trying to find out what the ill-described plant could be which Dioscorides had credited with so many virtues. Moreover, the minds of most inquirers were filled with that interesting but lamentable mysticism, which saw nature as magical and symbolic instead of real and rational, and found expression in the long-lived doctrine of "signatures". According to this superstition the shape of a leaf, the colour of a flower, or the like, was a sign of the use for which the plant was meant.

The scientific renaissance of the sixteenth century, which sent throbs of new life in so many directions, touched even the systematic botanist, and we find a succession of herbalists who looked^{The} out with fresh eyes upon nature, describing and drawing with loving care. Even their names are now unfamiliar—Brunfels, Fuchs, Bock, Dodoens, De l'Ecluse, De l'Obel, and Bauhin—save perhaps when one wonders for a minute over the commemorative name of some plant, like *Lobelia* or *Bauhinia*. But they mark an important transition from traditional to real botany, and it is with their painstaking enthusiasm that we associate the beginnings of precise descriptions, careful drawings and engravings, herbaria, local "floras", botanical excursions, and even gardens. The greatest of them, after whom came a decline, was Kaspar Bauhin (1550-1624). In his hands descriptions rose to the dignity of terse diagnoses, and he preceded Linnæus in giving each plant at least two names. Like the other herbalists he was weak in his general classification, but full of insight in his minor groupings, sometimes reaching, as if by a sort of insight (the subconscious result of very thorough description), to a recognition of natural affinities.