

The primary use of this sense, the organ of which is placed at the entrance of the alimentary canal, is evidently to guide animals in the choice of their food, and to warn them of the introduction of a noxious substance into the stomach. With respect to the human species, this use has been, in the present state of society, superseded by many acquired tastes, which have supplanted those originally given to us by nature: but in the inferior animals it still retains its primitive office, and is a sense of great importance to the safety and welfare of the individual, from its operation being coincident with those of natural instincts. If, as it is said, these instincts are still met with among men in a savage state, they are soon weakened or effaced by civilization.

The tongue, in all the inferior classes of vertebrated animals, namely, Fishes, Reptiles, and Birds, is scarcely ever constructed with a view to the reception of delicate impressions of taste; being generally covered with a thick, and often horny cuticle; and being, besides, scarcely ever employed in mastication. This is the case, also, with those quadrupeds, which swallow their food entire, and which cannot, therefore, be supposed to have the sense of taste much developed.

Insects which are provided with a tongue or a proboscis may be conceived to exercise the sense of taste by means of these organs. But many insects possess, besides these, a pair of short feelers, placed behind the true antennæ; and it has been observed that, while the insect is taking food, these organs are in incessant motion, and are continually employed in touching and examining the food, before it is introduced into the mouth: hence, some entomologists have concluded that they are organs of taste. But it must be obvious that in this, as in every other instance in which our researches extend to beings of such minute dimensions, and which occupy a station, in the order of sensitive existence, so remote from ourselves, we are wandering into regions where the only light that is afforded us must be borrowed from vague and fanciful analogies, or created by the force of a vivid and deceptive imagination.