

CHAP. V.

OF THE CLASSIFICATION OF NATURAL OBJECTS AND PHENOMENA, AND OF NOMENCLATURE.

(129.) THE number and variety of objects and relations which the observation of nature brings before us are so great as to distract the attention, unless assisted and methodized by such judicious distribution of them in classes as shall limit our view to a few at a time, or to groups so bound together by general resemblances, that, for the immediate purpose for which we consider them, they may be regarded as individuals. Before we can enter into any thing which deserves to be called a general and systematic view of nature, it is necessary that we should possess an enumeration, if not complete, at least of considerable extent, of her materials and combinations; and that those which appear in any degree important should be distinguished by names which may not only tend to fix them in our recollection, but may constitute, as it were, nuclei or centres, about which information may collect into masses. The imposition of a name on any subject of contemplation, be it a material object, a phenomenon of nature, or a group of facts and relations, looked upon in a peculiar point of view, is an epoch in its history of great importance. It not only enables us readily to refer to it in conversation or writing, without circumlocution, but, what is of more consequence, it gives it a recognised existence in our own minds, as a matter for separate and peculiar consideration; places it on a list for examination; and renders it a head or title, under which information of various descriptions may be arranged; and, in consequence, fits it to perform the office of a connecting link between all the subjects to which such information may refer.

(130.) For these purposes, however, a temporary or provisional name, or one adapted for common parlance, may suffice. But when a very great multitude of objects come to be referred to one class, especially of such as