

INTRODUCTION.

WE now arrive at that study which offers the most copious and complete example of the sciences of classification, I mean Botany. And in this case, we have before us a branch of knowledge of which we may say, more properly than of any of the sciences which we have reviewed since Astronomy, that it has been constantly advancing, more or less rapidly, from the infancy of the human race to the present day. One of the reasons of this resemblance in the fortunes of two studies so widely dissimilar, is to be found in a simplicity of principle which they have in common; the ideas of Likeness and Difference, on which the knowledge of plants depends, are, like the ideas of Space and Time, which are the foundation of astronomy, readily apprehended with clearness and precision, even without any peculiar culture of the intellect. But another reason why, in the history of Botany, as in that of Astronomy, the progress of knowledge forms an unbroken line from the earliest times, is precisely the great difference of the kind of knowledge which has been attained in the two cases. In Astronomy, the discovery of general truths began at an early period of civilization; in Botany, it has hardly yet begun; and thus, in each of these departments of study, the lore of the ancient is homogeneous with that of the modern times, though in the one case it is science, in the other, the absence of science, which pervades all ages. The resemblance of the form of their history arises from the diversity of their materials.

I shall not here dwell further upon this subject, but proceed to trace rapidly the progress of *Systematic Botany*, as the classificatory science is usually denominated, when it is requisite to distinguish between that and *Physiological Botany*. My own imperfect acquaintance with this study admonishes me not to venture into its details, further than my purpose absolutely requires. I trust that, by taking my views principally from writers who are generally allowed to possess the best insight into the science, I may be able to draw the larger features of its history with tolerable correctness; and if I succeed in this, I shall attain an object of great importance in my general scheme.