

CHAPTER I.

IMAGINARY KNOWLEDGE OF PLANTS.

THE apprehension of such differences and resemblances as those by which we group together and discriminate the various kinds of plants and animals, and the appropriation of words to mark and convey the resulting notions, must be presupposed, as essential to the very beginning of human knowledge. In whatever manner we imagine man to be placed on the earth by his Creator, these processes must be conceived to be, as our Scriptures represent them, contemporaneous with the first exertion of reason, and the first use of speech. If we were to indulge ourselves in framing a hypothetical account of the origin of language, we should probably assume as the first-formed words, those which depend on the visible likeness or unlikeness of objects; and should arrange as of subsequent formation, those terms which imply, in the mind, acts of wider combination and higher abstraction. At any rate, it is certain that the names of the kinds of vegetables and animals are very abundant even in the most uncivilized stages of man's career. Thus we are informed¹ that the inhabitants of New Zealand have a distinct name of every tree and plant in their island, of which there are six or seven hundred or more different kinds. In the accounts of the rudest tribes, in the earliest legends, poetry, and literature of nations, pines and oaks, roses and violets, the olive and the vine, and the thousand other productions of the earth, have a place, and are spoken of in a manner which assumes, that in such kinds of natural objects, permanent and infallible distinctions had been observed and universally recognized.

For a long period, it was not suspected that any ambiguity or confusion could arise from the use of such terms; and when such inconveniences did occur, (as even in early times they did,) men were far from divining that the proper remedy was the construction of a science of classification. The loose and insecure terms of the language of common life retained their place in botany, long after their

¹ Yate's *New Zealand*, p. 238.