

defects were severely felt: for instance, the vague and unscientific distinction of vegetables into *trees*, *shrubs*, and *herbs*, kept its ground till the time of Linnæus.

While it was thus imagined that the identification of a plant, by means of its name, might properly be trusted to the common uncultured faculties of the mind, and to what we may call the instinct of language, all the attention and study which were bestowed on such objects, were naturally employed in learning and thinking upon such circumstances respecting them as were supplied by any of the common channels through which knowledge and opinion flow into men's minds.

The reader need hardly be reminded that in the earlier periods of man's mental culture, he acquires those opinions on which he loves to dwell, not by the exercise of observation subordinate to reason; but, far more, by his fancy and his emotions, his love of the marvellous, his hopes and fears. It cannot surprise us, therefore, that the earliest lore concerning plants which we discover in the records of the past, consists of mythological legends, marvellous relations, and extraordinary medicinal qualities. To the lively fancy of the Greeks, the Narcissus, which bends its head over the stream, was originally a youth who in such an attitude became enamored of his own beauty: the hyacinth,² on whose petals the notes of grief were traced (A I, A I), recorded the sorrow of Apollo for the death of his favorite Hyacinthus: the beautiful lotus of India,³ which floats with its splendid flower on the surface of the water, is the chosen seat of the goddess Lackshmi, the daughter of Ocean.⁴ In Egypt, too,⁵ Osiris swam on a lotus-leaf, and Harpocrates was cradled in one. The lotus-eaters of Homer lost immediately their love of home. Every one knows how easy it would be to accumulate such tales of wonder or religion.

Those who attended to the effects of plants, might discover in them some medicinal properties, and might easily imagine more; and when the love of the marvellous was added to the hope of health, it is easy to believe that men would be very credulous. We need not dwell upon the examples of this. In Pliny's Introduction to that book of his

² *Lilium martagon*.

*Ipse suos gemitus foliis inscribit et A I, A I,
Flos habet inscriptum funestaque litera ducta est.—OVID.*

³ *Nelumbium speciosum*.

⁴ Sprengel, *Geschichte der Botanik*, i. 27.

⁵ *Ib.* i. 28.