

selves to the risk of taking a backward step; all their propositions are established with certainty, and become so many solid foundations for that which remains to be built.”¹

Nor can we look upon the great prominence which Cuvier gives to French names in the course of his survey as unjust or partial. He was well aware of the contributions of other nations: no one has spoken in more generous and correct terms of Priestley and Cavendish, of Banks and Rumford, of Pallas, Werner, and Humboldt. We must admit the correctness of the remark, “that even in those departments where chance has willed that Frenchmen should not make the principal discoveries, the manner in which they have received, examined, and developed them, and followed them out into all their consequences, places their names next to those of the real inventors, and gives them in many ways the right to share in the honour.”²

41.
Deserved
prominence
given to
French
names by
Cuvier.

In the first decades of this century the home of the scientific spirit was France: for though not born there, it was nevertheless there nursed into full growth and vigour. But it soon set out on its wanderings through

¹ Compare also the “Réflexions sur la marche actuelle des Sciences,” being the introduction to the ‘Eloges historiques,’ vol. i. p. 1, &c.

² ‘Rapport,’ p. 391. It is also remarkable how clearly Cuvier here announces the defects which the teaching of science was still labouring under. Whilst he rightly praises the great Paris institutions, the medical schools, the mathematical, physical, and polytechnic establishments, the new schools of

technology and agriculture, as unequalled organisations for higher instruction, he draws attention to the absence of equally efficient elementary schools and to the neglect of those provincial institutions which before that age had already done so much to disseminate knowledge and learning. At the end of our century both France and Great Britain have still only very partially supplied the wants which Cuvier so clearly defines in the beginning.