

is assumed. The only effect of this hypothesis is to make us lose sight of the principle which ought to direct us in the observation of such curious structures, as well as of the conclusions to which an unbiassed mind would come. The matter to be explained is simply this:—the chain of bones in the ear, which is so curiously adapted in the mammalia to convey the vibrations of the membrane of the tympanum to the nerve of hearing, is not found in the organ of hearing in birds; but there is substituted a mechanism entirely different. They choose to say that the incus, one of the four bones of the chain, is wanting in the bird. Where shall we find it?—they ask. Here it is in the apparatus of the jaw or mandible; in that bone which is called *os quadratum*. I believe that the slight and accidental resemblance which this bone (B.) (see figure p. 159) in the bird has to the incus, is the real origin of this fancy. Let us follow a juster mode of reasoning, and see how this hypothesis obscures the beauty of the subject. The first step of the investigation ought to be to inquire into the fact, if there be any imperfection in the hearing of birds. That is easily answered—the hearing of birds is most acute; the slightest noise alarms; and the nightingale or other bird of song, in a summer evening, will answer to the note of his rival when he is out of our hearing. We have next to observe the imperfection in the