INTRODUCTION.

In the foregoing Preface I have glanced at the principal groups of Mammals inhabiting the great country of Australia. It will now, however, be necessary to enter into greater detail respecting this division of its fauna; and I conceive that it will not be out of place if I commence with a retrospective view of the gradual discovery of countries and their zoological productions from the earliest historic times. Such a retrospect will not, I think, be deemed unnecessary, especially since my intention is to show to the general reader, rather than to the scientific naturalist, that each great division of the globe has its own peculiar forms of animal life, and that the fauna of Australia is widely different from that of every other part of the world. By a mere glance at the zoological features of the globe as at present existing, it will be perceived with what precision the animal life of each country has been adapted to its physical character; the absence of certain great families of birds and quadrupeds in some countries will also be apparent. To account for this on any scientific principle would be very difficult, when we cannot say why the Nightingale is not a summer visitant to Devonshire, or why the Grouse is not found south of Wales; why the aërial Swifts, Swallows, and Martins are numerous in Australia, and absent in New Zealand; or why Woodpeckers, which occur in nearly every other part of the globe, are not found in Australia, New Guinea, or any of the Polynesian Islands.

The ancient Egyptians appear to have been little acquainted with the natural productions of any other country than their own,—at least, we have no evidence that they were; for neither so conspicuous a bird as the Peacock, nor even the Common Fowl, are represented on their lasting monuments. Of the eastern countries Alexander's expedition doubtless greatly increased the knowledge of the Greeks, furnishing materials for the philosophic mind of Aristotle, and certainly extending the knowledge of Pliny, as is evidenced by his 'Historia Naturalis,' the only work which has come down to us of the latter great naturalist. Pliny, standing out as a bright star in zoological science at the period he lived, was doubtless tolerably acquainted with the natural productions of Eastern Europe, Arabia, North-eastern Africa, slightly with those of Persia, and still less so with those of India.

It may be fairly said, that the earliest dawn of natural history commenced with the Christian era,—Aristotle living just before, and Pliny soon after, the advent of our Saviour. This early dawn, however, was for a long period obscured by the dark ages which succeeded; for it was not until the commencement of the