SECTION XVI.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE TESTUDINATA.

The distribution of the Testudinata upon the surface of our globe presents some very interesting features, which deserve the more to arrest our attention, as they bear directly upon the very principles which regulate the geographical distribution of the animals in general. In the first place, we find that, taken as a whole, the range of the Testudinata is less extensive than that of the other orders of Reptiles. This agrees with the general fact, that the higher representatives of any comprehensive group are everywhere more limited in their distribution than the lower types of the same group; and as we have seen that the Testudinata are the highest Reptiles, we should expect to find them, as is really the case, occupying a more limited area of the surface of the globe than either the Saurians or the Ophidians. This is equally true of their horizontal and of their vertical range. A few Saurians, and some Ophidians, especially of the family of Vipers, extend much farther north, and much higher up, along the slopes of the mountains, than any Chelonians. In the second place, it is known that the sea Turtles, the Chelonii proper, which constitute the lowest sub-order of the Testudinata, have a much wider range than the land and fresh-water Turtles, the Amydæ. This fact is important in two different points of view: first, as corroborating the assertion, already made above, that the lower representatives of any comprehensive group have a wider distribution than its higher types; and secondly, as showing that the mediums in which the lower types dwell are frequently different from those which suit the higher ones. It is a fact, that though the Testudinata, as a whole, have a more limited geographical range than the other orders of Reptiles, the sea Turtles, which are unquestionably the lowest Testudinata, are by far more widely diffused upon the surface of the earth than either the land or fresh-water Turtles. They are common to all oceans, being found in the North and South Atlantic as well as in its warmest waters; in the Mediterranean, in the Indian Ocean, and over the whole range of the Pacific. Moreover, marine Turtles have been observed in northern latitudes, far beyond the range of other Turtles; they are, indeed, the only ones seen, and that but occasionally, along the northern shores of Europe and of Eastern Asia. It is not less characteristic, that these Chelonii, which are the lowest of the Testudinata, are at the same time all marine, while the Amydæ, which constitute a higher sub-order, never live in the ocean, but only upon land, either in fresh water or upon dry land.