

ous branches of natural science, and which can be best characterised by the term morphology.¹ The word was first applied only to plants, then also to animals, and later still to crystals and minerals. The words quoted above refer to the forms of inanimate nature, to crystals. In all these cases we have to do with definite individual objects, which can be removed from their surroundings and examined in the laboratory. There is, however, no reason why a study of the actual forms of nature on a large scale, such as the physiognomy of landscape, the configuration of mountains and valleys, the shapes of glaciers, the actual distribution of land and water on our globe, the stratification of rocks, the formation of clouds, and many other things, should not all be comprised under the term, the morphological view of nature. And conceived in this larger sense, the study of nature as a whole and in its separate parts had at the end of the eighteenth century already made very important progress. In fact, natural history had, in the course of that century, gradually emerged from the previous epoch, that of the purely systematic and classificatory attempts, which aimed at giving inventories, collecting specimens, and classifying natural objects, naming, describing, and identifying them. The interest of the latter was a practical one, frequently

18.
Morphology
defined.

¹ In the 'Leçons sur les Phénomènes de la Vie communs aux Animaux et aux Végétaux,' a work which did so much to break down the older division of the sciences which deal with animals and vegetables separately, Claude Bernard says (p. 333 of vol. i., 1885): "Dans un autre équilibre cosmique, la morphologie vitale serait autre. Je pense, en un mot,

qu'il existe virtuellement dans la nature un nombre infini de formes vivantes que nous ne connaissons pas. Ces formes vivantes seraient en quelque sorte dormantes ou expectantes. . . . Il en est ainsi des corps nouveaux que forment les chimistes; ils ne les créent pas, ils étaient virtuellement possibles dans les lois de la nature."