

“For as I tried to take up his sharp and suggestive distinctions, his expressive, useful, but frequently arbitrary laws, there arose in me an inner conflict: what he tried forcibly to hold asunder, tended according to the innermost demands of my nature to be united.” And as the process of dividing, classifying, and keeping apart went on among the successors of Linnæus, so it must have produced in many genuine observers of nature a tendency similar to that which Goethe describes. They would emphasise the resemblances and analogies of natural objects and their organs in proportion as the classifiers had separated and distinguished them. And it was just as likely that the artistic mind of Goethe might succeed in “lifting the veil of nature,” as Humboldt¹ put it, when he transmitted to Goethe his suggestive work on the geography of plants, and as Huxley² repeated in 1894. Indeed it was the former who, on the largest scale, had traced those analogies and correspondences in nature which are so much dearer

¹ See Goethe's own account (in Werke, 2 Abth., vol. vi. p. 163): “Sollte jedoch meine Eitelkeit einigermassen gekränkt sein, dass man weder bei Blumen, Minern, noch Knöchelchen meiner weiter gedenken mag, so kann ich mich an der wohlthätigen Theilnahme eines höchst geschätzten Freundes genugsam erholen. Die deutsche Uebersetzung seiner Ideen zu einer Geographie der Pflanzen nebst einem Naturgemälde der Tropenländer sendet mir Alexander von Humboldt mit einem schmeichelhaften Bilde, wodurch er andeutet, dass es der Poesie wohl auch gelingen könne den Schleier der Natur aufzuheben; und wenn er es zugesteht, wer wird es leugnen?”

² See quotation *supra*, p. 246 note; also (‘Life of Owen, vol. ii. p. 288): “The cultivator of botany, who went beyond the classification of ‘hay,’ became familiar with facts of the same order. Indeed, flowering plants fairly thrust morphological ideas upon the observer. Flowers are the primers of the morphologist; those who run may read in them uniformity of type amidst endless diversity, singleness of plan with complex multiplicity of detail. As a musician might say, every natural group of flowering plants is a sort of visible fugue wandering about a central theme which is never forsaken, however it may, momentarily, cease to be apparent.”