

NOMENCLATURE.

"And aye I muse and sing thy name."—*Burns*.

NOMENCLATURE! The ponderosity of this word would have made Dr. Johnson himself take kindly to it. It is a vocabulary, a museum, an *Omnium gatherum*, packed with history, geography, etymology, philology, technical terms in Art and Science, and the names of places and persons in all ages and climes,—a storehouse of learning and wisdom, curiosity and folly. Hence, we have the nomenclature of Botany, the nomenclature of Astronomy, the nomenclature of Geology; Musical nomenclature, Family nomenclature, and, indeed, the nomenclature of everything, from a "Section" of the British Association to the verbalism of the Billingsgate fishmonger. It would appear, then, that I have committed myself to a somewhat formidable theme; that I am about to plunge into the mysteries of "vocalized breadth," vocalized thought, and accompany Max Müller, or some other *Savant*, in a general tour through the "Science of Language." I beg to state, however, that my purpose is far less pretentious, viz., a chat about *family names*.

I am aware that even this limitation of the theme does not cut off some of the by-paths of the "Science of Language." When did it originate? Were men—and women!—mutes in the earliest days of history? If we are to believe Adam Smith, Locke, Dugald Stewart &c., our worthy ancestors could only convey their thoughts and wishes by gestures and facial expressions. Scarcely. The gentleman's pat, the lady's kiss and the Frenchman's shrug, may be expressive, in a way; but neither this, nor any other theory about the origin of language, can be more than mere guess-work. Of course, ideas existed in the human mind before they could find expression in speech; but whether the words used, in the beginning of language, were what the Grammarians call "proper names," or were simply "general terms," I do not propose to discuss. Words, as the vehicles and expressions of thought, are important wherever we find them; whether in the precise modulations of the Chinese, or the uncouth jargon of the savage; whether in Homer's verse, or Cicero's prose, or the prattle of the child at its mother's skirts. As mere sounds and audible signs, tacked at