

MAGNETISM.

238. **T**HE knowledge which the antient naturalists possessed of this subject was extremely imperfect, and affords the strongest proof of their ignorance of the true method of philosophising; for there can hardly be named any object of physical research that is more curious in itself, or more likely to engage attention, than the apparent life and activity of a piece of rude unorganised matter. This had attracted notice in very early times; for Thales attributed the characteristic phenomenon, the attraction of a piece of iron, to the agency of a mind or soul residing in the magnet. Philosophers seem to have been contented with this lazy notice of a slight suggestion, unbecoming an inquirer, and rather such as might be expected from the most incurious peasant. Even Aristotle has collected no information that is of any importance. We know that the general imperfection of ancient physics has been ascribed to the little importance that was attached to the knowledge of the material world by the