

ascribe too large dimensions to that which occupies the whole of his own field of vision. Thus he may come to consider such study as the highest aim, and best evidence of human genius. To understand Aristotle, or Plato, may appear to him to comprise all that is possible of profundity and acuteness. And when he has travelled over a portion of their domain, and satisfied himself that of this he too is master, he may look with complacency at the circuit he has made, and speak of it as a labor of vast effort and difficulty. We may quote, as an expression of this temper, the language of Sir Henry Savile, in concluding a course of lectures on Euclid, delivered at Oxford.⁴ "By the grace of God, gentlemen hearers, I have performed my promise; I have redeemed my pledge. I have explained, according to my ability, the definitions, postulates, axioms, and *first eight propositions* of the Elements of Euclid. Here, sinking under the weight of years, I lay down my art and my instruments."

We here speak of the peculiar province of the Commentator; for undoubtedly, in many instances, a commentary on a received author has been made the vehicle of conveying systems and doctrines entirely different from those of the author himself; as, for instance, when the New Platonists wrote, taking Plato for their text. The labors of learned men in the stationary period, which came under this description, belong to another class.

3. *Greek Commentators on Aristotle.*—The commentators or disciples of the great philosophers did not assume at once their servile character. At first their object was to supply and correct, as well as to explain their teacher. Thus among the earlier commentators of Aristotle, Theophrastus invented five moods of syllogism in the first figure, in addition to the four invented by Aristotle, and stated with additional accuracy the rules of hypothetical syllogisms. He also not only collected much information concerning animals, and natural events, which Aristotle had omitted, but often differed with his master; as, for instance, concerning the saltness of the sea: this, which the Stagirite attributed to the effect of the evaporation produced by the sun's rays, was ascribed by Theophrastus to beds of salt at the bottom. Porphyry,⁵ who flourished in the third century, wrote a book on the *Predicables*, which was found to be so suitable a complement

⁴ Exolvi per Dei gratiam, Domini auditores, promissum; liberavi fidem meam; explicavi pro meo modulo, definitiones, petitiones, communes sententias, et *octo priores propositiones* Elementorum Euclidis. Hic, annis fessus, cyclos artemque repono.

⁵ Buhle, Arist. i. 284.