

general European interest only in the third decade of the century.¹ For the History of European Thought it is important, but also sufficient, to show how the critical spirit entered more and more into regions of research and learning which, before that time, were cultivated without the conscious application of any definite method. To do this I have, as it were, merely sampled an enormous material, having dealt with a few prominent representatives—such as Niebuhr and Ranke, Ritschl and Mommsen—who are now recognised by authorities all over Western Europe, or with others—such as Carl Ritter and Ernst Curtius—who exhibit what is peculiarly characteristic and unique among the contributions of the German mind to this department of European thought.

In one of the later chapters of this section I shall have an opportunity of showing how philosophical criticism has latterly approached, among other subjects, the historical problem also from a different side, having been led to deal with it as one of the principal aspects of a much larger question, of what I have termed “the problem of society.”

III.

As stated above, we may trace back philosophical criticism, or criticism *par excellence*, to the writings of Kant. They appeared somewhat later than those of Lessing, whom we have regarded as the first representative in Germany of that critical movement which,

¹ By Lord Acton, in the ‘English Historical Review,’ vol. i. p. 7.