

figures, they concluded of course, that the movements of the heavenly bodies must all be performed in exact circles, and with uniform motions; and when the plainest observation demonstrated the contrary, instead of doubting the principle, they saw no better way of getting out of the difficulty than by having recourse to endless combinations of circular motions to preserve their ideal perfection.

(98.) Undoubtedly among the Greek philosophers were many men of transcendent talents and virtues, the ornaments of their species, and justly entitled to the veneration of all posterity; but regarded as a body, they can hardly be considered otherwise than as a knot of disputatious candidates for popular favor, too busy in maintaining their ascendancy over their followers and admirers, by an ostentatious display of superior knowledge, to have the leisure (had they always the inclination) to base their pretensions on a deep and sure foundation, and yet, too sensible of the disgrace and inconvenience of failure, not to defend their dogmas, however shallow, when once promulgated, against their keen and sagacious opponents, by every art of sophism or appeal to passion. Hence the crudities and chimerical views with which their systems of philosophy, both natural and moral, were overloaded; their endless disputes about verbal subtleties, and, last and worst, the proud assumption with which they sheltered ignorance and indolence under the screen of unintelligible jargon or dogmatical assertion. Perhaps, however, this character applies rather to the later than to the earlier of the Greek philosophers. The spirit of rational inquiry into nature seems, if we can judge from the uncertain and often contradictory notices handed down to us of their tenets, to have been far more alive, and less warped by this vain and arrogant turn than at a later period. We know not now what was the precise meaning attached by Thales to his opinion, that water was the origin of all things; but modern geologists will not be at a loss to conceive how an observant traveller might become impressed with this notion, without having recourse to the mystic records of Egypt or