

BOOK I.

HISTORY OF THE GREEK SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY, WITH REFERENCE TO PHYSICAL SCIENCE.

CHAPTER I.

PRELUDE TO THE GREEK SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY.

Sect. 1.—First Attempts of the Speculative Faculty in Physical Inquiries.

AT an early period of history there appeared in men a propensity to pursue speculative inquiries concerning the various parts and properties of the material world. What they saw excited them to meditate, to conjecture, and to reason: they endeavored to account for natural events, to trace their causes, to reduce them to their principles. This habit of mind, or, at least that modification of it which we have here to consider, seems to have been first unfolded among the Greeks. And during that obscure introductory interval which elapsed while the speculative tendencies of men were as yet hardly disentangled from the practical, those who were most eminent in such inquiries were distinguished by the same term of praise which is applied to sagacity in matters of action, and were called *wise men*—σοφοί. But when it came to be clearly felt by such persons that their endeavors were suggested by the love of knowledge, a motive different from the motives which lead to the wisdom of active life, a name was adopted of a more appropriate, as well as of a more modest signification, and they were termed *philosophers*, or lovers of wisdom. This appellation is said¹ to have been first assumed by Pythagoras. Yet he, in Herodotus, instead of having this title, is called a powerful *sophist*—Ἐλλήνων οὐ τῷ ἀσθενεστάτῳ σοφιστῇ Πυθαγόρῃ;² the historian using this word, as it would seem, without intending to imply that misuse of reason which the term afterwards came to denote. The historians of literature

¹ Cic. Tusc. v. 8.

² Herod. iv. 95.