

placed Pythagoras at the origin of the Italic School, one of the two main lines of succession of the early Greek philosophers: but the other, the Ionic School, which more peculiarly demands our attention, in consequence of its character and subsequent progress, is deduced from Thales, who preceded the age of *Philosophy*, and was one of the *sophi*, or "wise men of Greece."

The Ionic School was succeeded in Greece by several others; and the subjects which occupied the attention of these schools became very extensive. In fact, the first attempts were, to form systems which should explain the laws and causes of the material universe; and to these were soon added all the great questions which our moral condition and faculties suggest. The physical philosophy of these schools is especially deserving of our study, as exhibiting the character and fortunes of the most memorable attempt at universal knowledge which has ever been made. It is highly instructive to trace the principles of this undertaking; for the course pursued was certainly one of the most natural and tempting which can be imagined; the essay was made by a nation unequalled in fine mental endowments, at the period of its greatest activity and vigor; and yet it must be allowed (for, at least so far as physical science is concerned, none will contest this), to have been entirely unsuccessful. We cannot consider otherwise than as an utter failure, an endeavor to discover the causes of things, of which the most complete results are the Aristotelian physical treatises; and which, after reaching the point which these treatises mark, left the human mind to remain stationary, at any rate on all such subjects, for nearly two thousand years.

The early philosophers of Greece entered upon the work of physical speculation in a manner which showed the vigor and confidence of the questioning spirit, as yet untamed by labors and reverses. It was for later ages to learn that man must acquire, slowly and patiently, letter by letter, the alphabet in which nature writes her answers to such inquiries. The first students wished to divine, at a single glance, the whole import of her book. They endeavored to discover the origin and principle of the universe; according to Thales, *water* was the origin of all things, according to Anaximenes, *air*; and Heraclitus considered *fire* as the essential principle of the universe. It has been conjectured, with great plausibility, that this tendency to give to their Philosophy the form of a Cosmogony, was owing to the influence of the poetical Cosmogonies and Theogonies which had been produced and admired at a still earlier age. Indeed, such wide and ambitious