

CHAPTER III.

FAILURE OF THE PHYSICAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE GREEK SCHOOLS.

Sect. 1.—Result of the Greek School Philosophy.

THE methods and forms of philosophizing which we have described as employed by the Greek Schools, failed altogether in their application to physics. No discovery of general laws, no explanation of special phenomena, rewarded the acuteness and boldness of these early students of nature. Astronomy, which made considerable progress during the existence of the sects of Greek philosophers, gained perhaps something by the authority with which Plato taught the supremacy and universality of mathematical rule and order; and the truths of Harmonics, which had probably given rise to the Pythagorean passion for numbers, were cultivated with much care by that school. But after these first impulses, the sciences owed nothing to the philosophical sects; and the vast and complex accumulations and apparatus of the Stagirite do not appear to have led to any theoretical physical truths.

This assertion hardly requires proof, since in the existing body of science there are no doctrines for which we are indebted to the Aristotelian School. Real truths, when once established, remain to the end of time a part of the mental treasure of man, and may be discerned through all the additions of later days. But we can point out no physical doctrine now received, of which we trace the anticipation in Aristotle, in the way in which we see the Copernican system anticipated by Aristarchus, the resolution of the heavenly appearances into circular motions suggested by Plato, and the numerical relations of musical intervals ascribed to Pythagoras. But it may be worth while to look at this matter more closely.

Among the works of Aristotle are thirty-eight chapters of "Problems," which may serve to exemplify the progress he had really made in the reduction of phenomena to laws and causes. Of these Problems, a large proportion are physiological, and these I here pass by, as not illustrative of the state of physical knowledge. But those which are properly physical are, for the most part, questions concerning such