

feeble and irresolute a hand ; probably they cannot even prevent their sliding back towards the obscurity from which they had been drawn, or from being lost altogether. Such indistinctness and vacillation of thought appear to have prevailed in the stationary period, and to be, in fact, intimately connected with its stationary character. I shall point out some indications of the intellectual peculiarity of which I speak.

1. *Collections of Opinions.*—The fact, that mere Collections of the opinions of physical philosophers came to hold a prominent place in literature, already indicated a tendency to an indistinct and wandering apprehension of such opinions. I speak of such works as Plutarch's five Books "on the Opinions of Philosophers," or the physical opinions which Diogenes Laërtius gives in his "Lives of the Philosophers." At an earlier period still, books of this kind appear ; as for instance, a large portion of Pliny's Natural History, a work which has very appropriately been called the Encyclopædia of Antiquity ; even Aristotle himself is much in the habit of enumerating the opinions of those who had preceded him. To present such statements as an important part of physical philosophy, shows an erroneous and loose apprehension of its nature. For the only proof of which its doctrines admit, is the possibility of applying the general theory to each particular case ; the authority of great men, which in moral and practical matters may or must have its weight, is here of no force ; and the technical precision of ideas which the terms of a sound physical theory usually demand, renders a mere statement of the doctrines very imperfectly intelligible to readers familiar with common notions only. To dwell upon such collections of opinions, therefore, both implies, and produces, in writers and readers, an obscure and inadequate apprehension of the full meaning of the doctrines thus collected ; supposing there be among them any which really possess such a clearness, solidity, and reality, as to make them important in the history of science. Such diversities of opinion convey no truth ; such a multiplicity of statements of what has been *said*, in no degree teaches us what *is* ; such accumulations of indistinct notions, however vast and varied, do not make up one distinct idea. On the contrary, the habit of dwelling upon the verbal expressions of the views of other persons, and of being content with such an apprehension of doctrines as a transient notice can give us, is fatal to firm and clear thought : it indicates wavering and feeble conceptions, which are inconsistent with sound physical speculation.