

We may, therefore, consider the prevalence of Collections of the kind just referred to, as indicating a deficiency of philosophical talent in the ages now under review. As evidence of the same character, we may add the long train of publishers of Abstracts, Epitomes, Bibliographical Notices, and similar writers. All such writers are worthless for all purposes of *science*, and their labors may be considered as dead works; they have in them no principle of philosophical vitality; they draw their origin and nutriment from the death of true physical knowledge; and resemble the swarms of insects that are born from the perishing carcass of some noble animal.

2. *Indistinctness of Ideas in Mechanics.*—But the indistinctness of thought which is so fatal a feature in the intellect of the stationary period, may be traced more directly in the works, even of the best authors, of those times. We find that they did not retain steadily the ideas on which the scientific success of the previous period had depended. For instance, it is a remarkable circumstance in the history of the science of Mechanics, that it did not make any advance from the time of Archimedes to that of Stevinus and Galileo. Archimedes had established the doctrine of the lever; several persons tried, in the intermediate time, to prove the property of the inclined plane, and none of them succeeded. But let us look to the attempts; for example, that of Pappus, in the eighth Book of his Mathematical Collections, and we may see the reason of the failure. His Problem shows, in the very terms in which it is propounded, the want of a clear apprehension of the subject. “Having given the power which will draw a given weight along the horizontal plane, to find the additional power which will draw the same weight along a given inclined plane.” This is proposed without previously defining how Powers, producing such effects, are to be measured; and as if the speed with which the body were drawn, and the nature of the surface of the plane, were of no consequence. The proper elementary Problem is, To find the force which will *support* a body on a smooth inclined plane; and no doubt the solution of Pappus has more reference to this problem than to his own. His reasoning is, however, totally at variance with mechanical ideas on any view of the problem. He supposes the weight to be formed into a sphere; and this sphere being placed in contact with the inclined plane, he assumes that the effect will be the same as if the weight were supported on a horizontal lever, the fulcrum being the point of contact of the sphere with the plane, and the power acting at the circumference of the sphere. Such an assumption implies an entire