

prevail in men's minds are the material upon which we must work, the particulars from which we are to generalize, the instruments which we are to use; and that, therefore, to reject the study of antiquity, or even its authority, would be to show ourselves ignorant of the extent and mutual bearing of the elements with which we have to deal;—would be to cut asunder that which we ought to unite into a vital whole. Yet even in the provinces of history and poetry, the poverty and servility of men's minds during the middle ages, are shown by indications so strong as to be truly remarkable; for instance, in the efforts of the antiquarians of almost every European country to assimilate the early history of their own state to the poet's account of the foundation of Rome, by bringing from the sack of Troy, Brutus to England, Bavo to Flanders, and so on. But however this may be, our business at present is, to trace the varying spirit of the *physical* philosophy of different ages; trusting that, hereafter, this prefatory study will enable us to throw some light upon the other parts of philosophy. And in physics the case undoubtedly was, that the labor of observation, which is one of the two great elements of the progress of knowledge, was in a great measure superseded by the collection, the analysis, the explanation, of previous authors and opinions; experimenters were replaced by commentators; criticism took the place of induction; and instead of great discoverers we had learned men.

1. *Natural Bias to Authority.*—It is very evident that, in such a bias of men's studies, there is something very natural; however strained and technical this erudition may have been, the propensities on which it depends are very general, and are easily seen. Deference to the authority of thoughtful and sagacious men, a disposition which men in general neither reject nor think they ought to reject in practical matters, naturally clings to them, even in speculation. It is a satisfaction to us to suppose that there are, or have been, minds of transcendent powers, of wide and wise views, superior to the common errors and blindness of our nature. The pleasure of admiration, and the repose of confidence, are inducements to such a belief. There are also other reasons why we willingly believe that there are in philosophy great teachers, so profound and sagacious, that, in order to arrive at truth, we have only to learn their thoughts, to understand their writings. There is a peculiar interest which men feel in dealing with the thoughts of their fellow-men, rather than with brute matter. Matter feels and excites no sympathies: in seeking for mere laws of nature, there is nothing of mental intercourse with the great spirits of the past, as there is in stu-