

dying Aristotle or Plato. Moreover, a large portion of this employment is of a kind the most agreeable to most speculative minds; it consists in tracing the consequences of assumed principles: it is deductive like geometry: and the principles of the teachers being known, and being undisputed, the deduction and application of their results is an obvious, self-satisfying, and inexhaustible exercise of ingenuity.

These causes, and probably others, make criticism and commentation flourish, when invention begins to fail, oppressed and bewildered by the acquisitions it has already made; and when the vigor and hope of men's minds are enfeebled by civil and political changes. Accordingly,<sup>1</sup> the Alexandrian school was eminently characterized by a spirit of erudition, of literary criticism, of interpretation, of imitation. These practices, which reigned first in their full vigor in "the Museum," are likely to be, at all times, the leading propensities of similar academical institutions.

How natural it is to select a great writer as a paramount authority, and to ascribe to him extraordinary profundity and sagacity, we may see, in the manner in which the Greeks looked upon Homer; and the fancy which detected in his poems traces of the origin of all arts and sciences, has, as we know, found favor even in modern times. To pass over earlier instances of this feeling, we may observe, that Strabo begins his Geography by saying that he agrees with Hipparchus, who had declared Homer to be the first author of our geographical knowledge; and he does not confine the application of this assertion to the various and curious topographical information which the Iliad and Odyssey contain, concerning the countries surrounding the Mediterranean; but in phrases which, to most persons, might appear the mere play of a poetical fancy, or a casual selection of circumstances, he finds unquestionable evidence of a correct knowledge of general geographical truths. Thus,<sup>2</sup> when Homer speaks of the sun "rising from the soft and deep-flowing ocean," of his "splendid blaze plunging in the ocean;" of the northern constellation

"Alone unwashen by the ocean wave;"

and of Jupiter, "who goes to the ocean to feast with the blameless Ethiopians;" Strabo is satisfied from these passages that Homer knew the dry land to be surrounded with water: and he reasons in like manner with respect to other points of geography.

<sup>1</sup> Degerando, *Hist. des Syst. de Philos.* iii. p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> Strabo, i. p. 5.