

typical representative of that change being David Hume, who, starting with the metaphysical problems involved in Locke's and Berkeley's writings, was from them led on to the study of moral, political, and economic questions, and ended by devoting himself to the study of history.<sup>1</sup> At the end of his career political and historical writings were as frequent in English literature as metaphysical and theological writings had been at the beginning. The causes which have effected the same transition from the metaphysical to the historical mode of treatment in Germany during the present century are similar to those existing in England in the last century; but the whole movement has taken place on a larger scale, penetrates deeper into the mental life and work of the nation, and cannot be so easily studied in the writings of any great representative.

24.  
Causes of  
transition  
from meta-  
physical to  
historical  
method.

Whilst in Germany historical studies are now foremost,

<sup>1</sup> I am quite aware that generalisations of this kind must be made and used with great caution. I therefore refer my readers to Leslie Stephen's 'History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century,' especially to the Introduction, where the typical position of Hume is fully discussed, and also to the last chapter of the second volume, where he says of Hume (vol. ii. p. 381, 1st ed.): "Hume was, in one sense, far in advance of his time, and indeed of the average opinion of the present time. But the change may in many respects be described as a revolt from Hume's opinions, much more than a development of them. . . . The history of philosophical and of theological opinion in England is a history of gradual decay down to the

revolutionary era." And p. 444: "The last half of the century was pre-eminently historical. As civilisation progresses, as records are better preserved, and a greater permanence in social organisation makes men more disposed to look beyond their immediate surroundings, a tendency to historical inquiry is naturally awakened. This cause alone, without the more philosophical considerations which might lead a Hume or a Gibbon to turn from abstract investigations to historical inquiries, may account for the growth of antiquarianism in the latter years." But the mere statistics of English literature in the eighteenth century suffice to prove the decline of argumentative and the growth of realistic literature.