

Lucretius distinctly notices the physical office of the air as a receptacle, and medium of conveyance for sound^l and odours^m, and the various exhalations continually arising from the surface of the earthⁿ. But, though he is right in asserting that the skin of animals and the bark of trees are a protection against the action of the air, he is wrong in supposing them to be a protection against the *mechanical* action of that element^o. The science of chemistry, which had not then arisen, has taught us that such external coverings are a protection against the *chemical* action of the air.

It appears probable, from the preceding statement, that in the age of Lucretius philosophers had formed some reasonable conjectures respecting the nature of light and heat; and that several of the physical phenomena of water and of atmospherical air had been accurately observed, and upon the whole correctly explained by them. And even in a subject of a much more subtle nature, the mutual attraction of the magnet and iron, the explanation of the phenomenon was attempted with a degree of ingenuity quite equal to that, which has marked the reasonings of some of the philosophers of the last and present century, on subjects of a similarly abstruse nature.

^l Lib. IV. 561—563, and 572, 573.

^m Lib. IV. 219—222, and 228—230. ⁿ Lib. V. 276, 277.

^o Lib. IV. 930—934.