A SKETCH

OF

ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

FROM THALES TO CICERO.
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FROM THALES TO CICERO

BY

JOSEPH B. MAYOR, M.A.

PROFESSOR OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY AT KING'S COLLEGE,
FORMERLY FELLOW AND TUTOR OF ST JOHN'S
COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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PREFACE.

The readers whom I have chiefly had in my mind, in writing the following sketch of Ancient Philosophy, are Undergraduates at the University or others who are commencing the study of the philosophical works of Cicero or Plato or Aristotle in the original language. It has been my wish to supply to them, what I remember vainly seeking when I was in their position, something which may help them to find their bearings in the new world into which they are plunged on first making acquaintance with such books as Cicero’s *De Finibus* or the *Republic* of Plato. The only helps which I had in similar circumstances some thirty years ago were a translation of Schleiermacher’s *Introduction to the Dialogues of Plato*, of which I could make nothing, and Lewes’ small *Biographical History of Philosophy*, of which the aim, as far as I could judge, was to show that, as philosophy was moonshine, it was mere waste of time to read what the philosophers had written. Things have changed since then. The noblest defence of ancient philosophy which has ever appeared, is contained in the chapters on the
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Sophists and Socrates written by one, who might have been supposed to be himself more or less a sympathizer with Lewes, and in the elaborate examination of the speculations of the Ancients contained in the same Author's *Plato* and *Aristotle*. During the same interval the charm and the wit and the irony of Plato have for the first time been made intelligible to English readers by Mr Jowett's admirable translations; and the excellent German histories of philosophy by Zeller, Ueberweg and Schwegler have been translated into English. None of these however, nor any others which might be named, seem to me exactly to meet the wants of the case. They are too long, too full, too hard, too abstract, or too vague, for a first sketch. What is wanted is something to combine conciseness with accuracy and clearness, something which will be easy and interesting to readers of ordinary intelligence, and will leave no doubt in their minds as to the author's meaning. It is for others to judge how far this object has been accomplished in the present book, which is the outcome of various courses of lectures delivered on the same subject during the last quarter of a century.

But, though I write in the first instance for Classical scholars, and have therefore thought myself at liberty to quote the original Greek and Latin, wherever it seemed expedient to do so; I am not without hopes that what I have written may be found interesting and useful by educated readers generally, not merely as an introduction to the formal history of philosophy, but as supplying a
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key to our present ways of thinking and judging in regard to matters of the highest importance. For Greece is in everything the starting-point of modern civilization. Homer is not more the fountain-head of Western poetry, than Socrates of Western philosophy. Allowing as much as we will to Semitic and Teutonic influences, it remains true that for Art and Science and Law, for the Philosophy of thought and of action, nay even for Theology itself, as far as the form is concerned, we are mainly indebted to Greece, and to Rome as the interpreter of Greece. Even that which we call ‘common sense’ consists of little more than the worn fragments of older systems of thought, just as the common soil of our gardens is composed, in great part, of the detritus of primeval rocks.

As we trace backwards the march of civilization, we find extraordinary contrasts in the degrees of progress made in its different departments. In some departments, as for instance in the inductive sciences and in mechanical inventions, the early stages have only a historical value: in others, as in geometry, we still use text-books written two thousand years ago. So in the arts: while in sculpture we despair of approaching Greece, in music we have far surpassed her, and in poetry we may claim equality at least, if not superiority. How stands it with regard to philosophy? Here too we find the same variety. While the fanciful speculations of the ancients as to the constitution and laws of the external universe, have for the most part vanished away before the touch of reality, and given place to the solid edifice of modern
physical science; while the loose induction of Socrates and of Aristotle has been reduced in our own day into a definite system of Inductive Logic; while immense additions have thus been made to our knowledge of the external universe and of man as a part of the universe, that is, of the anatomy, the physiology and the habits of the human animal, there has been far less advance in the knowledge of man as a moral and intellectual being. Thus, Deductive Logic remains in its essentials the same as when it was first given to the world by Aristotle, and neither in Psychology nor in Ethics can it be said that the ancient systems have been finally superseded by any generally accepted system of modern times. No doubt many new facts have been observed and new explanations have been offered in reference to such subjects as comparative psychology, the association of ideas, the influence of heredity, the influence of nature on man, the laws of human progress, and so on. Above all, Christianity has imparted a far deeper feeling of the complexity of life, a sense of moral responsibility, of man's weakness and sinfulness, and of the regenerating powers of faith and love, such as was never dreamt of by the ancients. And yet, in spite of all this, is there any modern work of systematic morality which could be compared with Aristotle's Ethics for its power of stimulating moral thought? Most moderns appear to write under the consciousness that they are uttering truisms; or, if they escape from this, it is by running off from the main highway of morality into by-paths of psychology or physiology.
or sociology. Again, they are hampered by the suspicion that whatever concerns moral practice is more impressively and effectively treated of by religion; or else they consign, what, supposing it to be true, is the most important part of morality, to the region of the unknown and unknowable. The ancient moralists knew no such restrictions. Aristotle's, and still more Plato's, theory of conduct was no stale repetition of other men's thoughts; it was the full expression of their own highest aspirations and discoveries in regard to the duty, the hopes, and the destiny of man. And thus there is a freshness and a completeness about the ethics of the Ancients which we seek in vain in the Moderns. Even if it were otherwise, the comparison between pre-Christian and post-Christian systems of morality must always be full of interest and importance in reference to our view of Christianity itself.

One word more as to the general use of the history of philosophy. It was a saying of Democritus that a fool has to be taught everything by his own personal experience, while a wise man draws lessons from the experience of others. History of whatever kind supplies us with the means of thus gaining experience by proxy, and in the history of philosophy above all we have the concentrated essence of all human experience. For the philosopher is, no more than the poet, an isolated phenomenon. As the latter expresses the feeling, so the former expresses in its purest form the thought of his time, summing up the past, interpreting the present, and fore-
shadowing the future. We might be spared much of crudeness and violence and one-sidedness, if people were aware that what they hold to be the last result of modern enlightenment was perhaps the common-place of 2000 years ago; or, on the other hand, that doctrines or practices which they regard as too sacred for examination are to be traced back, it may be, to a Pagan origin. It is possible to be provincial in regard to time as well as in regard to space; and there is no more mischievous provincialism than that of the man who accepts blindly the fashionable belief, or no-belief, of his particular time, without caring to inquire what were the ideas of the countless generations which preceded, or what are likely to be the ideas of the generations which will follow. However firm may be our persuasion of the Divinely guided progress of our race, the fact of a general forward movement in the stream of history is not inconsistent with all sorts of eddies and retardations at particular points; and before we can be sure that such points are not to be found in our own age, we must have some knowledge of the past development of thought, and have taken the trouble to compare our own ways of thinking and acting with those that have prevailed in other epochs of humanity.

Had space permitted, I should have been glad to have followed the example set by Sir Alexander Grant in his Essays on Aristotle, and shown how the half-conscious morality of the Epic and Gnomic and Lyric poets, and of the early historians, provided the raw material which was afterwards worked up by the philosophers; and
again how the results of philosophic thought became in their turn the common property of the educated class, and were transformed into household words by Euripides and the writers of the New Comedy, and still more by the Roman Satirists. But to do this would have swollen the volume to twice its present size, and perhaps it may suffice here to throw out a hint which any Classical scholar may put into practice for himself.

In conclusion I have to return my best thanks to the friends who have helped me by looking over portions of my proof-sheets, especially to my colleague Prof. Warr, to whose suggestion indeed it is mainly owing that a part of the Introduction to my edition of Cicero’s De Natura Deorum has thus been expanded into a separate work on the History of Ancient Philosophy.

N.B. The references to Zeller are, except when otherwise stated, to the latest German edition, which is denoted by the small numeral following the number of the page. To the books recommended under Aristotle’s Ethics, p. 100, add a new translation by Mr F. H. Peters, and the Essays V. and VI. contained in Grote’s Fragments on Ethical Subjects.

May 20, 1881.
"Ὅταν γὰρ ἔθην τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα φύει τὰ
tοῦ νόμου ποιώσιν, οὐτοὶ νόμον μὴ ἔχοντες ἐγγετικ
εἰσὶν νόμος, οὕτως ἐνδείκνυται τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου
γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἄτυχων, συμμαρτυροῦσθε ἄτυχων
τὰς συνειδήσεις καὶ μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν
καθηγορούντων ἣ καὶ ἀπολογογομένων.

S. Paul. ad Rom. II. 14, 15.

Διότι τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φανερὸν ἐκτιν ἐν
ἄτυχως· ὡς δὲ γὰρ ἄτυχος ἐφανέρωσεν. τὰ γὰρ ἀδόρατα
ἄτυχος ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου τοῖς ποιήμασιν νοούμενα
καθοράται, ἣ τε ἀδίδως ἄτυχος δύναμις καὶ θεότης.

Ibid. 1. 19, 20.

"Ἡν μὲν οὖν πρὸ τὰς τοῦ Κυρίου παραγείας εἰς
δικαιοσύνην Ἑλληνες ἀναγκαία φιλοσοφία, νυνὶ δὲ χρῆσιμὴ
πρὸς θεοειδεῖας γίνεται, προπαιδεία της ούχα τοῖς τὴν
πίστιν ἀπὸ τοῦτο καρπούμενος.