

THE STORY OF PHILOSOPHY

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The Story of Philosophy by Aston Leigh

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ASTON LEIGH

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BY
ASTON LEIGH.



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265. i. 587

PREFACE.

THE object of the following pages is to give the reader, concisely and in ordinary language—philosophical terms being as far as possible excluded—the history of the rise and progress, during the seven centuries before the birth of Christ, of that which sounds so unapproachable when the word which represents it is heard—“Philosophy.”

What is Philosophy ?

The answer can be best conveyed by a simile.

Years ago the writer came across a little book whose subject-matter was “One Object Seen by Seven Eyesights.”

The fable related how a poor artist, out in the country sketching, was told by various creatures—the fly, the ant, birds, &c.—of some extraordinary object lying in the grass at a certain spot. Although the painter could not doubt as to the object described by the different creatures being one and the same, the descriptions varied so absurdly and were so grotesque, that he could not form the remotest idea as to what the object described really was—each description tallying with the natural formation of the eye of the creature who was supposed to give it. At last the artist viewed the object himself, and his human eyesight recognised it as a golden guinea.

Philosophy—the actual truth about self and everything which is not self—may be called the object; the story of philosophy the account of this longed-for, actual truth given by myriads of mental eyesights.

The conclusions arrived at by the minds of the different philosophers are dependent upon the structure of those minds. Therefore, in the "Story of Philosophy" the reader will see the truth through different mental eyes. If impatience lead him to determine to reject them all, and view the truth with his own mental vision alone, the philosophers will not have lived and struggled in vain.

The philosophical student may be compared to a gold-digger. He has to unearth and sift vast masses of sand before he finds the grain of gold—the thought. He has to wade through pages upon pages of words, all used in the endeavour of the writer to express some vast idea, which, like a will-o'-the-wisp, hovers about him and defies language. It is easy to lose the thought in the words, the thought being frequently a very needle in the hay of verbiage.

The following pages are the result of several years' reading and research. The writer has not compiled; he has endeavoured to hear all sides of the question, and to relate the salient points of each as simply as is possible when dealing with so vast a subject.

Although he has written for those unacquainted with philosophy, and lacking the time to read the works of great writers for themselves, he has studiously rejected every unauthenticated account, that, failing a better book of reference at hand, his epitome may not mislead the inquirer.

In a few months the writer hopes to present to his readers the work to which this is merely the Prologue—viz., the "Progress of Philosophy after the Birth of Christ."

If a reader be inclined to dip for himself into the vast stores of works on this great subject, he cannot do better than first read the account of the ancient philosophers in Grote's "History of Greece;" continuing with Jowett's "Plato;" Grote's "Plato and the other Companions of Socrates;" "Aristotle," by the same author; Maurice's "Ancient Philosophy;" Ritter's celebrated work on the same (the two last are somewhat diffuse in style); the translation of Zeller (London, 1876); Sewell's Introduction to the Platonic Dialogues; the biographies of the various philosophers in Bayle's Dictionary; G. H. Lewes' "History of Philosophy;" and the "Dissertations" (8th edition of "Encyclopædia Britannica").

Should he be a classical student, the vast field of Greek and Latin literature lies open to him; and if he has a taste for the subject, he is to be congratulated upon the pleasure in prospect for him—to which the writer leaves him, wishing him that "passionate patience" which was a great thinker's interpretation of the word, genius.

LONDON, *October* 1880.

