

**A LIFE OF ARISTOTLE; INCLUDING
A CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF
SOME QUESTIONS OF LITRARY
HISTORY CONNECTED WITH HIS
WORKS**

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HIS WORKS.

BY

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Essay is intended by the author to be preliminary to a few others in which he hopes to give an account of the several systems of Ancient Philosophy which converged in those of Plato and Aristotle,—to pursue some of the more important branches of speculation in the course which they took after leaving the hands of the latter,—and to examine the success which has attended their cultivation up to the present time. Before this task could be attempted with any advantage, it was necessary to enter upon some points relative to the history of philosophical literature, and, from the nature of these, no mode of discussing them appeared preferable to interweaving them in a critical biography of the founder of the Peripatetic School. The present treatise, however, although the first of a series, is complete in itself, and it is the intention of the writer to preserve a similar independence to each of the others.



CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION



✓ If the acquaintance we possessed with the private life of individuals were at all proportioned to the influence exerted by them on the destinies of mankind, the biography of Aristotle would fill a library; for without attempting here to discuss the merits of his philosophy as compared with that of others, it may safely be asserted that no man has ever yet lived who exerted so much influence upon the world. (Absorbing into his capacious mind the whole existing philosophy of his age, he reproduced it, digested and transmuted, in a form of which the main outlines are recognised at the present day, and of which the language has penetrated into the inmost recesses of our daily life.) Translated in the fifth century of the Christian era into the Syriac language by the Nestorians who fled to Persia, and from Syriac into Arabic four hundred years later, his writings furnished the Mohammedan conquerors of the East with a germ of science which, but for the effect of their religious and political institutions, might have shot up into as tall a tree as it did produce in the West; while his logical works, in the Latin translation which Boethius, "the last of the Romans," bequeathed as a legacy to posterity, formed the basis of that extraordinary phenomenon, the Philosophy of the Schoolmen. An empire like this, extending over nearly twenty centuries of time, sometimes more sometimes less despotically, but always with great force,—recognised in Bagdad and in Cordova, in Egypt and in

Britain,—and leaving abundant traces of itself in the language and modes of thought of every European nation, is assuredly without a parallel. Yet of its founder's personal history all that we can learn is to be gathered from meager compilations, scattered anecdotes, and accidental notices, which contain much that is obviously false and even contradictory, and from which a systematic account, in which tolerable confidence may be placed, can only be deduced by a careful and critical investigation. ✓

It is not, however, to the indifference of his contemporaries, or to that of their immediate successors, that the paucity of details relating to Aristotle's life is due. If we may trust the account of a commentator, Ptolemy Philadelphus, the second of the Macedonian dynasty in Egypt, not only bestowed a great deal of study upon the writings of the illustrious philosopher, but also wrote a biography of him¹. At any rate, about the same time, Hermippus of Smyrna, one of the Alexandrine school of learned men, whose research and accuracy is highly praised by Josephus², composed a work extending to some length, *On the Lives of Distinguished Philosophers and Orators*, in which Aristotle appears to have occupied a considerable space³. Another author, whose date there is no

¹ David the Armenian, in a commentary on the *Categories*, cited by Brandis in the *Rheinisches Museum*, Vol. i. p. 250, and since published by him from two Vatican MSS., says, Τῶν Ἀριστοτελικῶν συγγραμμάτων πολλῶν ὄντων χιλίων τὸν ἀριθμὸν, ὡς φησι Πτολεμαῖος ὁ Φιλάделφος, ἀναγραφὴν αὐτῶν ποιησάμενος καὶ τὸν βίον αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν διάθεσιν. κ. τ. λ. (p. 22. ed. Bekk.) an important passage if not corrupt, as showing who the Ptolemy was that is elsewhere cited in connection with Aristotle's works.

² *Contr. Apion.* lib. i. ἀπὸ περι πᾶσαν ἱστορίαν ἐπιμελής.

³ Athenæus (xiii. p. 589. xv. p. 696.) cites him, ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ περι Ἀριστοτέλους.

direct means of ascertaining, but who probably is to be placed somewhere about the end of the third century before the Christian era⁴, Timotheus of Athens, is also to be added to the number of his early biographers. But independently of such works as these, antiquity abounded in others which contained information on this subject in a less direct form. Aristoxenus of Tarentum, who during a part of his life was himself a pupil of Aristotle, in his biographies of Socrates and Plato had frequent occasion to speak of the great Stagirite. Epicurus, in a treatise which is cited under the title of *A Letter on the Pursuits and Habits of former Philosophers*, related several stories to his disparagement⁵. The same, perhaps, was the case with Aristippus (apparently the grandson of the founder of the Cyrenean school) in his work *On the Luxury of Antiquity*⁶. And yet more valuable materials than were furnished by the two last-mentioned works, of which at least the former appears to have been composed in that vulgar spirit which delights in finding something to degrade to its own level all that is above it⁷, seem to have been contained in the treatises of Demetrius the Magnesian and Apollodorus the Athenian. The first of these was a contemporary of Cicero

⁴ This seems to follow from the fact that Diogenes only quotes him in the lives of Plato, Spensippus, Aristotle, and Zeno of Cittium. He is therefore no authority for any thing later than the time of the last. Zeno was an old man b. c. 260. (Diog. Laert. vii. 6.) Timotheus's work is quoted under the title *Περὶ Βίωσ.*

⁵ Ap. Athen. p. 354.

⁶ Diog. Laert. ii. 23. v. 3.

⁷ See the stories which were related in it of Protagoras, also mentioned by Athenæus, *loc. cit.*

and his celebrated friend Atticus¹, and appears to have exercised his acumen in detecting such erroneous stories prevalent in his time as arose from the confusion of different poets and philosophers who had borne the same name²; a cause which formerly in the absence of hereditary surnames, and under the operation of many motives for falsification, was much more fertile in its results than can now be easily imagined³. The second is an authority which for the purposes of the modern biographer of Aristotle is the most important of all. He, like Hermippus, was an Alexandrine scholar, and pupil of the celebrated commentator and editor of the Homeric poems, Aristarchus⁴. Among his voluminous works was one *On the Sects of Philosophers*, which no doubt contained much that was interesting on our subject; but what renders him valuable above any other of these lost writers, and makes us treasure up with avidity the slightest notices by him which have come down to us, is his celebrated *Chronology*, a composition in iambic verse, often cited under the title of *Χρονικά*, or *Χρονική σύνταξις*, by that compiler whose treatise is unfortunately the most ancient systematic account of Aristotle's life which has escaped the ravages of time. These citations are invaluable, not merely for the positive information which we gain from them, but because they serve also, as we shall have occasion to

¹ Cicero, *Brut.* 91. He is alluded to in *Epp. ad. Attic.* iv. 11. but in viii. 11. ix. 9. xiii. 6. it is Demetrius the Syrian, a rhetorician, who is referred to. This latter is also spoken of in *Brut.* 91.

² Diog. Laert. v. 3.

³ See Galen, *Comment. in Hippocr. de nat. Hom.* ii. p. 105, 109, and in *Hippocr. de Humor.* i. p. 5, ed. Kuehn.

⁴ Suidas, *sub* v. Ἀπολλόδοτος.