HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

YEAR 1829—SECOND HALF-YEAR.

SENSUALISTIC SCHOOL. SYSTEM OF LOCKE.

LECTURE XIII.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE SCHOOLS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

Of the method of observation and of induction in history.—That induction, resting upon the observation of all the anterior facts in the philosophy of history, divides at first the philosophy of the eighteenth century into four systems.—Confirmation of induction by facts.—Division of the European schools of the eighteenth century into four schools: sensualistic, idealistic, skeptical, mystical. Division of this course into four corresponding parts.—Order of the development of these four schools, and consequently the order to follow in their exposition.—Spirit of this course.—Its last aim.

The analysis of the human mind has demonstrated to us that in its natural development it ends at four fundamental points of view, which measure it and wholly represent it. These four points of view, in their scientific expression, give four elementary systems: sensualism, idealism, skepticism, and mysticism. And, as the history of philosophy is the manifestation of the human mind in time and space, there must be in history all that there is in the human mind: so, we have not feared to affirm, in advance, that the history of philosophy would constantly reproduce these four systems.

This is not a hypothetical method, it is a rational method, as

Bacon says;* it consists in going from the human mind, which is the material of history, to history, which is the manifestation of the human mind, and in confirming one by the other. And we have not confined ourselves to the rational method, we have joined to it the experimental method; we have interrogated history as we have interrogated the human mind. I have exhibited to you all the great epochs of the history of philosophy; I have shown you successively the East, Greece, scholasticism, the philosophy of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, finally all the first period of modern philosophy, from the first years of the seventeenth century up to 1750. Not only have I run over with you all these epochs, but I am not conscious of having omitted in each one of these any important school, and in each of these schools any celebrated system; and entire history at each one of these epochs has adjusted itself to the frame itself which the analysis of the human mind had furnished us. The last result of the experiences of history has been the constant recurrence, in each epoch, of the four systems which are intimately connected without being confounded, which are developed unequally, but harmoniously, and always with a marked progress. Why, then, have we not the right to convert the constant recurrence of this phenomenon into a law of history?

Call to mind by what processes and upon what conditions we obtain a law in the physical order. When a phenomenon presents itself with such a character in such a circumstance, and when, the circumstance changing, the character of the phenomenon changes also, it follows that this character is not a law of the phenomenon; for this phenomenon can still appear, even when this character no longer exists. But if this phenomenon appears with the same character in a succession of numerous and diverse cases, and even in all the cases that fall under the observation,

* Preceding Vol., Lecture 9.—On the necessity of uniting the rational method and the experimental method, see Vol. 1 of this Series, Lecture 4. and first Series, Vol. 2, *Discours d'Ouverture*, and Lecture 1.

we hence conclude that this character does not pertain to such or such a circumstance, but to the existence itself of the phenomenon. Such is the process which gives to the physical philosopher and to the naturalist what is called a law. When a law has been thus obtained by observation, that is, by the comparison of a great number of particular cases, the mind in possession of this law transfers it from the past to the future, and predicts that, in all the analogous circumstances that can take place, the same phenomenon will be produced with the same character. This prediction is induction: induction has for a necessary condition a supposition, that of the constancy of nature; for leave out this supposition, admit that nature does not resemble herself, and the night does not guarantee the coming day, the future eludes foresight, and there no longer exists any thing but arbitrary chance: all induction is impossible.* The supposition of the constancy of nature is the necessary condition of induction; but this condition being granted, induction, resting upon sufficient observation, has all its force. In the moral order, the same processes severely employed conduct to the same results, to laws which give to the moralist and the historian, quite as well as to the physical philosopher and the naturalist, the right to foresee and to predict the future. All the epochs of the history of philosophy being given, that is, all the experiments upon which observation of this kind can bear, when all these experiments, very different by reason of external circumstances, have always offered us the same phenomenon with the same character, that is, the constant recurrence of these four elementary systems, distinct from each other and developed by each other, I ask, what is wanting to give us the right to consider this result as the law itself of the history of philosophy? Will it be said that observation bears upon too small a number of cases? But we have commenced with the East, and we have been as far as to 1750:

* See on the stability of the laws of nature as the condition of all induction, 1st Series, Vol. 4, Lecture 20, p. 382; and Lecture 22, p. 485.

we have five great experiments, one of which embraces twelve hundred years. Observation bears therefore upon a sufficiently great number of particular cases; it bears at least upon all existing cases; we have omitted none: each great philosophical experiment has presented the same character, the division into four elementary systems. There remains only one condition to be fulfilled, to wit, the supposition of the constancy of the human mind, a supposition as necessary here as that of the constancy of nature in the physical order. But what right has the physical philosopher to suppose that nature is rather constant to herself, than the moralist to suppose that the human mind is constant to itself? All human life is founded upon the supposition of the constancy of human nature.* You suppose that humanity will do to-morrow what it has done to-day, the circumstances being analogous, as you suppose that nature will not fail to reproduce what has already been produced. Induction, therefore, has the same value in one case as in the other. So, when, after having met, in all the great epochs of the history of philosophy from the East up to 1750, the same phenomenon with the same character, I come to the philosophy of the eighteenth century, induction founded upon the experience of three thousand years authorizes me to predict that if this new experiment is extended, developed, completed (for an incomplete experiment proves nothing), the human mind, constant to itself in the eighteenth century, will reproduce the same philosophical phenomena which it has thus far produced, with the same characters, and that the philosophy of the eighteenth century will also be resolved into sensualism, into idealism, into skepticism, and into mysticism. Historical induction incontestably bears us thus far; it only remains to submit this legitimate conjecture to a last and decisive proof, that of facts.

The philosophy of the eighteenth century forms a great experiment. Never, at any epoch of history, has there appeared in less time a greater number of systems; never have more

* First Series, Vol. 4, Lecture 22, p. 484.

schools disputed with more ardor the empire of philosophy. The experiment is very rich, and at the same time it is perfectly clear; for, with a little instruction, one may easily possess himself of all the systems of which the European philosophy of the eighteenth century is composed. Now, an attentive study of all these systems gives precisely the same result which induction, drawn from the laws of history and from the laws of the human mind, would in advance suggest; and I undertake to demonstrate that in fact, in the eighteenth century, as in the seventeenth, as in the period of the Revival, as in the middle age, as in Greece, as in the East, there were only four fundamental systems, the four which you have already seen. Everywhere, it is true, reigns a contrary prejudice. The eighteenth century is a century so great, so glorious for the human mind, that it is very natural that all the schools should contend for it among themselves. Here, it is almost a dogma that sensualism constitutes the whole philosophy of the eighteenth century, and sums up civilization. There, sensualism is regarded as a sort of anomaly, as an insignificant phenomenon the whole office of which, in a picture of modern philosophy, is to cast a shadow upon the fundamental system, idealism. On another side, there are not wanting people who honor the eighteenth century for quite another reason, as having expanded and firmly established in the world, contempt of all systems, skepticism. Hear also the disciple of Swedenborg; he will say to you that the eighteenth century is the definite advent of divine philosophy. Whence come these contrary prejudices? From a very simple cause: each one, instead of elevating himself to a European point of view, usually stops at the point of view of his own country. But a country, whatever it may be, in Europe, is only a fragment of Europe, and represents there only one side of the human mind and of things. It is therefore natural that in each country of Europe a particular system should reign, and that all those who are within the horizon of this system should not see beyond it, and should make Europe in the image of their native land. But just because in

each country of Europe a particular system has reigned, as there is more than one country in Europe, I conclude that for this very reason, no particular system has reigned exclusively in Europe, and that European philosophy in the eighteenth century is the triumph of a single thing, of a thing much greater than all systems, philosophy itself.

Yes, philosophical Europe in the eighteenth century belongs only to philosophy; it contains all systems, it is ruled by no one of them; I go farther, and I say that if the general philosophy of Europe, which it is always necessary to have in view, comprises in itself the different systems which rule in the different countries of Europe, each one of these countries, in order to be a part of the great European unity, taken in itself is also a unity more or less considerable; and that this particular unity, if it is somewhat rich, and if the philosophical spirit takes in it a development of some extent, still presents, under the domination of such or such a particular system, all the other systems, obscure, it is true, but not entirely smothered by the vanquishing system; so that the philosophy of each great country of Europe is a complete philosophy, which has four distinct elements, among which there is one which it elevates above all the rest.

It is certain that in France the philosophical system which reigned in the eighteenth century was that which derived every thing from sensible data;* but it must not be supposed that other systems were entirely wanting to France. Without speaking of the ancient spiritualism of Descartes and Malebranche, which was not extinguished among us with the seventeenth century, and which had as a representative in the eighteenth the Abbé de Lignac, the author of some excellent works, among others the *Témoignage du Sens intime*,† can one say that spiritualism was destitute of splendor in the country where Rousseau wrote? Is Rousseau any thing else than energetic opposition to

* First Series, Vol. 3, Condillac, Helvetius, Saint-Lambert, etc.
† First Series, Vol. 1, Lecture 18, p. 150.

the spirit of the philosophy of his times? Neglect the earliest works produced when Rousseau was ignorant of himself and was searching for himself, consider only the great monuments of the maturity of his talent, and in them you will everywhere find, under forms more or less severe, an avowed system of spiritualism; everywhere Rousseau defends conscience, disinterested virtue, human liberty, the immateriality and the immortality of the soul, and divine providence. It is sufficient to mention the first part of the *Profession de Foi du Vicaire Savoyard*. We know that Rousseau had written a refutation of the book of Helvetius; but the parliament having condemned Helvetius and burned his book, Rousseau suppressed his refutation.* Turgot, a man very inferior to the author of *Emile* as a writer, but who was much superior as a philosopher, also declared himself an adversary of Helvetius in a confidential letter to Condorcet, which Dupont de Nemours has published. His *Discourses on Universal History*, and the article entitled *Existence* in the *Encyclopédie*, bear a somewhat undecided but real impress of spiritualism.† As to skepticism, in order not to perceive it in France in the eighteenth century, it would be necessary to forget Voltaire. What, in fact, is Voltaire?‡ good sense somewhat superficial; and, in this degree, common sense always leads to skepticism. Voltaire doubtless attached himself to the sensualistic school, as skepticism usually does; but he constantly rejected its most bitter consequences, when he seriously explained himself. If he supported with all his talent the philosophy of Locke, which he regarded as the philosophy of the new times, against the philosophy of Descartes exaggerated and compromised by Malebranche, he took good care not to adopt the extravagances of Helvetius and d'Holbach;

* First Series, Vol. 3, Lectures 4 and 5, p. 203.
† On Turgot, in this Series, Vol. 1, Lecture 9, and First Series, Vol. 1, Lecture 17, p. 147; Vol. 3, Lectures on Helvetius, p. 208; Vol. 4, Lecture 16, p. 201.
‡ On Voltaire, in this Series, Vol. 2, Lecture 1, and First Series, Vol. 3, Lecture 1, p. 38; Lecture 2, p. 80; Lectures 4 and 5, p. 201.

his philosophy consisted in adopting no system, and in ridiculing all systems; he is skepticism in its most brilliant and lightest dress. It is also just to recognize that mysticism has never had in France an interpreter more profound, more eloquent, and who has exercised more influence, than Saint-Martin. The works of Saint-Martin, celebrated in all Europe, have made a school among us.*

If in England you only look at London in the eighteenth century, you will doubtless there see little else than sensualism. But even at London you would find, by the side of Priestley, Price, that ardent friend of liberty, that ingenious and profound economist, who renewed and brilliantly sustained the Platonic idealism of Cudworth.† I know that Price is an isolated phenomenon at London; but the whole Scotch school is more or less spiritualistic. Not without glory are the names of those professors who have succeeded each other in Scotland in the chairs of Aberdeen, of Glasgow, of Edinburgh, from the first quarter of the eighteenth century up to our day—Hutcheson, Smith, Reid, Ferguson, Beattie, and Dugald Stewart.‡ In regard to skepticism, it will be sufficient for me to name Hume, who by himself alone is an entire school.§ Mysticism is found in every part of

* He has by turns published translations or imitations of Böhme and original writings. They are as follows, in chronological order: *Of Errors and Truth*, Lyons, 1775, 1 vol. in-8; *Natural Picture of the Relations which exist between God, Man, and the Universe*, Edinburgh, 1782, 2 vol.; *The Man of Appetite*, Lyons, 1790, 1 vol.; *Ecce Homo*, 1 vol., Paris, 1792; *The New Man*, Paris, in-8, 1 vol., the fourth year of liberty; *Concerning the Spirit of Things*, 1800, 2 vol.; the *Dayspring*, 1800, 2 vol.; *The Three Principles of the Divine Essence*, 1802, 2 vol.; *The Ministry of the Human Spirit*, Paris, 1802, 1 vol.; *Four Questions in regard to the Soul*, 1807, 1 vol; *Concerning the Triple Life of Man*, 1809, 1 vol.; *Posthumous Works*, Tours, 2 vol., 1807.

† Richard Price, born in 1723, died in 1791. List of his philosophical writings: *Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, London, 1758, 3d edition, London, 1787; *Four Dissertations on Providence, on Prayer, etc.*, 2d edition, 1768; *A Free Discussion of the Doctrine of Materialism and Philosophical Necessity, in a Correspondence between Dr. Price and Dr. Priestley*, by Dr. Priestley, London, 1778.

‡ First Series, Vol. 4, *Scotch School.*

§ First Series, Vol. 1, Lecture 10; and Vol. 4, *passim.*

England. Recollect that Swedenborg, during his sojourn at London, founded there a mystical school which numbers many partisans, has its periodical organs, journals, and, it is said, even several chapels.

Doubtless that which rules beyond the Rhine is idealism. Such is the general character of the great philosophy which sprang up at Kœnigsburg in 1781, with the *Critique of pure Reason*,* and has been maintained with a continually increasing progress up to our times, by an uninterrupted course of superior men whose names begin to pass beyond the limits of their own country. Idealism is enthroned in Germany, but it must not be supposed that it has there entirely effaced the other systems, not even sensualism. Kant found a very strong opposition in Feder and Weisshaupt,† in Tiedemann,‡ especially in Herder, who wrote several works against the doctrine of Kant, and whose philosophy of history was composed in the sense of the philosophy of Locke.§ Skepticism had as a representative in Germany M. Schulze, the spirited author of *Ænesidemus.*‖ Quite as ingenious and profound as Schulze, Frederic Jacobi¶ equally combated empiricism and idealism, and renewed the skepticism of Hume by changing its character in favor of sentiment and enthusiasm; an original thinker, a writer of the first order, whose renown has increased since his death, and equals that of his illustrious rival, Schelling. As to mysticism, we are very sure of finding it in abundance in the country of Böhme and Swedenborg.

This very incomplete review is sufficient to demonstrate what it was necessary to establish, that, if in each country of Europe there reigned perhaps a particular system, this particular system nowhere abolished the other systems. Now take from all these different countries the analogous systems, and place them by the side of each other; put together all the sensualistic systems of

* First Series, Vol. 5.
† See the following Lecture.
‡ Ibid., and Vol. 1, Lecture 12.
§ Ibid., and Vol. 1, Lecture 11.
‖ Ibid.
¶ On Jacobi, see farther on in this Lecture.