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Diogenes Laertius 3rd Cent. A.D.

The reader who sequences the entries in this e-book from outset, with the Homeric Age, to the three post-Christian centuries, during which Greek was still an admired language, but Greek culture was subordinate to that of the conquering Romans, will see that the expessions of that culture have dwindled to scholarship, personal meditation (as we see, wonderfully, in Marcus Aurelius), to natural history, none of which were components of the high vigorous period of classical Greece. Diogenes Laertius, about whose life we know nothing, is a good example of this 'dwindling.'

From the first half of the third century A.D., we have Diogenes' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, which is a lengthy survey of what remained known, in his time, of the Greek philosophers we have been reviewing in this ebook. Diogenes is a priceless source of information, shallow and scanty though much of his work is, about his philosophical predecessors. He not only provides biographical tidbits and philosophical excerpts, but he provides a kind of organizational grid for understanding this tradition: in a word he divides the list of philosophers into *Ionian* (from Anaximander to Theophrastus) and *Italic* (for which Pythagoras and Epicurus mark the beginning and end.) A sample of his excerpt on Thales follows:

After having been immersed in state affairs he applied himself to speculations in natural philosophy; though, as some people state, he left no writings behind him. For the book on Naval Astronomy, which is attributed to him, is said in reality to be the work of Phocus the Samian. But Callimachus was aware that he was the discoverer of the Lesser Bear; for in his Iambics he speaks of him thus:

And, he, 'tis said, did first compute the stars
Which beam in Charles's wain, and guide the bark
Of the Phoenician sailor o'er the sea.

According to others he wrote two books, and no more, about the solstice and the equinox; thinking that everything else was easily to be comprehended. According to other statements, he is said to have been the first who studied astronomy, and who foretold the eclipses and motions of the sun, as Eudemus relates in his history of the discoveries made in astronomy; on which account Xenophanes and Herodotus praise him greatly; and Heraclitus and Democritus confirm this statement.