Sketches Of The History Of Man

In Two Volumes

Home, Henry

Edinburgh, 1774

Sect. 1. Of the Conversion of Propositions.

them, and what figures and modes are adapted to each. Thus, in some syllogisms several distinct conclusions may be drawn from the same premises : in some, true conclusions may be drawn from false premises : in some, by assuming the conclusion and one premise, you may prove the other ; you may turn a direct syllogism into one leading to an absurdity.

We have likewise precepts given in this book, both to the assailant in a syllogistical dispute, how to carry on his attack with art, so as to obtain the victory ; and to the defendant, how to keep the enemy at such a distance as that he shall never be obliged to yield.   From which we learn, that Aristotle introduced in his own school, the practice of disputing syllogistically, instead of the rhetorical disputations which the sophists were wont to use in more ancient times.

C H A P.   IV.

Remarks.

SECT. I. *Of the Conversion of Propositions.*

WE have given a summary view of the theory of pure syllogisms as delivered by Aristotle, a theory of which he claims the sole invention. And I believe it will be difficult, in any science, to find so large a system of truths of so very abstract and so general a nature, all fortified by demonstration, and all invented and perfected by one man. It shows a force of genius, and labour of
<div align="right">investigation,</div>

investigation, equal to the moſt arduous attempts. I ſhall now make ſome remarks upon it.

As to the converſion of propoſitions, the writers on logic commonly ſatisfy themſelves with illuſtrating each of the rules by an example, conceiving them to be ſelf-evident when applied to particular caſes. But Ariſtotle has given demonſtrations of the rules he mentions. As a ſpecimen, I ſhall give his demonſtration of the firſt rule. " Let A B be an univerſal negative propoſition ; I " ſay, that if A is in no B, it will follow that B is in no A. If " you deny this conſequence, let B be in ſome A, for example, " in C ; then the firſt ſuppoſition will not be true ; for C is of the " B's." In this demonſtration, if I underſtand it, the third rule of converſion is aſſumed, that if B is in ſome A, then A muſt be in ſome B, which indeed is contrary to the firſt ſuppoſition. If the third rule be aſſumed for proof of the firſt, the proof of all the three goes round in a circle ; for the ſecond and third rules are proved by the firſt. This is a fault in reaſoning which Ariſtotle condemns, and which I would be very unwilling to charge him with, if I could find any better meaning in his demonſtration. But it is indeed a fault very difficult to be avoided, when men attempt to prove things that are ſelf-evident.

The rules of converſion cannot be applied to all propoſitions, but only to thoſe that are categorical ; and we are left to the direction of common ſenſe in the converſion of other propoſitions. To give an example : Alexander was the ſon of Philip ; therefore Philip was the father of Alexander : A is greater than B ; therefore B is leſs than A. Theſe are converſions which, as far as I know, do not fall within any rule in logic ; nor do we find any loſs for want of a rule in ſuch caſes.

Even in the converſion of categorical propoſitions, it is not enough to tranſpoſe the ſubject and predicate. Both muſt undergo ſome change, in order to fit them for their new ſtation : for in every