argued a point. Professing to know nothing himself, he constantly challenged others as to what they professed to know. He put his questions to each person with whom he conversed, very much as the skilful experimenter in these days does to nature, so as to lead to the affirmative or negative of a particular hypothesis whose truth he would investigate. Having obtained an answer, he proceeds analytically, to found on that another question, studiously directed, in like manner, to elicit the answer which might serve for fur­ther inquiry, and so on, until he has reduced the first proposition to some simple elements, clearly shewing the truth or falsehood of the original assumption. It was as truly an experimental process on men’s minds, as that which the modern investigator performs on the subject which he examines. Those analogical instances in which he so much delighted, served the purpose of this analysis, no less than direct and proper instances, such as belong to him who in­vestigates experimentally the nature of a particular subject. For analogies detect the state of the mind to which they are addressed. They at once call forth and illustrate its principles and habits of thought, and enable the experimenter to avail himself of the existing resources in that mind for effecting the desired conviction. They furnish him with a clue to the course which he should follow in carrying on his analysis. This was that midwifery of the mind which Socrates used sportively to describe as his peculiar occupation.

In his conversation, for example, with Euthydemus, who prided himself in having cultivated his mind by his own in­dependent study of books, of which he had formed a large collection,—he first drew attention to the singularity of the young man’s conceit, by representing him as coming before the public, with high professions of being self-taught, and putting the parallel case of a candidate tor some medical office, who should announce that he had studiously avoided even the appearance of having *learned* the art of medicine, and ask for the office on the promise of endeavouring to learn the art by his future practice. Interest being ex­cited by this illustration of the absurdity, he next led his hearers to see the absurdity of entering on political affairs without preparation, by referring to the fact of the severe application and discipline undergone by persons who seek reputation in such accomplishments as flute-playing or rid­ing. Then, having gained over Euthydemus as a more willing listener, he proceeds to question him as to the use for which he had collected so many books. He throws out the presumption that they have been collected with a view to enrich the mind with virtue. Supposing this to be granted, he goes on to interrogate Euthydemus as to the particular excellence of which he is in quest. He enume­rates several particulars; and these being rejected, he comes at last to excellence in the art of government, which the young man concedes to be the object of his desire. This gives an opening to inquire into the qualifications necessary for such excellence. He discovers, by the answers of Euthydemus, that he conceives himself master of those mo­ral virtues which he is induced to admit are indispensable to the good citizen. By a series of questions, however, re­lating to particular actions, he forces Euthydemus to admit, that what is just in one case, is unjust in another, and to contradict himself in his successive statements as to the comparative criminality of voluntary and involuntary acts of injustice. What, then, triumphantly asks the philosopher,

think you of a person who is so inconsistent with himself? The conclusion is inevitable; and Euthydemus is constrain­ed to own, that “ he knew not what he thought he knew.” But Socrates, not yet satisfied, presses him further to ex­plain his notion of that ignorance which he had thus dis­played ; and finds, that notwithstanding his confession of his want of right instruction, he yet presumes on his pos­

session of self-knowledge. Another question forces him to abandon this position. The young man then asks to be only put in the way of self-examination. Here at once his false presumptions are exposed to the searching analysis of So­crates. The inquiry turns on a knowledge of the goods and evil of life. Euthydemus enumerates one thing after an­other as good ; and Socrates immediately subjoins some counter evil as attending it ; until Euthydemus at last gives up his confidence in his own opinion, and declares that he knows not now what he ought to pray for to the gods. Again, Socrates presents before him pointedly the evidence he had thus given of having been diverted from consideration of the subject by the strong presumption of his knowledge of it. But that he may leave no room for escape, he calls on him, in conclusion, to state his opinion as to the nature of democracy, which at least, he conceived, Enthydemus, as a candidate for public office in a popular state, must have studied. And in like manner, he extorts from his succes­sive answers a further proof of his ignorance and incompe­tence to the duties for which he had designed himself.

The effect thus produced is what Plato compares to the numbing touch of the torpedo.@@1 The mental powers of the individual thus tried were for the moment paralyzed. He found that he only committed himself further by renewed efforts ; and “ began to think,” as Euthydemus says of him­self at the close of the conversation to which we have just referred, “ whether it were not best for him to be silent, as he ran the hazard of appearing absolutely to know nothing.”

From the instance just given, it will appear that a cur­rent of irony pervaded these experimental argumentations of Socrates. There was irony mingled with earnest con­viction, in that very disclaimer of all knowledge with which he set out. It was a mask, behind which he could hurl his weapons of assault on the boasted knowledge of others, whilst at the same time he expressed his serious view of the real ignorance of man, and the necessity of com­ing with a simple unprejudiced mind to the acquisition of truth. In the prosecution, however, of his method of analysis by interrogation, irony was indispensable for the success of his inquiry. For his object was to obtain the truth from the mouth of the person interrogated, not to state it himself ; and where he did state it accordingly, it was necessary to put it in such a form as to try whether it was the opinion or not of that person,—whether he really thought so, or adopted it on the judgment of his questioner. An ironical statement answers this purpose. It conceals the teacher, and enables him to judge, according as the hearer applies it, what the state of the hearer’s mind is, and to argue the point in question, not on premises laid down by himself, but the admissions of the other. The hearer, too, is taken by surprise. The air of seriousness which the ironical manner sets out with, and the absurdity involved, on second thought, in carrying out the supposition of a serious intent, in their united effect, provoke the smile of surprise, and win at­tention. As Socrates was engaged, too, in presenting unac­ceptable conclusions,—bringing home to the self-conceited evidences of their real ignorance,—it was necessary for him to disguise, as much as possible, the conclusion to which he was tending. He had to assume, therefore, the principles on which those with whom he conversed were reasoning and acting, and reduce these to an absurdity, by applying them as true to some evident case of ordinary experience. The skilful use made by Socrates of this irony was a power­ful enforcement, in itself, of the convictions which he desired to leave on the minds of his hearers. He brought the aid of a delicate ridicule to the support of an argument, and thus exhibited the desired conclusion under a form, which, whilst it pleased the hearers, shamed them into an acknow­ledgment of its truth.

@@@, Plato, Meno., 80 a. t. iv. p. 348.