

ART. XI. — LANGUAGE.

No man was ever deeply and intensely fired with a conviction of a truth which he knew to be of vital importance to his fellow-men, that he did not burn to communicate it. And no man ever felt the full force of this desire of communication, who has not brooded at times over the fact of language, and its want of effectiveness; while at the same time it has seemed to him, that the difficulty was not altogether in the vagueness and inexpressiveness of language itself; for that the words often unfolded a mysterious power of acting on his own mind, whenever it was raised to a certain pitch of exaltation, assuring him that, if they should find other minds equally in earnest, they would *burn* and *breathe* into them also.

Dr. Bushnell could not have evinced so conclusively in any other way, that he was full of a truth it behoved other men to know, than by falling upon Language itself, and calling his readers to consider its nature, introductory to the treatment of a great subject.* But, though his general view is great, and many of his observations upon language are profound, we take leave to say that he has stopped, in his analysis, short of a truth which might be unfolded, and has admitted to his investigation a boundary which does not exist. He has seen and said, that the world which meets the senses has for its final cause to unfold the intelligence of man into consciousness, and to bring about that communion of the finite, with the infinite intelligence which is life. He has seen also, that men live within one another's sight and hearing, and in communion with each other, not only for lower ends, but ulteriorly for that higher end. In fine, he sees that all nature and human life have a representative, as their highest character, and that it is this which it most behoves men to understand.

* See Introductory Essay to "God in Christ," published in Hartford, Conn. by Brown & Parsons, 1849.

Still more, he has seen that men are linguistic, as truly, naturally, inevitably, as that they are locomotive or intellectual; and therefore there is *a priori* reason to believe, that language is not arbitrary or accidental, but springs out of nature, with which it has vital connection. He says, that man is a speaking, as he is a seeing creature; that the parable of God's bringing all creatures to Adam, to name, signifies, that men named things by a pre-established law connecting the mind and outward nature with each other. He even sees, that every word is, in the last analysis, the sign or vocal form of some material thing or action; but what is remarkable is, that while he sees all this, and farther sees that the application of words to moral and religious subjects follows the same laws of imagination that are exemplified in those sentences which are called "figures of speech," he does not seem to see that the same laws of imagination determined the elements of single words to their subjects, so that every word which is not an imitation of nature, like *hum*, *buzz*, *boom*, is, as it were, a poem; in short, that there is some natural and inevitable reason why every word should be what it is; that there is a foregoing impossibility of *lepus* and *lupus* and *vulpes* and *wolf* and *fox* (*fugax*) to be *tortoise* or *sloth*, though words as different as *hare* and *lepus* may both signify the same animal, viewed according to different characteristics. He sees as much difference between *sol* and *sun*, and *stella* and *astre*, as between *nubes* and *cloud*; and ends at last with a restatement of the old and superficial theory, that language is, after all, arbitrary, the creature of convention.

But we have not introduced Dr. Bushnell's name to criticize the shortcomings of his Essay, as philological science, since he does not profess to be an adept in it; but because the justice he has done to the subject of language as a power acting and re-acting upon the mind, helping or hindering it in the investigation of truth, must awaken a sense of the importance of the subject, and affords a good opportunity to direct an intelligent attention to the philological essay, entitled the "Significance of the Alphabet."*

* A pamphlet published in 1837, at 13, West-street, Boston, Mass.

When a great scientific discovery is made, and given forth to the world abstracted from its applications and a full development of its uses, it is apt to fall unobserved, and perhaps sleep for years. The world knows only of seeds that have sprouted. And yet, that a theory of language which, as an organic whole, and in some degree demonstrated as true, is certainly original, should have been passed over* so long, as at best but an ingenious and curious speculation, is somewhat strange. For, if it pretends to touch the heart of the matter, it must be either impertinently foolish, calling for animadversion and ridicule, or it is of serious import. The truth upon the subject has relations with every department of human knowledge and thought.

For what is language? It is the picture and vehicle of all that has been present to the mind of Humanity, stretching back beyond all histories and other literatures; and its bearings are incalculable upon the discovery and retention of truth, as well as upon the discipline and activity of the human mind which is in relation to it. The human mind is in relation to nature as the stone-cutter or the artist to the quarry; and language is at once the representation and vehicle of all that has been quarried.

“One man dies, and other men enter into the fruits of his labor.” How? Because these fruits are conserved, or rather live and move, in language. Language must therefore be a necessary product, and what it is, precisely because it could not be otherwise; therefore within the multitude of languages, and beneath the confusion of tongues, there must be something of *a universal character*, which gives meaning to the articulations of sound. This has seemed so probable, *a priori*, from the time of Socrates † to the present day, that again and again the idea has been broached, and sometimes a clue has seemed to be caught. But all experience seems at first sight to be against it. Dr. Bushnell brings forward

* Since the present article has been in the hands of the printer, the attention of the writer has been called to two notices of this work, in the January and April numbers of the “North American Review,” which are very important, and will doubtless lead to important consequences.

† “Cratylus.”

the argument drawn both from the existence of diverse languages and from the failure of all systems of etymology, that have been broached, as if these were conclusive against it, and as a warning to future inquirers not to stumble on dark mountains. But always the discoveries of science seem impossible till they are made, and every erroneous path that is taken is called a conclusive experience. Let us not be discouraged. Euler, when announcing the formula of the principle of circular motion, said, "*This is true, though all experience is against it.*" The mathematical student of the celestial motions understands this, however paradoxical it may sound. Language is another exponent of the same paradox. There is a universal truth with respect to language which contradicts those special facts of each language called *idioms*. And these exceptions also prove the rule. There is, in short, a view to be taken of this subject which reconciles the two opposite views which Dr. Bushnell speaks of, viz. the *a priori* probability of a universal language, and the *a posteriori* fact of a diversity of languages; and this view will account for that strange power in the form of some words which he notices, and for the pertinacity of being which characterizes these children of the air.

The vast importance of nomenclature to natural science is exemplified in that of chemistry. This nomenclature is, in fact, the best instance of the invention of a language in modern scientific annals. There is a rational principle obvious. The new words explain themselves. A great deal of the time of students of all sciences is used up in settling the meaning of words, — *defining*; that is, attempting to clear away by one set of words the confusion occasioned by the use of another set, called *scientific terms*. Grammar and mathematics, for instance, are talked of in a mongrel of Latin and Greek words, whose laborious paraphrasing into equivalent English keeps off the mind, for a long time, from the real subject in hand. It is a commonly acknowledged drawback on all school-instruction, that the mind is employed about words, as *counters*, which prevents the faculties from being refreshed by those realities of nature intended to be signified by them. It is a common remark, that it is not until the learner has

left school, and come into relation with *things*, that his lessons are vivified, made to cultivate his mind, and stimulate his character. But the desired revolution in school-education would be accomplished, if words were looked at as transparent vases of realities of nature, and every department of science was treated in terms that, instead of hiding, revealed these realities clearly, as a picture reveals the objects of natural history. And why is it not so? The reason is, that the key to the meaning of language — its secret — is not in the common possession.

Dr. Bushnell has seen, and verified to his mind in a sufficient number of instances, that words which consist of several syllables elucidate complex ideas by the combination. He might have spoken of the word *consider* in English, made of *con* and *sedeo*. We consider a subject when we *sit* down in company with it. In German, the same act of the mind is expressed by *überlegen*. The German *lies over* the subject of his consideration. To *occur* means to run (*curro*) to meet (*ob*); and in England thoughts *occur*, and sometimes *strike*, while in Germany they *fall into* people (*einfallen*). It is curious enough to run through languages, and trace national characteristics evinced by words of this kind, that reveal operations of mind which are familiar or easily explained. But it is not necessary to stop here, as Dr. Bushnell has done. He says, p. 48: —

“There is only a single class of intellectual words that can be said to have a perfectly determinate significance, viz. those which relate to what are called necessary ideas. They are such as *time, space, cause, truth, right*, arithmetical numbers, and geometrical figures. Here the names applied are settled into a perfectly determinate meaning, not by any peculiar virtue in them, but by reason of the absolute exactness of the ideas themselves. Time cannot be any thing more or less than time; truth cannot, in its idea, be any thing different from truth; the numbers suffer no ambiguity of count or measure; a circle must be a circle, a square a square. As far as language, therefore, has to do with these, it is a perfectly exact algebra of thought, but no further.”

He, however, had already asked:—

“What is the real and legitimate use of words, when applied to moral subjects? for we cannot dispense with them, and it is uncomfortable to hold them in universal scepticism, as being only instruments of error.”

And this question follows a long disquisition, whose object is to show that “physical terms are never exact, being only names of genera.”—“Much less have we any terms in the spiritual department of language that are exact representatives of thought.” He answers his own question, therefore, with this remark, of which he does not seem to follow out the whole value:—

“Words are used as *signs* of thoughts to be expressed. They do not literally convey, or pass over, a thought out of one mind into another, as we commonly speak of doing. They are only hints or images held up before the mind of another, to put *him* upon generating or reproducing the same thought, which he can do only as he has the same personal contents, or the generative power out of which to bring the thought required.” Nay, we would add, he must also have the generative power of making the words *so, and not otherwise*; that, whatever superficial difference they may have, yet, taken in some point of view, there is a certain identity of all words applied to the same thought.

But Dr. Bushnell does not see this. He says: “Yet, in the languages radically distinct, we shall find that the sounds or names which stand for the same objects have generally no similarity whatever; *whence it follows irresistibly, that nothing in the laws of voice or sound has determined the names adopted.*”

This conclusion is drawn so *irresistibly* by means of the mistake that Dr. Bushnell, with many famous etymologists, has made, of conceiving “no similarity whatever” in words, except in their sound, *i. e.* their similarity of effect on the ear. It is very true, as he says, “No theory of *sound*, as connected with sense, in the names of things, will be found to hold extensively enough to give it any moment;” although, “when sounds are the objects named, they will very naturally be imitated, as in *hoarse* and *hiss*.”

But words should be considered not merely as sounds, but as *articulations* of sound.

The discovery and first principle of the author of the "Significance of the Alphabet" is, that words are to be considered, not merely or chiefly by their effect on the ear, but *in the process of their formation by the organs of speech*. Looked at in this point of view, words may be identified at once, although they may sound differently from each other, as *garden* and *hortus* and *wirta* and *ogrod* and *zahrada*. And this is the great idea in which lies a revolution not only for the treatment of philology itself, but for the method of intercommunicating the knowledge of all particular languages, and of elucidating all sciences communicable by words.

Dr. Bushnell, having quoted Prof. Gibbs's theory of case, published in the "Christian Spectator," vol. ix. says, it is there shown that "as words themselves are found in space, so they are declined, or formed into grammar, under the relations of space;" and infers "that such results in grammar do not take place apart from some inherent law or system pertaining either to mind or to outward space, or to one as related to the other;" and adds that it will sometime be fully seen, that "the outer word is a vast menstruum of thought or intelligence. There is a *logos* in the forms of things, by which they are prepared to serve as types or images of what is inmost in our souls; and there is a *logos* also of construction in the relations of space, the position, qualities, connections, and predicates of things, by which they are formed into grammar. In one word, the outer world which envelopes our being is itself language, the power of all language. 'Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge; there is no speech nor language where their sound is not heard; their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.'"

Let Dr. Bushnell add from Dr. Kraitsir's theory the other element, and see that there is a *logos* also in the *apparatus of articulation*; and he will have, but not otherwise, demonstrable ground for his next paragraph, which is eloquent with a suggestion, which, as he justly afterwards remarks, is "sufficient of itself to change a man's intellectual capacities and destiny; for it sets him always in the presence of divine

thoughts and meanings, makes even the words he utters luminous of Divinity, and, to the same extent, subjects of love and reverence."

This is the passage we mean :—

"And if the outer world is the vast dictionary and grammar of thought we speak of, then it is also an organ throughout of intelligence. Whose intelligence? By this question we are set directly confronting God, the universal Author; no more to hunt for him by curious arguments and subtle deductions, if haply we may find Him; but He stands EXPRESSED everywhere, so that, turn whichsoever way we please, we behold the outlooking of His intelligence. No series of Bridgewater treatises, piled even to the moon, could give a proof of God so immediate, complete, and conclusive."

It is not the purpose here to give an abstract of the little book, called the "Significance of the Alphabet." Indeed, it would be impossible. One peculiarity of it is, that it is so condensed it admits of no farther condensation. It rather needs a paraphrase, and it certainly ought to have a sequel of some practical elementary books which may make it possible to apply its principles for the purpose of transforming the present system of language-teaching in schools. It is said the author is superintending the preparation of some. A whole series is necessary, from the *a b c* book to a manual of the Sanscrit. Indeed, from him might be expected the realization of that idea of a lexicon which Herder has sketched in his "Conversations on the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry." One of the interlocutors of the conversation asks, —after having granted, with respect to the Hebrew, "the symbolism of the radical sounds, or the utterance of the feeling that was prompted, while the object itself was present to the senses; *the sound of the feelings in the very intuition of their causes* :— But how is it with the derivations from these radical terms? What are they but an overgrown jungle of thorns, where no human foot has ever trod?

"EUTYPHRON.

"In bad lexicons this is indeed the case, and many of the most learned philologists of Holland have rendered the way

still more difficult by their labors. But the time is coming when this jungle will become a pleasant grove of palms.

“ALCIPHRON.

“Your metaphor is Oriental.

“EUTYPHRON.

“So is the object of it. The root of the mother-word will stand in the centre, and around her the grove of her children. By influence of taste, diligence, sound sense, and the judicious comparison of different dialects, lexicons will be brought to distinguish what is essential from what is accidental in the signification of words, and to trace the gradual process of transition; while in the derivation of words, and the application of metaphors, we shall behold the invention of the human mind in its act, and more fully understand the logic of ancient figurative language. I anticipate with joy the time, and the first lexicon, in which this shall be well accomplished. For the present I use the best we have. . . .

“ALCIPHRON.

“It will be long yet before we shall repose ourselves in your palm-grove of Oriental lexicography. Pray, in the meantime, illustrate your ideas of derivation by an example.

“EUTYPHRON.

“You may find examples everywhere, even as the lexicons now are. Strike at the first radical form that occurs, as the primitive ‘he is gone,’ and observe the easy gradation of its derivatives. A series of expressions signifying loss, disappearance, and death, vain purposes; and fruitless toil and trouble, go on in soft transitions; and, if you place yourself in the circumstances of the ancient herdsmen, in their wandering, unsettled mode of life, the most distant derivative will still give back in its tones something of the original sound of the word, and of the original feeling. It is from this cause that the language addresses itself so much to our senses, and the creations of its poetry become present to us with such stirring effect. The language abounds in roots of this character; and our commentators, who rather go too deep than too superficially, have shown enough of them. They never know when to quit, and, if possible, would lay bare all the roots

and fibres of every tree, even where one would wish to see only the flowers and fruits.

“ALCIPHRON.

“These are the black demons, I suppose, upon your plantation of palms.

“EUTYPHRON.

“A very necessary and useful race. We must treat them with mildness; for, if they do too much, they do it with a good motive.”

In answer to some criticisms* that have been made upon the “Significance of the Alphabet,” such as that it is a dark hint, rather than a full elucidation of the subject, the history of the book may be given. It was merely the enlargement by Dr. Kraitsir of some notes taken by a hearer of one or two lectures of a series which he delivered in Boston to an audience of about a score of persons! This particular portion of the series, touching the true pronunciation of the Latin language, it was advised by the late John Pickering, should be put forth, to excite, if possible, a controversy that should be the means of introducing the whole subject to the public attention; and he promised to further it in the periodicals of the day. But the day it was published was the very day when that eminent philologist, having finished correcting the last proof of his Greek dictionary, said, “This is the last printed page I shall read.” The words were prophetic: in a few days he was, in fact, no more.

The book, however, is not so “dark a hint” as may be supposed by those who have not studied it. Even the notes are treatises. The note on mathematical phraseology, and which involves the reference of the words *line* and *circle* to the true standard of meaning, not only serves “to elucidate the life-principle of philology, but of mathematical discipline.” So the note upon grammatical terms, and the last note on the appropriation of words, are only “dark with excessive bright.” In the notes, also, he has collected the *authorities* for the Latin pronunciation out of the ancient grammarians,

* A misprint on the last line of the 17th page, of *formation* for *pronunciation*, obscures the meaning of one of its most important paragraphs.

to whom Latin was vernacular. Yet doubtless the whole series of lectures was a much more adequate treatment of the subject; and we will close this article, which is already a kind of *pot-pourri*, with an extract from a letter written by one of that small audience, and which vies well with the eloquent passage that Dr. Bushnell has quoted from Prof. Gibbs, in the 31st page of his essay:—

“Language, before apparently a mere ordinary vehicle, became in his hands the chariot of Ezekiel, ‘celestial equipage instinct with spirit,’ the fabric not behind the noble uses. His science is to all who have the boon of speech what anatomy is to the painter. His descriptions of the structure and nature of vocal sounds charm like the explanations of Egyptian hieroglyphics. Indeed, they display a scheme of more subtle symbolism, and one which, if in its own region less beautiful, is richer than music.

“The common enjoyment of the study of languages, arising from their social character, their revelations of community of thought and sentiment, is greatly enhanced by Dr. Kraitsir’s lively and penetrating methods. The identity of roots presented by him affects the imagination with a sense of the closest fraternity, and recalled to my mind with new force the words of an eloquent advocate for the study of languages, who, in dwelling upon the sympathies it stirred up, exclaimed with the prophet, ‘Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us?’”

ART. XII. — VEGETATION ABOUT SALEM, MASS.

THE vegetation of Salem is remarkably foreign. Two species belonging to different families, and both of exotic origin, threaten to take complete possession of the soil.

The first, the well-known wood-wax (*Ginista tinctoria*), is running rapidly over all the hills and dry pastures. This plant seems to occupy in this vicinity the place which the furze-bush occupies on the heaths and commons of England; or it may resemble, in its manner of possessing the soil, the