

WILLIAM STEVENS BALCH

LECTURES ON LANGUAGE,
AS PARTICULARLY
CONNECTED WITH
ENGLISH GRAMMAR.

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Particularly Connected
with English Grammar.

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William Stevens Balch Lectures on Language, as Particularly Connected with English Grammar

Providence, Feb. 24, 1838.

To Wm. S. Balch,

Sir—The undersigned, in behalf of the Young People's Institute, hasten to present to you the following *Resolutions*, together with their personal thanks, for the Lectures you have delivered before them, on the Philosophy of Language. The uncommon degree of interest, pleasure and profit, with which you have been listened to, is conclusive evidence, that whoever possesses taste and talents to comprehend and appreciate the philosophy of language, which you have so successfully cultivated, cannot fail to attain a powerful influence over the minds of his audience. The Committee respectfully request you to favor them with a copy of your Lectures for the Press.

Very respectfully,

Your most obedient servants,

C. T. JAMES,

E. F. MILLER,

H. L. WEBSTER.

Resolved, That we have been highly entertained and greatly instructed by the Lectures of our President, on the subject of Language; that we consider the principles he has advocated, immutably true, exceedingly important, and capable of an easy adoption in the study of that important branch of human knowledge.

Resolved, That we have long regretted the want of a system to explain the grammar of our vernacular tongue, on plain, rational, and consistent principles, in accordance with philosophy and truth, and in a way to be understood and practised by children and adults.

Resolved, That in our opinion, the manifold attempts which have been made, though doubtless undertaken with the purest intentions, to simplify and make easy existing systems, have failed entirely of their object, and tended only to perplex, rather than enlighten learners.

Resolved, That in our belief, the publication of these Lectures would meet the wants of the community, and throw a flood of light upon this hitherto dark, and intricate, and yet exceedingly interesting department of a common education, and thus prove of immense service to the present and future generations.

Resolved, That Messrs. Charles T. James, Edward F. Miller, and Henry L. Webster, be a Committee to wait on Rev. William S. Balch, and request the publication of his very interesting Course of Lectures before this Institute.

Providence, Feb. 25, 1838.

Messrs. C. T. James, E. F. Miller, and H. L. Webster:

Gentlemen—Your letter, together with the Resolutions accompanying it, was duly and gratefully received. It gives me no ordinary degree of pleasure to know that so deep an interest has been, and still is, felt by the members of our Institute, as well as the public generally, on this important subject; for it is one which concerns the happiness and welfare of our whole community; but especially the rising generation.

The only recommendation of these Lectures is the subject of which they treat. They were written in the space of a few weeks, and in the midst of an accumulation of engagements which almost forbade the attempt. But presuming you will make all due allowances for whatever errors you may discover in the style of composition, and regard the *matter* more than the *manner*, I consent to their publication, hoping they will be of some service in the great cause of human improvement.

I am, gentlemen,

Very respectfully yours,

WM. S. BALCH.

PREFACE

There is no subject so deeply interesting and important to rational beings as the knowledge of language, or one which presents a more direct and powerful claim upon all classes in the community; for there is no other so closely interwoven with all the affairs of human life, social, moral, political and religious. It forms a basis on which depends a vast portion of the happiness of mankind, and deserves the first attention of every philanthropist.

Great difficulty has been experienced in the common method of explaining language, and grammar has long been considered a dry, uninteresting, and tedious study, by nearly all the teachers and scholars in the land. But it is to be presumed that the fault in this case, if there is any, is to be sought for in the manner of teaching, rather than in the science itself; for it would be unreasonable to suppose that a subject which occupies the earliest attention of the parent, which is acquired at great expense of money, time, and thought, and is employed from the cradle to the grave, in all our waking hours, can possibly be dull or unimportant, if rightly explained.

Children have been required to learn verbal forms and changes, to look at the mere signs of ideas, instead of the things represented by them. The consequence has been that the whole subject has become uninteresting to all who do not possess a retentive verbal memory. The philosophy of language, the

sublime principles on which it depends for its existence and use, have not been sufficiently regarded to render it delightful and profitable.

The humble attempt here made is designed to open the way for an exposition of language on truly philosophical principles, which, when correctly explained, are abundantly simple and extensively useful. With what success this point has been labored the reader will determine.

The author claims not the honor of entire originality. The principles here advanced have been advocated, believed, and successfully practised. William S. Cardell, Esq., a bright star in the firmament of American literature, reduced these principles to a system, which was taught with triumphant success by Daniel H. Barnes, formerly of the New-York High School, one of the most distinguished teachers who ever officiated in that high and responsible capacity in our country. Both of these gentlemen, so eminently calculated to elevate the standard of education, were summoned from the career of the most active usefulness, from the scenes they had labored to brighten and beautify by the aid of their transcendant intellects, to unseen realities in the world of spirits; where mind communes with mind, and soul mingles with soul, disenthralled from error, and embosomed in the light and love of the Great Parent Intellect.

The author does not pretend to give a system of exposition in this work suited to the capacities of small children. It is designed for advanced scholars, and is introductory to a system of

grammar which he has in preparation, which it is humbly hoped will be of some service in rendering easy and correct the study of our vernacular language. But this book, it is thought, may be successfully employed in the instruction of the higher classes in our schools, and will be found an efficient aid to teachers in inculcating the sublime principles of which it treats.

These Lectures, as now presented to the public, it is believed, will be found to contain some important information by which all may profit. The reader will bear in mind that they were written for, and delivered before a popular audience, and published with very little time for modification. This will be a sufficient apology for the mistakes which may occur, and for whatever may have the appearance of severity, irony, or pleasantry, in the composition.

On the subject of Contractions much more might be said. But verbal criticisms are rather uninteresting to a common audience; and hence the consideration of that matter was made more brief than was at first intended. It will however be resumed and carried out at length in another work. The hints given will enable the student to form a tolerable correct opinion of the use of most of those words and phrases, which have long been passed over with little knowledge of their meaning or importance.

The author is aware that the principles he has advocated are new and opposed to established systems and the common method of inculcation. But the difficulties acknowledged on all hands to exist, is a sufficient justification of this humble attempt. He will not be condemned for his good intentions. All he asks is a patient

and candid examination, a frank and honest approval of what is true, and as honest a rejection of what is false. But he hopes the reader will avoid a rash and precipitate conclusion, either for or against, lest he is compelled to do as the author himself once did, approve what he had previously condemned.

With these remarks he enters the arena, and bares himself to receive the sentence of the public voice.

LECTURE I.

GENERAL VIEW OF LANGUAGE

Study of Language long considered difficult. – Its importance. – Errors in teaching. – Not understood by Teachers. – Attachment to old systems. – Improvement preferable. – The subject important. – Its advantages. – Principles laid down. – Orthography. – Etymology. – Syntax. – Prosody.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is proposed to commence, this evening, a course of Lectures on the Grammar of the English Language. I am aware of the difficulties attending this subject, occasioned not so much by any fault in itself, as by the thousand and one methods adopted to teach it, the multiplicity of books pretending to "simplify" it, and the vast contrariety of opinion entertained by those who profess to be its masters. By many it has been considered a needless affair, an unnecessary appendage to a common education; by others, altogether beyond the reach of common capacities; and by all, cold, lifeless, and uninteresting, full of doubts and perplexities, where the wisest have differed, and the firmest often changed opinions.

All this difficulty originates, I apprehend, in the wrong view that is taken of the subject. The most beautiful landscape may

appear at great disadvantage, if viewed from an unfavorable position. I would be slow to believe that the means on which depends the whole business of the community, the study of the sciences, all improvement upon the past, the history of all nations in all ages of the world, social intercourse, oral or written, and, in a great measure, the knowledge of God, and the hopes of immortality, can be either unworthy of study, or, if rightly explained, uninteresting in the acquisition. In fact, on the principles I am about to advocate, I have seen the deepest interest manifested, from the small child to the grey-headed sire, from the mere novice to the statesman and philosopher, and all alike seemed to be edified and improved by the attention bestowed upon the subject.

I confess, however, that with the mention of *grammar*, an association of ideas are called up by no means agreeable. The mind involuntarily reverts to the days of childhood, when we were compelled, at the risk of our bodily safety, to commit to memory a set of arbitrary rules, which we could neither understand nor apply in the correct use of language. Formerly it was never dreamed that grammar depended on any higher authority than the books put into our hands. And learners were not only dissuaded, but strictly forbidden to go beyond the limits set them in the etymological and syntactical rules of the authors to whom they were referred. If a query ever arose in their minds, and they modestly proposed a plain question as to the *why* and *wherefore* things were thus, instead of giving an answer

according to common sense, in a way to be understood, the authorities were pondered over, till some rule or remark could be found which would apply, and this settled the matter with "proof as strong as holy writ." In this way an end may be put to the inquiry; but the thinking mind will hardly be satisfied with the mere opinion of another, who has no evidence to afford, save the undisputed dignity of his station, or the authority of books. This course is easily accounted for. Rather than expose his own ignorance, the teacher quotes the printed ignorance of others, thinking, no doubt, that folly and nonsense will appear better second-handed, than fresh from his own responsibility. Or else on the more common score, that "misery loves company."

Teachers have not unfrequently found themselves placed in an unenviable position by the honest inquiries of some thinking urchin, who has demanded why "*one noun governs* another in the possessive case," as "master's slave;" why there are more tenses than *three*; what is meant by a *neuter* verb, which "signifies neither action nor passion;" or an "intransitive verb," which expresses the highest possible action, but terminates on no object; a cause without an effect; why *that* is sometimes a pronoun, sometimes an adjective, and not unfrequently a conjunction, &c. &c. They may have succeeded, by dint of official authority, in silencing such inquiries, but they have failed to give a satisfactory answer to the questions proposed.

Long received opinions may, in some cases, become law, pleading no other reason than antiquity. But this is an age of

investigation, which demands the most lucid and unequivocal proof of the point assumed. The dogmatism of the schoolmen will no longer satisfy. The dark ages of mental servility are passing away. The day light of science has long since dawned upon the world, and the noon day of truth, reason, and virtue, will ere long be established on a firm and immutable basis. The human mind, left free to investigate, will gradually advance onward in the course of knowledge and goodness marked out by the Creator, till it attains to that perfection which shall constitute its highest glory, its truest bliss.

You will perceive, at once, that our inquiries thro out these lectures will not be bounded by what has been said or written on the subject. We take a wider range. We adopt no sentiment because it is ancient or popular. We refer to no authority but what proves itself to be correct. And we ask no one to adopt our opinions any farther than they agree with the fixed laws of nature in the regulation of matter and thought, and apply in common practice among men.

Have we not a right to expect, in return, that you will be equally honest to yourselves and the subject before us? So far as the errors of existing systems shall be exposed, will you not reject them, and adopt whatever appears conclusively true and practically useful? Will you, can you, be satisfied to adopt for yourselves and teach to others, systems of grammar, for no other reason than because they are old, and claim the support of the learned and honorable?

Such a course, generally adopted, would give the ever-lasting quietus to all improvement. It would be a practical adoption of the philosophy of the Dutchman, who was content to carry his grist in one end of the sack and a stone to balance it in the other, assigning for a reason, that his honored father had always done so before him. Who would be content to adopt the astrology of the ancients, in preference to astronomy as now taught, because the latter is more modern? Who would spend three years in transcribing a copy of the Bible, when a better could be obtained for one dollar, because manuscripts were thus procured in former times? What lady would prefer to take her cards, wheel, and loom, and spend a month or two in manufacturing for herself a dress, when a better could be earned in half the time, merely because her respected grandmother did so before her? Who would go back a thousand years to find a model for society, rejecting all improvements in the arts and sciences, because they are innovations, encroachments upon the opinions and practices of learned and honorable men?

I can not believe there is a person in this respected audience whose mind is in such voluntary slavery as to induce the adoption of such a course. I see before me minds which sparkle in every look, and thoughts which are ever active, to acquire what is true, and adopt what is useful. And I flatter myself that the time spent in the investigation of the science of language will not be unpleasant or unprofitable.

I feel the greater confidence from the consideration that your

minds are yet untrammled; not but what many, probably most of you, have already studied the popular systems of grammar, and understood them; if such a thing is possible; but because you have shown a disposition to learn, by becoming members of this Institute, the object of which is the improvement of its members.

Let us therefore make an humble attempt, with all due candor and discretion, to enter upon the inquiry before us with an unflinching determination to push our investigations beyond all reasonable doubt, and never rest satisfied till we have conquered all conquerable obstacles, and come into the possession of the light and liberty of truth.

The attempt here made will not be considered unimportant, by those who have known the difficulties attending the study of language. If any course can be marked out to shorten the time tediously spent in the acquisition of what is rarely attained—a thoro knowledge of language—a great benefit will result to the community; children will save months and years to engage in other useful attainments, and the high aspirations of the mind for truth and knowledge will not be curbed in its first efforts to improve by a set of technical and arbitrary rules. They will acquire a habit of thinking, of deep reflection; and never adopt, for fact, what appears unreasonable or inconsistent, merely because great or good men have said it is so. They will feel an independence of their own, and adopt a course of investigation which cannot fail of the most important consequences. It is not the saving of time, however, for which we propose a change in

the system of teaching language. In this respect, it is the study of one's life. New facts are constantly developing themselves, new combinations of ideas and words are discovered, and new beauties presented at every advancing step. It is to acquire a knowledge of correct principles, to induce a habit of correct thinking, a freedom of investigation, and at that age when the character and language of life are forming. It is, in short, to exhibit before you truth of the greatest practical importance, not only to you, but to generations yet unborn, in the most essential affairs of human life, that I have broached the hated subject of grammar, and undertaken to reflect light upon this hitherto dark and disagreeable subject.

With a brief sketch of the outlines of language, as based on the fixed laws of nature, and the agreement of those who employ it, I shall conclude the present lecture.

We shall consider all language as governed by the invariable laws of nature, and as depending on the conventional regulations of men.

Words are the signs of ideas. Ideas are the impressions of things. Hence, in all our attempts to investigate the important principles of language, we shall employ the sign as the means of coming at the thing signified.

Language has usually been considered under four divisions, viz.: Orthography, Etymology, Syntax, and Prosody.

Orthography is *right spelling*; the combination of certain letters into words in such a manner as to agree with the spoken

words used to denote an idea. We shall not labor this point, altho we conceive a great improvement might be effected in this department of learning. My only wish is to select from all the forms of spelling, the most simple and consistent. Constant changes are taking place in the method of making words, and we would not refuse to cast in our mite to make the standard more correct and easy. We would prune off by degrees all unnecessary appendages, as unsounded or italic letters, and write out words so as to be capable of a distinct pronunciation. But this change must be *gradually* effected. From the spelling adopted two centuries ago, a wonderful improvement has taken place. And we have not yet gone beyond the possibility of improvement. Let us not be too sensitive on this point, nor too tenacious of old forms. Most of our dictionaries differ in many respects in regard to the true system of orthography, and our true course is to adopt every improvement which is offered. Thro out this work we shall spell some words different from what is customary, but intend not, thereby, to incur the ignominy of bad spellers. Let small improvements be adopted, and our language may soon be redeemed from the difficulties which have perplexed beginners in their first attempts to convey ideas by written words.¹

In that department of language denominated Etymology, we shall contend that all words are reducible to two general classes,

¹ The reader is referred to "The Red Book," by William Bearcroft, revised by Daniel H. Barnes, late of the New-York High School, as a correct system of teaching practical orthography.

nouns and verbs; or, *things* and *actions*. We shall, however, admit of subdivisions, and treat of pronouns, adjectives, and contractions. We shall contend for only two cases of nouns, one kind of pronouns, one kind of verbs, that all are active; three modes, and as many tenses; that articles, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections, have no distinctive character, no existence, in fact, to warrant a "local habitation or a name."

In the composition of sentences, a few general rules of Syntax may be given; but the principal object to be obtained, is the possession of correct ideas derived from a knowledge of things, and the most approved words to express them; the combination of words in a sentence will readily enough follow.

Prosody relates to the quantity of syllables, rules of accent and pronunciation, and the arrangement of syllables and words so as to produce harmony. It applies specially to versification. As our object is not to make poets, who, it is said, "are born, and not made," but to teach the true principles of language, we shall give no attention to this finishing stroke of composition.

In our next we shall lay before you the principles upon which all language depends, and the process by which its use is to be acquired.

LECTURE II.

FUNDAMENTAL

PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE

General principles of Language. – Business of Grammar. – Children are Philosophers. – Things, ideas, and words. – Actions. – Qualities of things. – Words without ideas. – Grammatical terms inappropriate. – Principles of Language permanent. – Errors in mental science. – Facts admit of no change. – Complex ideas. – Ideas of qualities. – An example. – New ideas. – Unknown words. – Signs without things signified. – Fixed laws regulate matter and mind.

All language depends on two general principles.

First. The fixed and unvarying laws of nature which regulate matter and mind.

Second. The agreement of those who use it.

In accordance with these principles all language must be explained. It is not only needless but impossible for us to deviate from them. They remain the same in all ages and in all countries. It should be the object of the grammarian, and of all who employ language in the expression of ideas, to become intimately acquainted with their use.

It is the business of grammar to explain, not only verbal

language, but also the sublime principles upon which all written or spoken language depends. It forms an important part of physical and mental science, which, correctly explained, is abundantly simple and extensively useful in its application to the affairs of human life and the promotion of human enjoyment.

It will not be contended that we are assuming a position beyond the capacities of learners, that the course here adopted is too philosophic. Such is not the fact. Children are philosophers by nature. All their ideas are derived from things as presented to their observations. No mother learns her child to lisp the name of a thing which has no being, but she chooses objects with which it is most familiar, and which are most constantly before it; such as father, mother, brother, sister.

She constantly points to the object named, that a distinct impression may be made upon its mind, and the thing signified, the idea of the thing, and the name which represents it, are all inseparably associated together. If the father is absent, the child may *think* of him from the idea or impression which his person and affection has produced in the mind. If the mother pronounces his *name* with which it has become familiar, the child will start, look about for the object, or thing signified by the *name*, father, and not being able to discover him, will settle down contented with the *idea* of him deeply impressed on the mind, and as distinctly understood as if the father was present in person. So with every thing else.

Again, after the child has become familiar with the name of

the being called father; the name, idea and object itself being intimately associated the mother will next begin to teach it another lesson; following most undeviatingly the course which nature and true philosophy mark out. The father comes and goes, is present or absent. She says on his return, father *come*, and the little one looks round to see the thing signified by the word father, the idea of which is distinctly impressed on the mind, and which it now sees present before it. But this loved object has not always been here. It had looked round and called for the father. But the mother had told it *he was gone*. Father gone, father come, is her language, and here the child begins to learn ideas of actions. Of this it had, at first, no notion whatever, and never thought of the father except when his person was present before it, for no impressions had been distinctly made upon the mind which could be called up by a sound of which it could have no conceptions whatever. Now that it has advanced so far, the idea of the father is retained, even tho he is himself absent, and the child begins to associate the notion of coming and going with his presence or absence. Following out this course the mind becomes acquainted with things and actions, or the changes which things undergo.

Next, the mother begins to learn her offspring the distinction and qualities of things. When the little sister comes to it in innocent playfulness the mother says, "*good* sister," and with the descriptive word *good* it soon begins to associate the quality expressed by the affectionate regard, of its sister. But when that sister strikes the child, or pesters it in any way, the mother

says "*naughty* sister," "bad sister." It soon comprehends the descriptive words, *good* and *bad*, and along with them carries the association of ideas which such conduct produces. In the same way it learns to distinguish the difference between *great* and *small*, *cold* and *hot*, hard and soft.

In this manner the child becomes acquainted with the use of language. It first becomes acquainted with things, the idea of which is left upon the mind, or, more properly, the *impression of which*, left on the mind, *constitutes the idea*; and a vocabulary of words are learned, which represent these ideas, from which it may select those best calculated to express its meaning whenever a conversation is had with another.

You will readily perceive the correctness of our first proposition, that all language depends on the fixed and unerring laws of nature. Things exist. A knowledge of them produces ideas in the mind, and sounds or signs are adopted as vehicles to convey these ideas from one to another.

It would be absurd and ridiculous to suppose that any person, however great, or learned, or wise, could employ language correctly without a knowledge of the things expressed by that language. No matter how chaste his words, how lofty his phrases, how sweet the intonations, or mellow the accents. It would avail him nothing if *ideas* were not represented thereby. It would all be an unknown tongue to the hearer or reader. It would not be like the loud rolling thunder, for that tells the wondrous power of God. It would not be like the soft zephyrs of evening, the

radiance of the sun, the twinkling of the stars; for they speak the intelligible language of sublimity itself, and tell of the kindness and protection of our Father who is in heaven. It would not be like the sweet notes of the choral songsters of the grove, for they warble hymns of gratitude to God; not like the boding of the distant owl, for that tells the profound solemnity of night; not like the hungry lion roaring for his prey, for that tells of death and plunder; not like the distant notes of the clarion, for that tells of blood and carnage, of tears and anguish, of widowhood and orphanage. It can be compared to nothing but a Babel of confusion in which their own folly is worse confounded. And yet, I am sorry to say it, the languages of all ages and nations have been too frequently perverted, and compiled into a heterogeneous mass of abstruse, metaphysical volumes, whose only recommendation is the elegant bindings in which they are enclosed.

And grammars themselves, whose pretended object is to teach the rules of speaking and writing correctly, form but a miserable exception to this sweeping remark. I defy any grammarian, author, or teacher of the numberless systems, which come, like the frogs of Egypt, all of one genus, to cover the land, to give a reasonable explanation of even the terms they employ to define their meaning, if indeed, meaning they have. What is meant by an "*in*-definite article," a *dis*-junctive *con*-junction, an *ad*-verb which qualifies an *adjective*, and "sometimes another *ad*-verb?" Such "parts of speech" have no existence in fact, and

their adoption in rules of grammar, have been found exceedingly mischievous and perplexing. "Adverbs and conjunctions," and "*adverbial phrases*," and "conjunctive expressions," may serve as common sewers for a large and most useful class of words, which the teachers of grammar and lexicographers have been unable to explain; but learners will gain little information by being told that such is an *adverbial phrase*, and such, a *conjunctive expression*. This is an easy method, I confess, a sort of wholesale traffic, in parsing (*passing*) language, and may serve to cloak the ignorance of the teachers and makers of grammars. But it will reflect little light on the principles of language, or prove very efficient helps to "speak or write with propriety." Those who *think*, will demand the *meaning* of these words, and the reason of their use. When that is ascertained, little difficulty will be found in giving them a place in the company of respectable words. But I am digressing. More shall be said upon this point in a future lecture, and in its proper place.

I was endeavoring to establish the position that all language depends upon permanent principles; that words are the signs of ideas, and ideas are the impressions of things communicated to the mind thro the medium of some one of the five senses. I think I have succeeded so far as simple material things are concerned, to the satisfaction of all who have heard me. It may, perhaps, be more difficult for me to explain the words employed to express complex ideas, and things of immateriality, such as mind, and its attributes. But the rules previously adopted will, I apprehend,

apply with equal ease and correctness in this case; and we shall have cause to admire the simple yet sublime foundation upon which the whole superstructure of language is based.

In pursuing this investigation I shall endeavor to avoid all abstruse and metaphysical reasoning, present no wild conjectures, or vain hypotheses; but confine myself to plain, common place matter of fact. We have reason to rejoice that a wonderful improvement in the science and cultivation of the mind has taken place in these last days; that we are no longer puzzled with the strange phantoms, the wild speculations which occupied the giant minds of a Descartes, a Malebranch, a Locke, a Reid, a Stewart, and hosts of others, whose shining talents would have qualified them for the brightest ornaments of literature, real benefactors of mankind, had not their education lead them into dark and metaphysical reasonings, a continued tissue of the wildest vagaries, in which they became entangled, till, at length, they were entirely lost in the labyrinth of their own conjectures.

The occasion of all their difficulty originated in an attempt to investigate the faculties of the mind without any means of getting at it. They did not content themselves with an adoption of the principles which lay at the foundation of all true philosophy, viz., that the facts to be accounted for, *do exist*; that truth is eternal, and we are to become acquainted with it by the means employed for its development. They quitted the world of materiality they inhabited, refused to examine the development of mind as the

effect of an existing cause; and at one bold push, entered the world of thought, and made the unhallowed attempt to reason, a priori, concerning things which can only be known by their manifestations. But they soon found themselves in a strange land, confused with sights and sounds unknown, in the *explanation* of which they, of course, choose terms as unintelligible to their readers, as the *ideal realities* were to them. This course, adopted by Aristotle, has been too closely followed by those who have come after him.² But a new era has dawned upon the philosophy of the mind, and a corresponding change in the method of inculcating the principles of language must follow.³

In all our investigations we must take things as we find them, and account for them as far as we can. It would be a thankless

² Gall, Spurzheim, and Combe, have reflected a light upon the science of the mind, which cannot fail of beneficial results. Tho the doctrines of phrenology, as now taught, may prove false—which is quite doubtful—or receive extensive modifications, yet the consequences to the philosophy of the mind will be vastly useful. The very terms employed to express the faculties and affections of the mind, are so definite and clear, that phrenology will long deserve peculiar regard, if for no other reason than for the introduction of a vocabulary, from which may be selected words for the communication of ideas upon intellectual subjects.

³ Metaphysics originally signified the science of the causes and principles of all things. Afterwards it was confined to the philosophy of the mind. In our times it has obtained still another meaning. Metaphysicians became so abstruse, bewildered, and lost, that nobody could understand them; and hence, *metaphysical* is now applied to whatever is abstruse, doubtful, and unintelligible. If a speaker is not understood, it is because he is too metaphysical. "How did you like the sermon, yesterday?" "Tolerably well; but he was too metaphysical for common hearers." They could not understand him.

task to attempt a change of principles in any thing. That would be an encroachment of the Creator's rights. It belongs to mortals to use the things they have as not abusing them; and to Deity to regulate the laws by which those things are governed. And that man is the wisest, the truest philosopher, and brightest Christian, who acquaints himself with those laws as they do exist in the regulation of matter and mind, in the promotion of physical and moral enjoyment, and endeavors to conform to them in all his thoughts and actions.

From this apparent digression you will at once discover our object. We must not endeavor to change the principles of language, but to understand and explain them; to ascertain, as far as possible, the actions of the mind in obtaining ideas, and the use of language in expressing them. We may not be able to make our sentiments understood; but if they are not, the fault will originate in no obscurity in the facts themselves, but in our inability either to understand them or the words employed in their expression. Having been in the habit of using words with either no meaning or a wrong one, it may be difficult to comprehend the subject of which they treat. A man may have a quantity of sulphur, charcoal, and nitre, but it is not until he learns their properties and combinations that he can make gunpowder. Let us then adopt a careful and independent course of reasoning, resolved to meddle with nothing we do not understand, and to use no words until we know their meaning.

A complex idea is a combination of several simple ones, as

a tree is made up of roots, a trunk, branches, twigs, and leaves. And these again may be divided into the wood, the bark, the sap, &c. Or we may employ the botanical terms, and enumerate its external and internal parts and qualities; the whole anatomy and physiology, as well as variety and history of trees of that species, and show its characteristic distinctions; for the mind receives a different impression on looking at a maple, a birch, a poplar, a tamarisk, a sycamore, or hemlock. In this way complex ideas are formed, distinct in their parts, but blended in a common whole; and, in conformity with the law regulating language, words, sounds or signs, are employed to express the complex whole, or each distinctive part. The same may be said of all things of like character. But this idea I will illustrate more at large before the close of this lecture.

First impressions are produced by a view of material things, as we have already seen; and the notion of action is obtained from a knowledge of the changes these things undergo. The idea of quality and definition is produced by contrast and comparison. Children soon learn the difference between a sweet apple and a sour one, a white rose and a red one, a hard seat and a soft one, harmonious sounds and those that are discordant, a pleasant smell and one that is disagreeable. As the mind advances, the application is varied, and they speak of a sweet rose, changing from *taste* and *sight* to smell, of a sweet song, of a hard apple, &c. According to the qualities thus learned, you may talk to them intelligibly of the *sweetness* of an apple, the *color* of a rose, the

hardness of iron, the *harmony* of sounds, the *smell* or scent of things which possess that quality. As these agree or disagree with their comfort, they will call them *good* or *bad*, and speak of the qualities of goodness and badness, as if possessed by the thing itself.

In this apparently indiscriminate use of words, the ideas remain distinct; and each sign or object calls them up separately and associates them together, till, at length, in the single object is associated all the ideas entertained of its size, qualities, relations, and affinities.

In this manner, after long, persevering toil, principles of thought are fixed, and a foundation laid for the whole course of future thinking and speaking. The ideas become less simple and distinct. Just as fast as the mind advances in the knowledge of things, language keeps pace with the ideas, and even goes beyond them, so that in process of time a single term will not unfrequently represent a complexity of ideas, one of which will signify a whole combination of things.

On the other hand, there are many instances where the single declaration of a fact may convey to the untutored mind, a single thought or nearly so, when the better cultivated will take into the account the whole process by which it is effected. To illustrate: *a man killed a deer*. Here the boy would see and imagine more than he is yet fully able to comprehend. He will see the obvious fact that the man levels his musket, the gun goes off with a loud report, and the deer falls and dies. How this is all produced he

does not understand, but knowing the fact he asserts the single truth—the man killed the deer. As the child advances, he will learn that the sentence conveys to the mind more than he at first perceived. He now understands how it was accomplished. The man had a gun. Then he must go back to the gunsmith and see how it was made, thence back to the iron taken from its bed, and wrought into bars; all the processes by which it is brought into the shape of a gun, the tools and machinery employed; the wood for the stock, its quality and production; the size, form and color of the lock, the principle upon which it moves; the flint, the effect produced by a collision with the steel, or a percussion cap, and its composition; till he finds a single gun in the hands of a man. The man is present with this gun. The motives which brought him here; the movements of his limbs, regulated by the determinations of the mind, and a thousand other such thoughts, might be taken into the account. Then the deer, his size, form, color, manner of living, next may claim a passing thought. But I need not enlarge. Here they both stand. The man has just seen the deer. As quick as thought his eye passes over the ground, sees the prey is within proper distance, takes aim, pulls the trigger, that loosens a spring, which forces the flint against the steel; this produces a spark, which ignites the charcoal, and the sulphur and nitre combined, explode and force the wad, which forces the ball from the gun, and is borne thro the air till it reaches the deer, enters his body by displacing the skin and flesh, deranges the animal functions, and death ensues. The whole and much more

is expressed in the single phrase, "a man killed a deer."

It would be needless for me to stop here, and examine all the operations of the mind in coming at this state of knowledge. That is not the object of the present work. Such a duty belongs to another treatise, which may some day be undertaken, on logic and the science of the mind. The hint here given will enable you to perceive how the mind expands, and how language keeps pace with every advancing step, and, also, how combinations are made from simple things, as a house is made of timber, boards, shingles, nails, and paints; or of bricks, stone, and mortar; as the case may be, and when completed, a single term may express the idea, and you speak of a wood, or a brick house. Following this suggestion, by tracing the operations of the mind in the young child, or your own, very minutely, in the acquisition of any knowledge before wholly unknown to you, as a new language, or a new science; botany, mineralogy, chemistry, or phrenology; you will readily discover how the mind receives new impressions of things, and a new vocabulary is adopted to express the ideas formed of plants, minerals, chemical properties, and the development of the capacities of the mind as depending on material organs; how these things are changed and combined; and how their existence and qualities, changes and combinations, are expressed by words, to be retained, or conveyed to other minds.

But suppose you talk to a person wholly unacquainted with these things, will he understand you? Talk to him of stamens, pistils, calyxes; of monandria, diandria, triandria; of

gypsum, talc, calcareous spar, quartz, topaz, mica, garnet, pyrites, hornblende, augite, actynolite; of hexahedral, prismatic, rhomboidal, dodecahedral; of acids and alkalies; of oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen and carbon; of the configuration of the brain, and its relative powers; do all this, and what will he know of your meaning? So of all science. Words are to be understood from the things they are employed to represent. You may as well talk to a man in the hebrew, chinese, or choctaw languages, as in our own, if he does not know what is signified by the words selected as the medium of thought.

Your language may be most pure, perfect, full of meaning, but you cannot make yourself understood till your hearers can look thro your signs to the things signified. You may as well present before them a picture of *nothing*.

The great fault in the popular system of education is easily accounted for, particularly in reference to language. Children are taught to study signs without looking at the thing signified. In this way they are mere copyists, and the mind can never expand so as to make them independent, original thinkers. In fact, they can, in this way, never learn to reason well or employ language correctly; no more than a painter can be successful in his art, by merely looking at the pictures of others without having ever seen the originals. A good artist is a close observer of nature. So children should be left free to examine and reflect, and the signs will then serve their proper use—the means of acquiring the knowledge of things. In vain you may give a scholar a knowledge of the

Hebrew, Greek, or Latin, learn him to translate with rapidity or speak our own language fluently. If he has not thereby learned the knowledge of things signified by such language, he is, in principle, advanced no farther than the parrot which says "pretty poll, pretty poll."

I am happy, however, in the consideration that a valuable change is taking place in this respect. Geography is no longer taught on the old systems, but maps are given to represent more vividly land and water, rivers, islands, and mountains. The study of arithmetic, chemistry, and nearly all the sciences have been materially improved within a few years. Grammar alone remains in quiet possession of its unquestioned authority. Its nine "parts of speech," its three genders, its three cases, its half dozen kinds of pronouns, and as many moods and tenses, have rarely been disquieted. A host of book makers have fondled around them, but few have dared molest them, finding them so snugly ensconced under the sanctity of age, and the venerated opinions of learned and good men. Of the numberless attempts to simplify grammar, what has been the success? Wherein do modern "simplifiers" differ from Murray? and he was only a *compiler*! They have all discovered his errors. But who has corrected them? They have all deviated somewhat from his manner. But what is that but saying, that with all his grammatical knowledge, he could not explain his own meaning?

All the trouble originates in this; the rules of grammar have not been sought for where they are only to be found, in the

laws that govern matter and thought. Arbitrary rules have been adopted which will never apply in practice, except in special cases, and the attempt to bind language down to them is as absurd as to undertake to chain thought, or stop the waters of Niagara with a straw. Language will go on, and keep pace with the mind, and grammar should explain it so as to be correctly understood.

I wish you to keep these principles distinctly in view all thro my remarks, that you may challenge every position I assume till proved to be correct—till you distinctly understand it and definite impressions are made upon your minds. In this way you will discover a beauty and perfection in language before unknown; its rules will be found few and simple, holding with most unyielding tenacity to the sublime principles upon which they depend; and you will have reason to admire the works and adore the character of the great Parent Intellect, whose presence and protection pervade all his works and regulate the laws of matter and mind. You will feel yourselves involuntarily filled with sentiments of gratitude for the gift of mind, its affections, powers, and means of operation and communication, and resolved more than ever to employ these faculties in human improvement and the advancement of general happiness.

LECTURE III.

WRITTEN AND SPOKEN LANGUAGE

Principles never alter. – They should be known. – Grammar a most important branch of science. – Spoken and written Language. – Idea of a thing. – How expressed. – An example. – Picture writing. – An anecdote. – Ideas expressed by actions. – Principles of spoken and written Language. – Apply universally. – Two examples. – English language. – Foreign words. – Words in science. – New words. – How formed.

We now come to take a nearer view of language as generally understood by grammar. But we shall have no occasion to depart from the principles already advanced, for there is existing in practice nothing which may not be accounted for in theory; as there can be no effect without an efficient cause to produce it.

We may, however, long remain ignorant of the true explanation of the principles involved; but the fault is ours, and not in the things themselves. The earth moved with as much grandeur and precision around its axis and in its orbit before the days of Gallileo Gallilei, when philosophers believed it flat and stationary, as it has done since. So the great principles on which depends the existence and use of all language are permanent, and

may be correctly employed by those who have never examined them; but this does not prove that to be ignorant is better than to be wise. We may have taken food all our days without knowing much of the process by which it is converted into nourishment and incorporated into our bodies, without ever having heard of delutition chymification, chylicification, or even digestion, as a whole; but this is far from convincing me that the knowledge of these things is unimportant, or that ignorance of them is not the cause of much disease and suffering among mankind. And it is, or should be, the business of the physiologist to explain these things, and show the great practical benefit resulting from a general knowledge of them. So the grammarian should act as a sort of physiologist of language. He should analyze all its parts and show how it is framed together to constitute a perfect whole.

Instead of exacting of you a blind submission to a set of technical expressions, and arbitrary rules, I most urgently exhort you to continue, with unremitting assiduity, your inquiries into the reason and propriety of the positions which may be taken. It is the business of philosophy, not to meddle with things to direct how they should be, but to account for them and their properties and relations as they are. So it is the business of grammar to explain language as it exists in use, and exhibit the reason why it is used thus, and what principles must be observed to employ it correctly in speaking and writing. This method is adopted to carry out the principles already established, and show their adaptation to the wants of the community, and

how they may be correctly and successfully employed. Grammar considered in this light forms a department in the science of the mind by no means unimportant. And it can not fail to be deeply interesting to all who would employ it in the business, social, literary, moral, or religious concerns of life. Those who have thoughts to communicate, or desire an acquaintance with the minds of others, can not be indifferent to the means on which such intercourse depends. I am convinced, therefore, that you will give me your most profound attention as I pursue the subject of the present lecture somewhat in detail. And I hope you will not consider me tedious or unnecessarily prolix in my remarks.

I will not be particular in my remarks upon the changes of spoken and written language, altho that topic of itself, in the different sounds and signs employed in different ages and by different nations to express the same idea, would form a most interesting theme for several lectures. But that work must be reserved for a future occasion. You are all acquainted with the signs, written and spoken, which are employed in our language as vehicles (some of them like omnibusses) of thought to carry ideas from one mind to another. Some of you doubtless are acquainted with the application of this fact in other languages. In other words, you know how to sound the name of a thing, how to describe its properties as far as you understand them, and its attitudes or changes. This you can do by vocal sounds, or written, or printed signs.

On the other hand, you can receive a similar impression by

hearing the description of another, or by seeing it written or printed. But here you will bear in mind the fact that the word, spoken or written, is but the sign of the idea derived from the thing signified. For example: Here is an apple. I do not now speak of its composition, the skin, the pulp, &c.; nor of its qualities, whether sour, or sweet, or bitter, good or bad, great or small, long or short, round or flat, red, or white, or yellow. I speak of a single thing—an apple. Here it is, present before you. Look at it. It is now removed. You do not see it. Your minds are occupied with something else, in looking at that organ, or this representation of Solomon's temple, or, perhaps, lingering in melancholy review of your old systems of grammar thro which you plodded at a tedious rate, goaded on by the stimulus of the ferule, or the fear of being called ignorant. From that unhappy reverie I recal your minds, by saying *apple*. An apple? where? There is none in sight. No; but you have distinct recollections of a single object I just now held before you. You see it, mentally, and were you painters you might paint its likeness. What has brought this object so vividly before you? The single sound *apple*. This sound has called up the idea produced in your mind on looking at this object which I now again present before you. Here is the thing represented—the apple. Again I lay it aside, and commence a conversation with you on the varieties of apples, the form, color, flavor, manner of production, their difference from other fruit, where found, when, and by whom. Here! look again. What do you see? A-P-P-L-E—*Apple*. What is that? The representation of the idea produced

in the mind by a certain object you saw a little while ago. Here then you have the spoken and written signs of this single object I now again present to your vision. This idea may also be called up by the sense of feeling, smelling, or tasting, under certain restrictions. Here you would be no more liable to be mistaken than by seeing. We can indeed imagine things which would feel, and smell, and taste, and look some like an apple, but it falls to the lot of more abstruse reasoners to make their suppositions, and then account for them—to imagine things, and then treat of them as realities. We are content with the knowledge of things as they do exist, and think there is little danger of mistaking a potato for an apple, or a squash for a pear. Tho in the dark we may lay hold of the Frenchman's *pomme de terre*—apple of the earth, the first bite will satisfy us of our mistake if we are not too metaphysical.

The same idea may be called up in your minds by a picture of the apple presented to your sight. On this ground the picture writing of the ancients may be accounted for; and after that, the hieroglyphics of Egypt and other countries, which was but a step from picture writing towards the use of the alphabet. But these signs or vehicles for the conveyance or transmission of their thoughts, compared with the present perfect state of language, were as awkward and uncomly as the carriages employed for the conveyance of their bodies were compared with those now in use. They were like ox carts drawn by mules, compared with the most splendid barouches drawn by elegant dapple-greys.

A similar mode would be adopted now by those unacquainted with alphabetical writing. It was so with the merchant who could not write. He sold his neighbor a grindstone, on trust. Lest he should forget it—lest the *idea* of it should be obliterated from the mind—he, in the absence of his clerk, took his book and a pen and drew out a *round picture* to represent it. Some months after, he dunned his neighbor for his pay for a cheese. "I have bought no cheese of you," was the reply. Yes, you have, for I have charged. "You must be mistaken, for I never bought a cheese. We always make our own." How then should I have one charged to you? "I cannot tell. I have never had any thing here on credit except a grindstone." Ah! that's it, that's it, only I forgot to make a hole through it!"

Ideas may also be exchanged by actions. This is the first and strongest language of nature. It may be employed, when words have failed, in the most effectual manner. The angry man, choked with rage, unable to speak, tells the violent passions, burning in his bosom, in a language which can not be mistaken. The actions of a friend are a surer test of friendship than all the honied words he may utter. Actions speak louder than words. The first impressions of maternal affection are produced in the infant mind by the soothing attentions of the mother. In the same way we may understand the language of the deaf and dumb. Certain motions express certain ideas. These being duly arranged and conformed to our alphabetic signs, and well understood, the pupil may become acquainted with book knowledge as well as we.

They go by sight and not by sound. A different method is adopted with the blind. Letters with them are so arranged that they can *feel* them. The signs thus felt correspond with the sounds they hear. Here they must stop. They cannot see to describe. Those who are so unfortunate as to be blind and deaf, can have but a faint knowledge of language, or the ideas of others.

On similar principles we may explain the pantomime plays sometimes performed, where the most entertaining scenes of love and murder are represented, but not a word spoken.

Three things are always to be born in mind in the use and study of all language: 1st, the thing signified; 2d, the idea of the thing; and 3d, the word or sign chosen to represent it.

Things exist.

Thinking beings conceive *ideas of things*.

Those who employ language adopt *sounds or signs to convey those ideas* to others.

On these obvious principles rest the whole superstructure of all language, spoken or written. Objects are presented to the mind, impressions are there made, which, retained, constitute the idea, and, by agreement, certain words are employed as the future signs or representations of those ideas. If we saw an object in early life and knew its *name*, the mention of that name will recal afresh the idea which had long lain dormant in the memory, (if I may so speak,) and we can converse about it as correctly as when we first saw it.

These principles, I have said, hold good in all languages. Proof

of this may not improperly be offered here, provided it be not too prolix. I will endeavor to be brief.

In an open area of sufficient dimensions is congregated a delegation from every language under heaven. All are so arranged as to face a common center. A white horse is led into that spot and all look at the living animal which stands before them. The same impression must be made on all minds so far as a single animal is concerned. But as the whole is made up of parts, so their minds will soon diverge from a single idea, and one will think of his size, compared with other horses; another of his form; another of his color. Some will think of his noble appearance, others of his ability to travel, or (in jockey phrase) his *speed*. The farrier will look for his blemishes, to see if he is *sound*, and the jockey at his teeth, to *guess* at his *age*. The anatomist will, in thought, dissect him into parts and see every bone, sinew, cartilage, blood vessel, his stomach, lungs, liver, heart, entrails; every part will be laid open; and while the thoughtless urchin sees a single object—a white horse—others will, at a single glance, read volumes of instruction. Oh! the importance of knowledge! how little is it regarded! What funds of instruction might be gathered from the lessons every where presented to the mind!

One impression would be made on all minds in reference to the single tangible object before them; no matter how learned or ignorant. There stands an animal obvious to all. Let him be removed out of sight, and a very exact picture of him suspended in his place. All again agree. Here then is the proof of our first

general principle, viz. all language depends on the fixed and unvarying laws of nature.

Let the picture be removed and a man step forth and pronounce the word, *ippos*. The Greek starts up and says, "Yes, it is so." The rest do not comprehend him. He then writes out distinctly, ΙΠΠΟΣ. They are in the dark as to the meaning. They know not whether a horse, a man, or a goose is named. All the Greeks, however, understand the meaning the same as when the horse or picture was before them, for they had *agreed* that *ippos* should represent the *idea* of that animal.

Forth steps another, and pronounces the word *cheval*. Every Frenchman is aroused: Oui, monsieur? Yes, sir. Comprenez vous? Do you understand? he says to the rest. But they are dumb. He then writes C-H-E-V-A-L. All are as ignorant as before, save the Frenchmen who had agreed that *cheval* should be the name for horse.

Next go yourself, thinking all will understand you, and say, *horse*; but, lo! none unacquainted with your language are the wiser for the sound you utter, or the sign you suspended before them; save, perhaps, a little old Saxon, who, at first looks deceived by the similarity of sound, but, seeing the sign, is as demure as ever, for he omits the *e*, and pronounces it shorter than we do, more like a yorkshire man. But why are you not understood? Because others have not entered into an *agreement* with you that *h-o-r-s-e*, spoken or written, shall represent that animal.

Take another example. Place the living animal called man before them. Less trouble will be found in this case than in the former, for there is a nearer agreement than before in regard to the signs which shall be employed to express the idea. This word occurs with very little variation in the modern languages, derived undoubtedly from the Teutonic, with a little change in the spelling, as Saxon *mann* or *mon*, Gothic *manna*, German, Danish, Dutch, Swedish and Icelandic like ours. In the south of Europe, however, this word varies as well as others.

Our language is derived more directly from the old Saxon than from any other, but has a great similarity to the French and Latin, and a kind of cousin-german to all the languages of Europe, ancient and modern. Ours, indeed, is a compound from most other languages, retaining some of their beauties and many of their defects. We can boast little distinctive character of our own. As England was possessed by different nations at different periods, so different dialects were introduced, and we can trace our language to as many sources, German, Danish, Saxon, French, and Roman, which were the different nations amalgamated into the British empire. We retain little of the real old english—few words which may not be traced to a foreign extraction. Different people settling in a country would of course carry their ideas and manner of expressing them; and from the whole compound a general agreement would, in process of time, take place, and a uniform language be established. Such is the origin and condition of our language, as well as every other

modern tongue of which we have any knowledge.

There is one practice of which our savans are guilty, at which I do most seriously demur—the extravagant introduction of exotic words into our vocabulary, apparently for no other object than to swell the size of a dictionary, and boast of having found out and defined thousands of words more than any body else. A mania seems to have seized our lexicographers, so that they have forsaken the good old style of "plainness of speech," and are flourishing and brandishing about in a cloud of verbiage as though the whole end of instruction was to teach loquacity. And some of our popular writers and speakers have caught the infection, and flourish in borrowed garments, prizing themselves most highly when they use words and phrases which no body can understand.

I will not contend that in the advancement of the arts and sciences it may not be proper to introduce foreign terms as the mean of conveying a knowledge of those improvements to others. It is better than to coin new words, inasmuch as they are generally adopted by all modern nations. In this way all languages are approximating together; and when the light of truth, science, and religion, has fully shone on all the nations, we may hope one language will be spoken, and the promise be fulfilled, that God has "turned unto the people a pure language, that they may call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent."

New ideas are formed like new inventions. Established principles are employed in a new combination, so as to produce

a new manifestation. Words are chosen as nearly allied to former ideas as possible, to express or represent this new combination. Thus, Fulton applied steam power to navigation. A new idea was produced. A boat was seen passing along the waters without the aid of wind or tide. Instead of coining a new word to express the whole, a word which nobody would understand, two old ones were combined, and "*steamboat*" became the sign to represent the idea of the thing beheld. So with rail-road, cotton-mill, and gun-powder. In the same way we may account for most words employed in science, although in that case we are more dependant on foreign languages, in as much as a large portion of our knowledge is derived from them. But we may account for them on the same principle as above. *Phrenology* is a compound of two greek words, and means the science or knowledge of the mind. So of geology, mineralogy, &c. But when improvements are made by those who speak the english, words in our own language are employed and used not only by ourselves, but also by those nations who profit by our investigations.

I trust I have now said enough on the general principles of language as applied to things. In the next lecture I will come down to a sort of bird's eye view of grammar. But my soul abhors arbitrary rules so devoutly, I can make no promises how long I will continue in close communion with set forms of speech. I love to wander too well to remain confined to one spot, narrowed up in the limits fixed by others. Freedom is the empire of the mind; it abjures all fetters, all slavery. It kneels at the altar of

virtue and worships at the shrine of truth. No obstacles should be thrown in the way of its progress. No limits should be set to it but those of the Almighty.

LECTURE IV.

ON NOUNS

Nouns defined. – Things. – Qualities of matter. – Mind. – Spiritual beings. – Qualities of mind. – How learned. – Imaginary things. – Negation. – Names of actions. – Proper nouns. – Characteristic names. – Proper nouns may become common.

Your attention is, this evening, invited to the first divisions of words, called *Nouns*. This is a most important class, and as such deserves our particular notice.

Nouns are the names of things.

The word *noun* is derived from the Latin *nomen*, French *nom*. It means *name*. Hence the definition above given.

In grammar it is employed to distinguish that class of words which name things, or stand as signs or representatives of things.

We use the word *thing* in its broadest sense, including every possible entity; every being, or thing, animate or inanimate, material or immaterial, real or imaginary, physical, moral, or intellectual. It is the noun of the Saxon *thincan* or *thingian*, to think; and is used to express every conceivable object of thought, in whatever form or manner presented to the human mind.

Every word employed to designate things, or name them, is to be ranked in the class called *nouns*, or names. You have only

to determine whether a word is used thus, to learn whether it belongs to this or some other class of words. Here let me repeat:

1. Things exist.
2. We conceive ideas of things.
3. We use sounds or signs to communicate these ideas to others.
4. We denominate the class of words thus used, *nouns*.

Perhaps I ought to stop here, or pass to another topic. But as these lectures are intended to be so plain that all can understand my meaning, I must indulge in a few more remarks before advancing farther.

In addition to individual, tangible objects, we conceive ideas of the *qualities* of things, and give *names* to such qualities, which become *nouns*. Thus, the *hardness* of iron, the *heat* of fire, the *color* of a rose, the *bitterness* of gall, the *error* of grammars. The following may serve to make my views more plain. Take two tumblers, the one half filled with water, the other with milk; mix them together. You can now talk of the milk in the water, or the water in the milk. Your ideas are distinct, tho the objects are so intimately blended, that they can not be separated. So with the qualities of things.

We also speak of mind, intellect, soul; but to them we can give no form, and of them paint no likeness. Yet we have ideas of them, and employ words to express them, which become *nouns*.

This accounts for the reason why the great Parent Intellect has strictly forbidden, in the decalogue, that a likeness of him should

be constructed. His being and attributes are discoverable only thro the medium of his works and word. No man can see him and live. It would be the height of folly—it would be more—it would be blasphemy—to attempt to paint the likeness of him whose presence fills immensity—whose center is every where, and whose circumference is no where. The name of this Spirit or Being was held in the most profound reverence by the Jews, as we shall have occasion to mention when we come to treat of the verb to be.

We talk of angels, and have seen the unhallowed attempt to describe their likeness in the form of pictures, which display the fancy of the artist very finely, but give a miserable idea of those pure spirits who minister at the altar of God, and chant his praises in notes of the most unspeakable delight.

We have also seen *death* and the pale horse, the fiery dragon, the mystery of Babylon, and such like things, represented on canvass; but they betoken more of human talent to depict the marvellous, than a strict regard for truth. Beelzebub, imps, and all Pandemonium, may be vividly imagined and finely arranged in fiction, and we can name them. Wizzards, witches, and fairies, may play their sportive tricks in the human brain, and receive names as tho they were real.

We also think and speak of the qualities and affections of the mind as well as matter, as wisdom, knowledge, virtue, vice, love, hatred, anger. Our conceptions in this case may be less distinct, but we have ideas, and use words to express them. There is, we

confess, a greater liability to mistake and misunderstand when treating of mind and its qualities, than of matter. The reason is evident, people know less of it. Its operations are less distinct and more varying.

The child first sees material objects. It is taught to name them. It next learns the qualities of things; as the sweetness of sugar, the darkness of night, the beauty of flowers. From this it ascends by gradation to the higher attainments of knowledge as revealed in the empire of mind, as well as matter. Great care should be taken that this advancement be easy, natural, and thoro. It should be constantly impressed with the importance of obtaining clear and definite ideas of things, and never employ words till it has ideas to express; never name a thing of which it has no knowledge. This is ignorance.

It would be well, perhaps, to extend this remark to those older than children, in years, but less in real practical knowledge. The remark is of such general application, that no specification need be made, except to the case before us; to those affected proficients in grammar, whose only knowledge is the memory of words, which to them have no meanings, if, indeed, the writers themselves had any to express by them; a fact we regard as questionable, at best. There is hardly a teacher of grammar, whose self-esteem is not enormous, who will not confess himself ignorant on many of the important principles of language; that he has never understood, and could never explain them. He finds no difficulty in repeating what the books say, but if called upon

to express an opinion of his own, he has none to give. He has learned and used words without knowing their meaning.

Children should be taught language as they are taught music. They should learn the simple tones on which the whole science depends. Distinct impressions of sounds should be made on their minds, and the characters which represent them should be inseparably associated with them. They will then learn tunes from the compositions of those sounds, as represented by notes. By dint of application, they will soon become familiar with these principles, if possessed of a talent for song, and may soon pass the acme with ease, accuracy, and rapidity. But there are those who may sing very prettily, and tolerably correct, who have never studied the first rudiments of music. But such can never become adepts in the science.

So there are those who use language correctly, who never saw the inside of a grammar book, and who never examined the principles on which it depends. But this, by no means, proves that it is better to sing by rote, than "with the understanding." These rudiments, however, should form the business of the nursery, rather than the grammar school. Every mother should labor to give distinct and forcible impressions of such things as she learns her children to *name*. She should carefully prevent them from employing words which have no meaning, and still more strictly should she guard them against attaching a wrong meaning to those they do use. In this way, the foundation for future knowledge and eminence, would be laid broad and deep. But I

wander.

We attach names to imaginary things; as ghosts, genii, imps.

To this class belong the thirty thousand gods of the ancients, who were frequently represented by emblems significant of the characters attached to them. We employ words to name these imaginary things, so that we read and converse about them understandingly, tho our ideas may be exceedingly various.

Nouns are also used to express negation, of which no idea can be formed. In this case, the mind rests on what exists, and employs a word to express what does not. We speak of *a hole* in the paper. But we can form no idea of *a hole*, separated from the surrounding substances. Remove the parts of the paper till nothing is left, and then you may look in vain for the hole. It is not there. It never was. In the same way we use the words nothing, nobody, nonentity, vacuum, absence, space, blank, annihilation, and oblivion. These are relative terms, to be understood in reference to things which are known to exist. We must know of *something* before we can talk of *nothing*, of an entity before we can think of nonentity.

In a similar way we employ words to name actions, which are produced by the changes of objects. We speak of a race, of a flight, of a sitting or session, of a journey, of a ride, of a walk, of a residence, etc. In all these cases, the mind is fixed on the persons who performed these things. Take for example, a race. Of that, we can conceive no idea separate from the agent or object which *ran* the *race*. Without some other word to inform us we could not

decide whether a *horse* race, a *foot* race, a boat race, the race of a mill, or some other race, was the object of remark. The same may be said of flight, for we read of the flight of birds, the flight of Mahommed, the flight of armies, and the flight of intellect.

We also give names to actions as tho they were taking place in the present tense. "The *reading* of the report was deferred;" steamboat *racing* is dangerous to public safety; *stealing* is a crime; false *teaching* deserves the reprobation of all.

The hints I have given will assist you in acquiring a knowledge of nouns as used to express ideas in vocal or written language. This subject might be pursued further with profit, if time would permit. As the time allotted to this lecture is nearly exhausted, I forbear. I shall hereafter have occasion to show how a whole phrase may be used to name an idea, and as such stand as the agent or object of a verb.

Some nouns are specifically used to designate certain objects, and distinguish them from the class to which they usually belong. In this way they assume a distinctive character, and are usually denominated proper nouns. They apply to persons, places and things; as, John Smith, Boston, Hylax. *Boy* is applied in common to all young males of the human species, and as such is a *common noun* or name. *John Smith* designates a particular boy from the rest.

Proper names may be also applied to animals and things. The stable keeper and stageman has a name for every horse he owns, to distinguish it from other horses; the dairyman for his cows,

the boy for his dog, and the girl for her doll. Any word, in fact, may become a proper name by being specifically used; as the ship Fair Trader, the brig Success, sloop Delight in Peace, the race horse Eclipse, Black Hawk, Round Nose, and Red Jacket.

Proper names were formerly used in reference to certain traits of character or circumstances connected with the place or thing. *Abram* was changed to *Abraham*, the former signifying *an elevated father*, the latter, *the father of a multitude*. *Isaac* signified *laughter*, and was given because his mother laughed at the message of the angel. *Jacob* signified *a supplanter*, because he was to obtain the birthright of his elder brother.

A ridiculous rage obtained with our puritan fathers to express scripture sentiments in the names of their children, as may be seen by consulting the records of the Plymouth and Massachusetts colonies.

This practice has not wholly gone out of use in our day, for we hear of the names of Hope, Mercy, Patience, Comfort, Experience, Temperance, Faith, Deliverance, Return, and such like, applied usually to females, (being more in character probably,) and sometimes to males. We have also the names of White, Black, Green, Red, Gray, Brown, Olive, Whitefield, Blackwood, Redfield, Woodhouse, Stonehouse, Waterhouse, Woodbridge, Swiftwater, Lowater, Drinkwater, Spring, Brooks, Rivers, Pond, Lake, Fairweather, Merryweather, Weatherhead, Rice, Wheat, Straw, Greatrakes, Bird, Fowle, Crow, Hawks, Eagle, Partridge, Wren, Goslings, Fox, Camel, Zebra, Bear,

Wolf, Hogg, Rain, Snow, Haile, Frost, Fogg, Mudd, Clay, Sands, Hills, Valley, Field, Stone, Flint, Silver, Gould, and Diamond.

Proper nouns may also become common when used as words of general import; as, *dunces*, corrupted from Duns Scotus, a distinguished theologian, born at Dunstane, Northumberland, an opposer of the doctrines of Thomas Aquinas. He is a real *solomon*, jack tars, judases, antichrist, and so on.

Nouns may also be considered in respect to person, number, gender, and positive, or case. There are *three* persons, *two* numbers, *two* genders, and *two* cases. But the further consideration of these things will be deferred, which, together with Pronouns, will form the subject of our next lecture.

LECTURE V.

ON NOUNS AND PRONOUNS

Nouns in respect to persons. – Number. – Singular. – Plural. – How formed. – Foreign plurals. – Proper names admit of plurals. – Gender. – No neuter. – In figurative language. – Errors. – Position or case. – Agents. – Objects. – Possessive case considered. – A definitive word. – Pronouns. – One kind. – Originally nouns. – Specifically applied.

We resume the consideration of nouns this evening, in relation to person, number, gender, and position or case.

In the use of language there is a speaker, person spoken to, and things spoken of. Those who speak are the *first* persons, those who hear the *second*, and those who are the subject of conversation the *third*.

The first and second persons are generally used in reference to human beings capable of speech and understanding. But we sometimes condescend to hold converse with animals and inanimate matter. The bird trainer talks to his parrots, the coachman to his horses, the sailor to the winds, and the poet to his landscapes, towers, and wild imaginings, to which he gives a "local habitation and a name."

By metaphor, language is put into the mouths of animals,

particularly in fables. By a still further license, places and things, flowers, trees, forests, brooks, lakes, mountains, towers, castles, stars, &c. are made to speak the most eloquent language, in the first person, in addresses the most pathetic. The propriety of such a use of words I will not stop to question, but simply remark that such figures should never be employed in the instruction of children. As the mind expands, no longer content to grovel amidst mundane things, we mount the pegasus of imagination and soar thro the blissful or terrific scenes of fancy and fiction, and study a language before unknown. But it would be an unrighteous demand upon others, to require them to understand us; and quite as unpardonable to brand them with ignorance because they do not.

Most nouns are in the third person. More things are talked about than talk themselves, or are talked to by others. Hence there is little necessity for teaching children to specify except in the first or second person, which is very easily done.

In English there are two *numbers*, singular and plural. The singular is confined to one, the plural is extended to any indefinite number. The Greeks, adopted a dual number which they used to express two objects united in pairs, or couples; as, a span of horses, a yoke of oxen, a brace of pistols, a pair of shoes. We express the same idea with more words, using the singular to represent the union of the two. We also extend this use of words and employ what are called *nouns of multitude*; as, a people, an army, a host, a nation. These and similar words are used in the

singular referring to many combined in a united whole, or in the plural comprehending a diversity; as, "the armies met," "the nations are at peace." *People* admits no change on account of number. We say "*many* people are collected together and form a numerous people."

The plural is not always to be understood as expressing an increase of number, but of qualities or sorts of things, as the merchant has a variety of *sugars, wines, teas, drugs, medicines, paints* and *dye-woods*. We also speak of *hopes, fears, loves, anxieties*.

Some nouns admit of no plural, in fact, or in use; as, chaos, universe, fitness, immortality, immensity, eternity. Others admit of no singular; as, scissors, tongs, vitals, molasses. These words probably once had singulars, but having no use for them they became obsolete. We have long been accustomed to associate the two halves of shears together, so that in speaking of one whole, we say shears, and of apart, half of a shears. But of some words originally, and in fact plural, we have formed a singular; as, "one twin died, and, tho the other one survived its dangerous illness, the mother wept bitterly for her twins." *Twin* is composed of *two* and *one*. It is found in old books, spelled *twane*, two-one, or twin. Thus, the *twi*-light is formed by the mingling of two lights, or the division of the rays of light by the approaching or receding darkness. They *twain* shall be one flesh. Sheep and deer are singular or plural.

Most plurals are formed by adding *s* to the singular, or, when

euphony requires it, *es*; as, tree, trees; sun, suns; dish, dishes; box, boxes. Some retain the old plural form; as, ox, oxen; child, children; chick, chicken; kit, kitten. But habit has burst the barrier of old rules, and we now talk of chicks and chickens, kits and kittens. *Oxen* alone stands as a monument raised to the memory of unaltered saxon plurals.

Some nouns form irregular plurals. Those ending in *f* change that letter to *v* and then add *es*; as, half, halves; leaf, leaves; wolf, wolves. Those ending in *y* change that to *i* and add the *es*; as, cherry, cherries; berry, berries; except when the *y* is preceded by a vowel, in which case it only adds the *s*; as, day, days; money, moneys (not *ies*); attorney, attorneys. All this is to make the sound more easy and harmonious. *F* and *v* were formerly used indiscriminately, in singulars as well as plurals, and, in fact, in the composition of all words where they occurred. The same may be said of *i* and *y*.

"The Fader (Father) Almychty of the heven abuf (above)
In the mene tyme, unto Juno his *luf* (love)
Thus spak; and sayd."

Douglas, booke 12, pag. 441.

"They lyued in ioye and in felycite
For eche of hem had other lefe and dere."

Chaucer, Monks Tale, fol. 81, p. 1.

"When strait twane beefes he tooke
And an the aultar layde."

The reason why *y* is changed into *i* in the formation of plurals, and in certain other cases, is, I apprehend, accounted for from the fact that words which now end in *y* formerly ended in *ie*, as may be seen in all old books. The regular plural was then formed by adding *s*.

"And upon those members of the *bodie*, which *wee* thinke most dishonest, put *wee* more honestie on." "It rejoyceth not in iniquitie—diversitie of gifts—all thinges edifie not." See old bible, 1 Cor., chap. 13 and 14.

Other words form their plurals still more differently, for which no other rule than habit can be given; as, man, men; foot, feet; tooth, teeth; die, dice; mouse, mice; penny, pence, and sometimes pennies, when applied to distinct pieces of money, and not to value.

Many foreign nouns retain the plural form as used by the nations from whom we have borrowed them; as, cherub, cherubim; seraph, seraphim; radius, radii; memorandum, memoranda; datum, data, &c. We should be pleased to have such words carried home, or, if they are ours by virtue of possession, let them be adopted into our family, and put on the garments of naturalized citizens, and no longer appear as lonely strangers among us. There is great awkwardness in adding the english to

the hebrew plural of cherub, as the translators of the common version of the bible have done. They use *cherub* in the singular and *cherubims* in the plural. The *s* should be omitted and the Hebrew plural retained, or the preferable course adopted, and the final *s* be added, making cherubs, seraphs, &c. The same might be said of all foreign nouns. It would add much to the regularity, dignity, and beauty, of our vernacular tongue.

Proper nouns admit of the plural number; as, there are sixty-four John Smiths in New-York, twenty Arnolds in Providence, and fifteen Davises in Boston. As we are not accustomed to form the plurals of proper names there is not that ease and harmony in the first use of them that we have found in those with which we are more familiar; especially those we have rarely heard pronounced. Habit surmounts the greatest obstacles and makes things the most harsh and unpleasant appear soft and agreeable.

Gender is applied to the distinction of the sexes. There are two—masculine and feminine. The former is applied to males, the latter to females. Those words which belong to neither gender, have been called *neuter*, that is, *no gender*. But it is hardly necessary to perplex the minds of learners with *negatives*. Let them distinguish between masculine and feminine genders, and little need be said to them about a *neuter*.

There are some nouns of both genders, as student, writer, pupil, person, citizen, resident. *Poet*, *author*, editor, and some other words, have of late been applied to females, instead of *poetess*, *authoress*, *editress*. Fashion will soon preclude the

necessity of this former distinction.

Some languages determine their genders by the form of the endings of their nouns, and what is thus made masculine in Rome, may be feminine in France. It is owing, no doubt, to this practice, in other nations, that we have attached the idea of gender to inanimate things; as, "the sun, *he* shines majestically;" while of the moon, it is said, "*she* sheds a milder radiance." But we can not coincide with the reason assigned by Mr. Murray, for this distinction. His notion is not valid. It does not correspond with facts. While in the south of Europe the sun is called masculine and the moon feminine, the northern nations invariably reverse the distinction, particularly the dialects of the Scandinavian. It was so in our own language in the time of Shakspeare. He calls the sun a "*fair wench*."

By figures of rhetoric, genders may be attached to inanimate matter. Where things are personified, we usually speak of them as masculine and feminine; but this practice depends on fancy, and not on any fixed rules. There is, in truth, but two genders, and those confined to animals. When we break these rules, and follow the undirected wanderings of fancy, we can form no rules to regulate our words. We may have as many fanciful ones as we please, but they will not apply in common practice. For example: poets and artists have usually attached female loveliness to angels, and placed them in the feminine gender. But they are invariably used in the masculine thro out the scriptures.

There is an apparent absurdity in saying of the ship General

Williams, *she* is beautiful; or, of the steamboat Benjamin Franklin, *she* is out of date. It were far better to use no gender in such cases. But if people will continue the practice of making distinctions where there are none, they must do it from habit and whim, and not from any reason or propriety.

There are three ways in which we usually distinguish the forms of words in reference to gender. 1st. By words which are different; as boy, girl; uncle, aunt; father, mother. 2d. By a different termination of the same word; as instructor, instructress; lion, lioness; poet, poetess. *Ess* is a contraction from the hebrew *essa*, a female. 3d. By prefixing another word; as, a male child, a female child; a man servant, a maid servant; a he-goat, a she-goat.

The last consideration that attaches to nouns, is the *position* they occupy in written or spoken language, in relation to other words, as being *agents*, or *objects* of action. This is termed *position*.

There are two positions in which nouns stand in reference to their meaning and use. First, as *agents* of action, as *David* killed Goliath. Second, as *objects* on which action terminates; as, *Richard* conquered *Henry*. These two distinctions should be observed in the use of all nouns. But the propriety of this division will be more evident when we come to treat of verbs, their agents and objects.

It will be perceived that we have abandoned the use of the "*possessive case*," a distinction which has been insisted on in our

grammars; and also changed the names of the other two. As we would adopt nothing that is new without first being convinced that something is needed which the thing proposed will supply; so we would reject nothing that is old, till we have found it useless and cumbersome. It will be admitted on all hands that the fewer and simpler the rules of grammar, the more readily will they be understood, and the more correctly applied. We should guard, on the one hand, against having so many as to perplex, and on the other, retain enough to apply in the correct use of language. It is on this ground that we have proposed an improvement in the names and number of cases, or positions.

The word noun signifies name, and *nominative* is the adjective derived from noun, and partakes of the same meaning. Hence the *nominative* or *naming* case may apply as correctly to the object as the agent. "*John strikes Thomas, and Thomas strikes John.*" John and Thomas name the boys who strike, but in the first case John is the actor or agent and Thomas the object. In the latter it is changed. To use a *nominative name* is a redundancy which should be avoided. You will understand my meaning and see the propriety of the change proposed, as the mind of the learner should not be burthened with needless or irrelevant phrases.

But our main objection lies against the "possessive case." We regard it as a false and unnecessary distinction. What is the possessive case? Murray defines it as "expressing the relation of property or possession; as, my father's house." His rule of syntax is, "one substantive governs another, signifying a different thing,

in the possessive or genitive case; as, my father's house." I desire you to understand the definition and use as here given. Read it over again, and be careful that you know the meaning of *property*, *possession*, and *government*. Now let a scholar parse correctly the example given. "*Father's*" is a common noun, third person, singular number, masculine gender, and *governed* by house:" Rule, "One noun *governs* another," &c. Then my father does not govern his own house, but his house him! What must be the conduct and condition of the family, if they have usurped the government of their head? "John Jones, hatter, keeps constantly for sale all kinds of *boy's hats*. Parse *boy's*. It is a noun, possessive case, *governed* by hats." What is the possessive case? It "signifies the *relation of property or possession*." Do the hats belong to the boys? Oh no. Are they the *property* or in the *possession* of the boys? Certainly not. Then what relation is there of property or possession? None at all. They belong to John Jones, were made by him, are his property, and by him are advertised for sale. He has used the word *boy's* to distinguish their size, quality, and fitness for boy's use.

"The master's slave." Master's is in the possessive case, and *governed* by slave! If grammars are true there can be no need of abolition societies, unless it is to look after the master and see that he is not abused. The rider's horse; the captain's ship; the general's army; the governor's cat; the king's subject. How false it would be to teach scholars the idea of *property* and *government* in such cases. The *teacher's scholars* should never learn that by

virtue of their grammars, or the *apostrophe* and letter *s*, they have a right to *govern* their teachers; nor the mother's son, to govern his mother. Our merchants would dislike exceedingly to have the *ladies* understand them to signify by their advertisements that the "ladies' merino shawls, the ladies's bonnets and lace wrought veils, the ladies' gloves and elegant Thibet, silk and challa dresses, were the *property* of the ladies; for in that case they might claim or *possess* themselves of their *property*, and no longer trouble the merchant with the care of it.

"Peter's wife's mother lay sick of a fever." "*His* physician said that *his* disease would require *his* utmost skill to defeat *its* progress in *his* limbs." Phrases like these are constantly occurring, which can not be explained intelligibly by the existing grammars. In fact, the words said to be nouns in the possessive case, have changed their character, by use, from nouns to adjectives, or definitive words, and should thus be classed. Russia iron, Holland gin, China ware, American people, the Washington tavern, Lafayette house, Astor house, Hudson river, (formerly Hudson's,) Baffin's bay, Van Dieman's land, John street, Harper's ferry, Hill's bridge, a paper book, a bound book, a red book, John's book—one which John is known to use, it may be a borrowed one, but generally known as some way connected with him,—Rev. Mr. Smith's church, St. John's church, Grace church, Murray's grammar; not the property nor in the possession of Lindley Murray, neither does it *govern him*; for he has gone to speak a purer language than he taught on earth.

It is mine. I bought it, have possessed it these ten years; but, thank fortune, am little *governed* by it. But more on this point when we come to the proper place. What I have said, will serve as a hint, which will enable you to see the impropriety of adopting the "possessive case."

It may be said that more cases are employed in other languages. That is a poor reason why we should break the barriers of natural language. Beside, I know not how we should decide by that rule, for none of them have a *case* that will compare with the English possessive. The genitive of the French, Latin, or Greek, will apply in only a few respects. The former has *three*, the latter five, and the Latin six cases, neither of which correspond with the possessive, as explained by Murray and his satellites. We should be slow to adopt into our language an idiom which does not belong to it, and compel learners to make distinctions where none exist. It is an easy matter to tell children that the apostrophe and letter *s* marks the possessive case; but when they ask the difference in the meaning between the use of the noun and those which all admit are adjectives, it will be no indifferent task to satisfy them. What is the difference in the construction of language or the sense conveyed, between Hudson's river, and *Hudson* river? Davis's straits, or Bass straits? St. John's church, or Episcopal church? the sun's beams, or sun shine? In all cases these words are used to define the succeeding noun. They regard "property or possession," only when attending circumstances, altogether foreign from any quality in the form or meaning of

the word itself, are so combined as to give it that import. And in such cases, we retain these words as adjectives, long after the property has passed from the hands of the persons who gave it a name. *Field's* point, *Fuller's* rocks, *Fisher's* island, *Fulton's* invention, will long be retained after those whose names were given to distinguish these things, have slept with their fathers and been forgotten. Blannerhassett's Island, long since ceased to be his property or tranquil possession, by confiscation; but it will retain its specific name, till the inundations of the Ohio's waters shall have washed it away and left not a wreck behind.

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