

From Hugh Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (chapters on universal grammar)

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LECTURE VI

The RISE and PROGRESS of LANGUAGE

Having finished my observations on the Pleasures of Taste, which were meant to be introductory to the principal subject of these Lectures, I now begin to treat of Language; which is the foundation of the whole power of eloquence. This will lead to a considerable discussion; and there are few subjects belonging to polite literature, which more merit such a discussion. I shall first give a History of the Rise and Progress of Language in several particulars, from its early to its more advanced periods; which shall be followed by a similar History of the Rise and Progress of Writing. I shall next give some account of the Construction of Language, or the Principles of Universal Grammar; and shall, lastly, apply these observations more particularly to the English Tongue.

Language, in general, signifies the expression of our ideas by certain articulate sounds, which are used as the signs of those ideas. By articulate sounds, are meant those modulations of simple voice, or of sound emitted from the thorax, which are formed by means of the mouth and its several organs, the teeth, the tongue, the lips, and the palate. How far there is any natural connexion between the ideas of the mind and the sounds emitted, will appear from what I am afterwards to offer. But as the natural connexion can, upon any system, affect only a small part of the fabric of Language; the connexion between words and ideas may, in general, be considered as arbitrary and conventional, owing to the agreement of men among themselves; the clear proof of which is, that different nations have different Languages, or a different set of articulate sounds, which they have chosen for communicating their ideas.

This artificial method of communicating thought, we now behold carried to the highest perfection. Language is become a vehicle by which the most delicate and refined emotions of one mind can be transmitted, or, if we may so speak, transfused into another. Not only are names given to all objects around us, by which means an easy and speedy intercourse is carried on for providing the necessaries of life, but all the relations and differences among these objects are minutely marked, the invisible sentiments of the mind are described, the most abstract notions and conceptions are rendered intelligible; and all the ideas which science can discover, or imagination create, are known by their proper names. Nay, Language has been carried so far, as to be made an instrument of the most refined luxury. Not resting in mere perspicuity, we require ornament also; not satisfied with having the conceptions of others made known to us, we make a farther demand, to have them so decked and adorned as to entertain our fancy; and this demand, it is found very possible to gratify. In this state, we now find Language. In this state, it has been found among many nations for some thousand years. The object is become familiar; and, like the expanse of the firmament, and other great objects, which we are accustomed to behold, we behold it without wonder.

But carry your thoughts back to the first dawn of Language among men. Reflect upon the feeble beginnings from which it must have arisen, and upon the many and great obstacles which it must have en-

countered in its progress; and you will find reason for the highest astonishment, on viewing the height which it has now attained. We admire several of the inventions of art; we plume ourselves on some discoveries which have been made in latter ages, serving to advance knowledge, and to render life comfortable; we speak of them as the boast of human reason. But certainly no invention is entitled to any such degree of admiration as that of Language; which, too, must have been the product of the first and rudest ages, if indeed it can be considered as a human invention at all.

Think of the circumstances of mankind when Languages began to be formed. They were a wandering scattered race; no society among them except families; and the family society too very imperfect, as their method of living by hunting or pasturage must have separated them frequently from one another. In this situation, when so much divided, and their intercourse so rare, how could any one set of sounds, or words, be generally agreed on as the signs of their ideas? Supposing that a few, whom chance or necessity threw together, agreed by some means upon certain signs, yet by what authority could these be propagated among other tribes or families, so as to spread and grow up into a Language? One would think, that, in order to any Language fixing and extending itself, men must have been previously gathered together in considerable numbers; Society must have been already far advanced; and yet, on the other hand, there seems to have been an absolute necessity for Speech, previous to the formation of Society. For, by what bond could any multitude of men be kept together, or be made to join in the prosecution of any common interest, until once, by the intervention of Speech, they could communicate their wants and intentions to one another? So that, either how Society could form itself, previously to Language, or how words could rise into a Language previously to Society formed, seem to be points attended with equal difficulty. And when we consider farther, that curious analogy which prevails in the construction of almost all Languages, and that deep and subtle logic on which they are founded, difficulties increase so much upon us, on all hands, that there seems to be no small reason for referring the first origin of all Language to Divine teaching or inspiration.

But supposing Language to have a Divine original, we cannot, however, suppose, that a perfect system of it was all at once given to man. It is much more natural to think, that God taught our first parents only such Language as suited their present occasions; leaving them, as he did in other things, to enlarge and improve it as their future necessities should require. Consequently, those first rudiments of Speech must have been poor and narrow; and we are at full liberty to inquire in what manner, and by what steps, Language advanced to the state in which we now find it. The history which I am to give of this progress, will suggest several things, both curious in themselves, and useful in our future disquisitions.

If we should suppose a period before any words were invented or known, it is clear, that men could have no other method of communicating to others what they felt, than by the cries of passion, accompanied with such motions and gestures as were farther expressive of passion. For these are the only signs which nature teaches all men, and which are understood by all. One who saw another going into some place where he himself had been frightened, or exposed to danger, and who sought to warn his neighbour of the danger, could contrive no other way of doing so, than by uttering those cries, and making those gestures, which are the signs of fear: just as two men, at this day, would endeavour to make themselves be understood by each other, who should be thrown together on a desolate island, ignorant of each other's Language. Those exclamations, therefore, which by Grammarians are called Interjections, uttered in a strong and passionate manner, were, beyond doubt, the first elements or beginnings of Speech.

When more enlarged communication became necessary, and names began to be assigned to objects, in what manner can we suppose men to have proceeded in this assignation of names, or invention of words? Undoubtedly, by imitating, as much as they could, the nature of the object which they named, by the sound of the name which they gave to it. As a Painter, who would represent grass, must employ a green colour; so, in the beginnings of Language, one giving a name to any thing harsh or boisterous, would of

course employ a harsh or boisterous sound. He could not do otherwise, if he meant to excite in the hearer the idea of that thing which he sought to name. To suppose words invented, or names given, to things, in a manner purely arbitrary, without any ground or reason, is to suppose an effect without a cause. There must have always been some motive which led to the assignation of one name rather than another; and we can conceive no motive which would more generally operate upon men in their first efforts towards Language, than a desire to paint by Speech, the objects which they named, in a manner more or less complete, according as the vocal organs had it in their power to effect this imitation.

Wherever objects were to be named, in which sound, noise, or motion were concerned, the imitation by words was abundantly obvious. Nothing was more natural, than to imitate, by the sound of the voice, the quality of the sound or noise which any external object made; and to form its name accordingly. Thus, in all Languages, we find a multitude of words that are evidently constructed upon this principle. A certain bird is termed the Cuckoo, from the sound which it emits. When one sort of wind is said to “whistle”, and another to “roar”; when a serpent is said to “hiss”; a fly to “buzz”, and falling timber to “crash”; when a stream is said to “flow”, and hail to “rattle”; the analogy between the word and the thing signified is plainly discernible.

In the names of objects which address the sight only, where neither noise nor motion are concerned, and still more in the terms appropriated to moral ideas, this analogy appears to fail. Many learned men, however, have been of opinion, that though, in such cases, it becomes more obscure, yet it is not altogether lost; but that throughout the radical words of all Languages, there may be traced some degree of correspondence with the object signified. With regard to moral and intellectual ideas, they remark, that, in every Language, the terms significant of them, are derived from the names of sensible objects to which they are conceived to be analogous; and with regard to sensible objects pertaining merely to sight, they remark, that their most distinguishing qualities have certain radical sounds appropriated to the expression of them, in a great variety of Languages. Stability, for instance, fluidity, hollowness, smoothness, gentleness, violence, &c. they imagine to be painted by the sound of certain letters or syllables, which have some relation to those different states of visible objects, on account of an obscure resemblance which the organs of voice are capable of assuming to such external qualities. By this natural mechanism, they imagine all Languages to have been at first constructed, and the roots of their capital words formed.

As far as this system is founded in truth, Language appears to be not altogether arbitrary in its origin. Among the ancient Stoic and Platonic Philosophers, it was a question much agitated, “Utrum nomina rerum sint NATURE, AN IMPOSITIONE?; by which they meant, Whether words were merely conventional symbols; of the rise of which no account could be given, except the pleasure of the first inventors of Language? or, Whether there was some principle in nature that led to the assignation of particular names to particular objects; and those of the Platonic school favoured the latter opinion?

This principle, however, of a natural relation between words and objects, can only be applied to Language in its most simple and primitive state. Though, in every Tongue, some remains of it, as I have shown above, can be traced, it were utterly in vain to search for it throughout the whole construction of any modern Language. As the multitude of terms increase in every nation, and the immense field of Language is filled up, words, by a thousand fanciful and irregular methods of derivation and composition, come to deviate widely from the primitive character of their roots, and to lose all analogy or resemblance in sound to the things signified. Words, as we now employ them, taken in the general, may be considered as symbols, not as imitations; as arbitrary, or instituted, not natural signs of ideas. But there can be no doubt, I think, that Language, the nearer we remount to its rise among men, will be found to partake more of a natural expression. As it could be originally formed on nothing but imitation, it would, in its primitive state, be more picturesque; much more barren indeed, and narrow in the circle of its terms, than now; but as far as it went, more expressive by sound of the thing signified. This, then, may be as-

sumed as one character of the first state, or beginnings, of Language, among every savage tribe.

A second character of Language, in its early state, is drawn from the manner in which words were at first pronounced, or uttered, by men. Interjections, I showed, or passionate exclamations, were the first elements of Speech. Men laboured to communicate their feelings to one another, by those expressive cries and gestures which nature taught them. After words, or names of objects, began to be invented, this mode of speaking, by natural signs, could not be all at once disused. For Language, in its infancy, must have been extremely barren; and there certainly was a period, among all rude nations, when conversation was carried on by a very few words, intermixed with many exclamations and earnest gestures. The small stock of words which men as yet possessed, rendered these helps absolutely necessary for explaining their conceptions; and rude, uncultivated men, not having always at hand even the few words which they knew, would naturally labour to make themselves understood, by varying their tones of voice, and accompanying their tones with the most significant gesticulations they could make. At this day, when persons attempt to speak in any Language which they possess imperfectly, they have recourse to all these supplemental methods, in order to render themselves more intelligible. The plan too, according to which I have shown, that Language was originally constructed, upon resemblance or analogy, as far as was possible, to the thing signified, would naturally lead men to utter their words with more emphasis and force, as long as Language was a sort of painting by means of sound. For all those reasons this may be assumed as a principle, that the pronunciation of the earliest Languages was accompanied with more gesticulation, and with more and greater inflections of voice, than what we now use; there was more action in it; and it was more upon a crying or singing tone.

To this manner of speaking, necessity first gave rise. But we must observe, that, after this necessity had, in a great measure, ceased, by Language becoming, in process of time, more extensive and copious, the ancient manner of Speech still subsisted among many nations; and what had arisen from necessity, continued to be used for ornament. Wherever there was much fire and vivacity in the genius of nations, they were naturally inclined to a mode of conversation which gratified the imagination so much; for, an imagination which is warm, is always prone to throw both a great deal of action, and a variety of tones, into discourse. Upon this principle, Dr. Warburton accounts for so much speaking by action, as we find among the Old Testament Prophets; as when Jeremiah breaks the potter's vessel, in sight of the people; throws a book into the Euphrates; puts on bonds and yokes; and carries out his household stuff; all which, he imagines, might be significant modes of expression, very natural in those ages, when men were accustomed to explain themselves so much by actions and gestures. In like manner, among the Northern American tribes, certain motions and actions were found to be much used as explanatory of their meaning, on all their great occasions of intercourse with each other; and by the belts and strings of wampum, which they gave and received, they were accustomed to declare their meaning, as much as by their discourses.

With regard to inflections of voice, these are so natural, that, to some nations, it has appeared easier to express different ideas, by varying the tone with which they pronounced the same word, than to contrive words for all their ideas. This is the practice of the Chinese in particular. The number of words in their Language is said not to be great; but, in speaking, they vary each of their words on no less than five different tones, by which they make the same word signify five different things. This must give a great appearance of music or singing to their Speech. For those inflections of voice which, in the infancy of Language, were no more than harsh or dissonant cries, must, as Language gradually polishes, pass into more smooth and musical sounds: and hence is formed, what we call, the Prosody of a Language.

It is remarkable, and deserves attention, that, both in the Greek and Roman Languages, this musical and gesticulating pronunciation was retained in a very high degree. Without having attended to this, we shall be at a loss in understanding several passages of the Classics, which relate to the public speaking, and the

theatrical entertainments, of the ancients. It appears, from many circumstances, that the prosody both of the Greeks and Romans, was carried much farther than ours; or that they spoke with more, and stronger, inflections of voice than we use. The quantity of their syllables was much more fixed than in any of the modern Languages, and rendered much more sensible to the ear in pronouncing them. Besides quantities, or the difference of short and long, accents were placed upon most of their syllables, the acute, grave, and circumflex; the use of which accents we have now entirely lost, but which, we know, determined the speaker's voice to rise or fall. Our modern pronunciation must have appeared to them a lifeless monotony. The declamation of their orators, and the pronunciation of their actors upon the stage, approached to the nature of recitative in music; was capable of being marked in notes, and supported with instruments; as several learned men have fully proved. And if this was the case, as they have shown, among the Romans, the Greeks, it is well known, were still a more musical people than the Romans, and carried their attention to tone and pronunciation much farther in every public exhibition. Aristotle, in his Poetics, considers the music of Tragedy as one of its chief and most essential parts.

The case was parallel with regard to gestures: for strong tones, and animated gestures, we may observe, always go together. Action is treated of by all the ancient critics, as the chief quality in every public speaker. The action, both of the orators and the players in Greece and Rome, was far more vehement than what we are accustomed to. Roscius would have seemed a madman to us. Gesture was of such consequence upon the ancient stage, that there is reason for believing, that, on some occasions, the speaking and the acting part were divided, which, according to our ideas, would form a strange exhibition; one player spoke the words in the proper tones, while another performed the corresponding motions and gestures. We learn from Cicero, that it was a contest between him and Roscius, whether he could express a sentiment in a greater variety of phrases, or Roscius in a greater variety of intelligible significant gestures. At last, gesture came to engross the stage wholly; for, under the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius, the favorite entertainment of the Public was the pantomime, which was carried on entirely by mute gesticulation. The people were moved, and wept at it, as much as at tragedies; and the passion for it became so strong, that laws were obliged to be made, for restraining the Senators from studying the pantomime art. Now, though in declamations and theatrical exhibitions, both tone and gesture were, doubtless, carried much farther than in common discourse; yet public speaking, of any kind, must, in every country, bear some proportion to the manner that is used in conversation; and such public entertainments as I have now mentioned, could never have been relished by a nation, whose tones and gestures, in discourse, were as languid as ours.

When the Barbarians spread themselves over the Roman Empire, these more phlegmatic nations did not retain the accents, the tones and gestures, which necessity at first introduced, and custom and fancy afterwards so long supported, in the Greek and Roman Languages. As the Latin Tongue was lost in their idioms, so the character of speech and pronunciation began to be changed throughout Europe. Nothing of the same attention was paid to the music of Language, or to the pomp of declamation, and theatrical action. Both conversation and public speaking became more simple and plain, such as we now find it; without that enthusiastic mixture of tones and gestures, which distinguished the ancient nations. At the restoration of letters, the genius of Language was so much altered, and the manners of the people had become so different, that it was no easy matter to understand what the Ancients had said, concerning their declamations and public spectacles. Our plain manner of speaking, in these northern countries, expresses the passions with sufficient energy, to move those who are not accustomed to any more vehement manner. But, undoubtedly, more varied tones, and more animated motions, carry a natural expression of warmer feelings. Accordingly, in different modern Languages, the prosody of Speech partakes more of music, in proportion to the liveliness and sensibility of the people. A Frenchman both varies his accents, and gesticulates while he speaks, much more than an Englishman. An Italian, a great deal more than either. Musical pronunciation and expressive gesture are, to this day, the distinction of Italy.

From the pronunciation of Language, let us proceed, in the third place, to consider the Style of Language in its most early state, and its progress in this respect also. As the manner in which men at first uttered their words, and maintained conversation, was strong and expressive, enforcing their imperfectly expressed ideas by cries and gestures; so the Language which they used, could be no other than full of figures and metaphors, not correct indeed, but forcible and picturesque.

For, first, the want of proper names for every object, obliged them to use one name for many; and, of course, to express themselves by comparisons, metaphors, allusions, and all those substituted forms of Speech which render Language figurative. Next, as the objects with which they were most conversant, were the sensible, material objects around them, names would be given to those objects long before words were invented for signifying the disposition of the mind, or any sort of moral and intellectual ideas. Hence, the early Language of men being entirely made up of words descriptive of sensible objects, it became, of necessity, extremely metaphorical. For, to signify any desire or passion, or any act or feeling of the mind, they had no precise expression which was appropriated to that purpose, but were under a necessity of painting the emotion, or passion, which they felt, by allusion to those sensible objects which had most relation to it, and which could render it, in some sort, visible to others.

But it was not necessity alone, that gave rise to this figured style. Other circumstances also, at the commencement of Language, contributed to it. In the infancy of all societies, men are much under the dominion of imagination and passion. They live scattered and dispersed; they are unacquainted with the course of things; they are, every day, meeting with new and strange objects. Fear and Surprise, wonder and astonishment, are their most frequent passions. Their Language will necessarily partake of this character of their minds. They will be prone to exaggeration and hyperbole. They will be given to describe every thing with the strongest colours, and most vehement expressions; infinitely more than men living in the advanced and cultivated periods of Society, when their imagination is more chastened, their passions are more tamed, and a wider experience has rendered the objects of life more familiar to them. Even the manner in which I before showed that the first tribes of men uttered their words, would have considerable influence on their style. Wherever strong exclamations, tones, and gestures, enter much into conversation, the imagination is always more exercised; a greater effort of fancy and passion is excited. Consequently, the fancy kept awake, and rendered more sprightly by this mode of utterance, operates upon style, and enlivens it more.

These reasonings are confirmed by undoubted facts. The style of all the most early Languages, among nations who are in the first and rude periods of Society, is found, without exception, to be full of figures; hyperbolical and picturesque in a high degree. We have a striking instance of this in the American Languages, which are known, by the most authentic accounts, to be figurative to excess. The Iroquois and Illinois carry on their treaties and public transactions with bolder metaphors, and greater pomp of style, than we use in our poetical productions.

Thus, to give an instance of the singular style of these nations, the Five Nations of Canada, when entering on a treaty of peace with us, expressed themselves by their Chiefs, in the following Language: We are happy in having buried under ground the red ax, that has so often been dyed with the blood of our brethren. Now, in this sort, we inter the ax, and plant the tree of peace. We plant a tree, whose top will reach the sun; and its branches spread abroad, so that it shall be seen afar off. May its growth never be stifled and choked; but may it shade both your country and ours with its leaves! Let us make fast its roots, and extend them to the utmost of your colonies. If the French should come to shake this tree, we would know it by the motion of its roots reaching into our country. May the Great Spirit allow us to rest in tranquillity upon our mats, and never again dig up the ax to cut down the tree of peace! Let the earth be trod hard over it, where it lies buried. Let a strong stream run under the pit, to wash the evil away out of our sight and remembrance. -- The fire that had long burned in Albany is extinguished. The bloody bed is washed

clean, and the tears are wiped from our eyes. We now renew the covenant chain of friendship. Let it be kept bright and clean as silver, and not suffered to contract any rust. Let not any one pull away his arm from it. These passages are extracted from Cadwassader Colden's History of the Five Indian Nations; where it appears, from the authentic documents he produces, that such is their genuine style.

Another remarkable instance is, the style of the Old Testament, which is carried on by constant allusions to sensible objects. Iniquity, or guilt, is expressed by A SPOTTED GARMENT; misery, by DRINKING THE CUP OF ASTONISHMENT; vain pursuits, by FEEDING ON ASHES; a sinful life, by A CROOKED PATH; prosperity, by THE CANDLE OF THE LORD SHINING ON OUR HEAD; and the like, in innumerable instances. Hence, we have been accustomed to call this sort of style the Oriental Style; as fancying it to be peculiar to the nations of the East: Whereas, from the American Style, and from many other instances, it plainly appears not to have been peculiar to any one region or climate; but to have been common to all nations, in certain periods of Society and Language.

Hence, we may receive some light concerning that seeming paradox, that Poetry is more ancient than Prose. I shall have occasion to discuss this point fully hereafter, when I come to treat of the Nature and Origin of Poetry. At present, it is sufficient to observe, that, from what has been said it plainly appears, that the style of all Language must have been originally poetical; strongly tinged with that enthusiasm, and that descriptive, metaphorical expression, which distinguishes Poetry.

As Language, in its progress, began to grow more copious, it gradually lost that figurative style, which was its early character. When men were furnished with proper and familiar names for every object, both sensible and moral, they were not obliged to use so many circumlocutions. Style became more precise, and, of course, more simple. Imagination too, in proportion as Society advanced, had less influence over mankind. The vehement manner of speaking by tones and gestures, began to be disused. The understanding was more exercised; the fancy, less. Intercourse among mankind becoming more extensive and frequent, clearness of style, in signifying their meaning to each other, was the chief object of attention. In place of Poets, Philosophers became the instructors of men; and, in their reasonings on all different subjects, introduced that plainer and simpler style of composition, which we now call Prose. Among the Greeks, Pherecydes of Scyros, the Master of Pythagoras, is recorded to have been the first, who, in this sense, composed any writing in prose. The ancient metaphorical and poetical dress of Language, was now laid aside from the intercourse of men, and reserved for those occasions only, on which ornament was professedly studied.

Thus I have pursued the History of Language through some of the variations it has undergone: I have considered it, in the first structure, and composition, of words; in the manner of uttering or pronouncing words; and in the style and character of Speech. I have yet to consider it in another view, respecting the order and arrangement of words; when we shall find a progress to have taken place, similar to what I have been now illustrating.

LECTURE VII

The RISE and PROGRESS of LANGUAGE, and of WRITING

When we attend to the order in which words are arranged in a sentence, or significant proposition, we find a very remarkable difference between the ancient and the modern Tongues. The consideration of this will serve to unfold farther the genius of Language, and to show the causes of those alterations, which it has undergone, in the progress of Society.

In order to conceive distinctly the nature of that alteration of which I now speak, let us go back, as we did

formerly, to the most early period of Language. Let us figure to ourselves a Savage, who beholds some object, such as fruit, which raises his desire, and who requests another to give it to him. Supposing our Savage to be unacquainted with words, he would, in that case, labour to make himself be understood, by pointing earnestly at the object which he desired, and uttering at the same time a passionate cry. Supposing him to have acquired words, the first word which he uttered would, of course, be the name of that object. He would not express himself, according to our English order of construction, GIVE ME FRUIT; but, according to the Latin order, FRUIT GIVE ME; FRUCTUM DA MIHI: for this plain reason, that his attention was wholly directed towards fruit, the desired object. This was the exciting idea; the object which moved him to speak, and, of course, would be the first named. Such an arrangement is precisely putting into words the gesture which nature taught the Savage to make, before he was acquainted with words; and therefore it may be depended upon as certain, that he would fall most readily into this arrangement.

Accustomed now to a different method of ordering our words, we call this an inversion, and consider it as a forced and unnatural order of Speech. But though not the most logical, it is, however, in one view, the most natural order; because, it is the order suggested by imagination and desire, which always impel us to mention their object in the first place. We might therefore conclude, “a priori”, that this would be the order in which words were most commonly arranged at the beginnings of Language; and accordingly we find, in fact, that, in this order, words are arranged in most of the ancient Tongues; as in the Greek and the Latin; and it is said also, in the Russian, the Slavonic, the Gaelic, and several of the American Tongues.

In the Latin Language, the arrangement which most commonly obtains, is, to place first, in the sentence, that word which expresses the principal object of the discourse, together with its circumstances; and afterwards, the person, or the thing that acts upon it. Thus Sallust, comparing together the mind and the body; ANIMI IMPERIO, CORPORIS FERVITIO, MAGIS UTIMUR; which order certainly renders the sentence more lively and striking, than when it is arranged according to our English construction; WE MAKE MOST USE OF THE DIRECTION OF THE FOUL, AND OF THE SERVICE OF THE BODY. The Latin order gratifies more the rapidity of the imagination, which naturally runs first to that which is its chief object; and having once named it, carries it in view throughout the rest of the sentence. In the same manner in poetry:

Justum & tenacem propositi virum,
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
Non vultus instantis tyranni,
Mente quatit folida.-----

Every person of taste must be sensible, that here the words are arranged with a much greater regard to the figure which the several objects make in the fancy, than our English construction admits; which would require the JUSTUM & TENACEM PROPOSITI VIRUM, though, undoubtedly, the capital object in the sentence, to be thrown into the last place.

I have said, that, in the Greek and Roman Languages, the most common arrangement is, to place that first which strikes the imagination of the speaker most. I do not, however, pretend, that this holds without exception. Sometimes regard to the harmony of the period requires a different order; and in Languages susceptible of so much musical beauty, and pronounced with so much tone and modulation as were used by those nations, the harmony of periods was an object carefully studied. Sometimes too, attention to the perspicuity, to the force, or to the artful suspension of the speaker’s meaning, alter this order; and produce such varieties in the arrangement, that it is not easy to reduce them to any one principle. But, in general, this was the genius and character of most of the ancient Languages, to give such full liberty to the collocation of words, as allowed them to assume whatever order was most agreeable to

the speaker's imagination. The Hebrew is, indeed, an exception: which, though not altogether without inversions, yet employs them less frequently, and approaches nearer to the English construction, than either the Greek or the Latin.

An English writer, paying a compliment to a great man, would say thus: IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO PASS OVER, IN SILENCE, SUCH REMARKABLE MILDNESS, SUCH SINGULAR AND UNHEARD-OF CLEMENCY, AND SUCH UNUSUAL MODERATION, IN THE EXERCISE OF SUPREME POWER. Here we have, first presented to us, the person who speaks, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR "ME"; next, what that person is to do, IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM "TO PASS OVER IN SILENCE"; and lastly, the object which moves him so to do, THE MILDNESS, CLEMENCY, AND MODERATION OF HIS PATRON. Cicero, from whom I have translated these words, just reverses this order; beginning with the object, placing that first which was the exciting idea in the speaker's mind, and ending with the speaker and his action. TANTAM MANSUETUDINEM, TAM INUSITATAM INAUDITAMQUE CLEMENTIAM, TANTUMQUE IN FUMMA POTESTATE RERUM OMNIUM MODUM, TACITUS NULLO MODO PRAETERIRE POSSUM. (Orat. pro Marcell.)

The Latin order is more animated; the English, more clear and distinct. The Romans generally arranged their words according to the order in which the ideas rose in the speaker's imagination. We arrange them according to the order in which the understanding directs those ideas to be exhibited, in succession, to the view of another. Our arrangement, therefore, appears to be the consequence of greater refinement in the art of Speech; as far as clearness in communication is understood to be the end of Speech.

In poetry, where we are supposed to rise above the ordinary style, and to speak the Language of fancy and passion, our arrangement is not altogether so limited; but some greater liberty is allowed for transposition, and inversion. Even there, however, that liberty is confined within narrow bounds, in comparison of the Ancient Languages. The different modern Tongues vary from one another, in this respect. The French Language is, of them all, the most determinate in the order of its words, and admits the least of inversion, either in prose or poetry. The English admits it more. But the Italian retains the most of the ancient transpositive character; though one is apt to think it attended with a little obscurity in the style of some of their authors, who deal most in these transpositions.

It is proper, next, to observe, that there is one circumstance in the structure of all the modern Tongues, which, of necessity, limits their arrangement, in a great measure, to one fixed and determinate train. We have disused those differences of termination, which, in the Greek and Latin, distinguished the several cases of nouns, and tenses of verbs; and which, thereby, pointed out the mutual relation of the several words in a sentence to one another, though the related words were disjoined, and placed in different parts of the sentence. This is an alteration in the structure of Language, of which I shall have occasion to pay more in the next Lecture. One obvious effect of it is, that we have now, for the most part, no way left us to shew the close relation of any two words to each other in meaning, but by placing them close to one another in the period. For instance; the Romans could, with propriety, express themselves thus;

Extinctum nymphae crudeli fenere Daphnim Flebant.-----

Because EXTINCTUM & DAPHNIM, being both in the accusative case, this showed, that the adjective and the substantive were related to each other, though placed at the two extremities of the line; and that both were governed by the active verb FLEBANT, to which NYMPHAE plainly appeared to be the nominative. The different terminations here reduced all into order, and made the connection of the several words perfectly clear. But let us translate these words literally into English, according to the Latin arrangement; DEAD THE NYMPHS BY A CRUEL FATE DAPHNIS LAMENTED; and they become a perfect riddle, in which it is impossible to find any meaning.

It was by means of this contrivance, which obtained in almost all the ancient Languages, of varying the termination of nouns and verbs, and thereby pointing out the concordance, and the government of the words, in a sentence, that they enjoyed so much liberty of transposition, and could marshal and arrange their words in any way that gratified the imagination, or pleased the ear. When Language came to be modelled by the northern nations who overran the empire, they dropped the cases of nouns, and the different termination of verbs, because they placed no great value upon the advantages arising from such a structure of Language. They were attentive only to clearness, and copiousness of expression. They neither regarded much the harmony of sound, nor sought to gratify the imagination by the collocation of words. They studied solely to express themselves in such a manner as should exhibit their ideas to others in the most distinct and intelligible order. And hence, if our Language, by reason of the simple arrangement of its words, possesses less harmony, less beauty, and less force, than the Greek or Latin; it is, however, in its meaning, more obvious and plain.

Thus I have shewn what the natural Progress of Language has been, in several material articles; and this account of the Genius and Progress of Language, lays a foundation for many observations, both curious and useful. From what has been said in this, and the preceding Lecture, it appears, that Language was, at first, barren in words, but descriptive by the sound of these words; and expressive in the manner of uttering them, by the aid of significant tones and gestures: Style was figurative and poetical: arrangement was fanciful and lively. It appears, that, in all the successive changes which Language has undergone, as the world advanced, the understanding has gained ground on the fancy and imagination. The Progress of Language, in this respect, resembles the progress of age in man. The imagination is most vigorous and predominant in youth; with advancing years, the imagination cools, and the understanding ripens. Thus Language, proceeding from sterility to copiousness, hath, at the same time, proceeded from vivacity to accuracy; from fire and enthusiasm, to coolness and precision. Those characters of early Language, descriptive sound, vehement tones and gestures, figurative style, and inverted arrangement, all hang together, have a mutual influence on each other; and have all gradually given place to arbitrary sounds, calm pronunciation, simple style, plain arrangement. Language is become, in modern times, more correct, indeed, and accurate; but, however, less striking and animated: In its ancient state, more favourable to poetry and oratory; in its present, to reason and philosophy.

Having finished my account of the Progress of Speech, I proceed to give an account of the Progress of Writing, which next demands our notice; though it will not require so full a discussion as the former subject.

Next to Speech, Writing is, beyond doubt, the most useful art which men possess. It is plainly an improvement upon Speech, and therefore must have been posterior to it in order of time. At first, men thought of nothing more than communicating their thoughts to one another, when present, by means of words, or sounds, which they uttered. Afterwards, they devised this further method, of mutual communication with one another, when absent, by means of marks or characters presented to the eye, which we call Writing.

Written characters are of two sorts. They are either signs for things, or signs for words. Of the former sort, signs of things, are the pictures, hieroglyphics, and symbols, employed by the ancient nations; of the latter sort, signs for words, are the alphabetical characters, now employed by all Europeans. These two kinds of Writing are generically, and essentially, distinct.

Pictures were, undoubtedly, the first essay towards Writing. Imitation is so natural to man, that, in all ages, and among all nations, some methods have obtained, of copying or tracing the likeness of sensible objects. Those methods would soon be employed by men for giving some imperfect information to

others, at a distance, of what had happened; or, for preserving the memory of facts which they sought to record. Thus, to signify that one man had killed another, they drew the figure of one man stretched upon the earth, and of another standing by him with a deadly weapon in his hand. We find, in fact, that, when America was first discovered, this was the only sort of Writing known in the kingdom of Mexico. By historical pictures, the Mexicans are said to have transmitted the memory of the most important transactions of their empire. These, however, must have been extremely imperfect records; and the nations who had no other, must have been very gross and rude. Pictures could do no more than delineate external events. They could neither exhibit the connections of them, nor describe such qualities as were not visible to the eye, nor convey any idea of the dispositions, or words, of men.

To supply, in some degree, this defect, there arose, in process of time, the invention of what are called, Hieroglyphical Characters; which may be considered as the second stage of the Art of Writing. Hieroglyphics consist in certain symbols, which are made to stand for invisible objects, on account of an analogy or resemblance which such symbols were supposed to bear to the objects. Thus, an eye, was the hieroglyphical symbol of knowledge; a circle, of eternity, which has neither beginning, nor end. Hieroglyphics, therefore, were a more refined and extensive species of painting. Pictures delineated the resemblance of external visible objects. Hieroglyphics painted invisible objects, by analogies taken from the external world.

Among the Mexicans, were found some traces of hieroglyphical characters, intermixed with their historical pictures. But Egypt was the country where this sort of Writing was most studied, and brought into a regular art. In hieroglyphics was conveyed all the boasted wisdom of their priests. According to the properties which they ascribed to animals, or the qualities with which they supposed natural objects to be endowed, they pitched upon them to be endowed, they pitched upon them to be the emblems, or hieroglyphics, of moral objects; and employed them in their Writing for that end. Thus, ingratitude was denominated by a viper; imprudence, by a fly; wisdom, by an ant; victory, by a hawk; a dutiful child, by a stork; a man universally shunned, by an eel, which they supposed to be found in company with no other fish. Sometimes they joined together two or more of these hieroglyphical characters; as, a serpent with a hawk's head; to denote nature, with God presiding over it. But, as many of those properties of objects which they assumed for the foundation of their hieroglyphics, were merely imaginary, and the allusions drawn from them were forced and ambiguous; as the conjunction of their characters rendered them still more obscure, and must have expressed very indistinctly the connections and relations of things; this sort of Writing could be no other than enigmatical, and confused, in the highest degree; and must have been a very imperfect vehicle of knowledge of any kind.

It has been imagined, that hieroglyphics were an invention of the Egyptian priests, for concealing their learning from common view; and that, upon this account, it was preferred by them to the alphabetical method of Writing. But this is certainly a mistake. Hieroglyphics were, undoubtedly, employed, at first, from necessity, not from choice or refinement; and would never have been thought of, if alphabetical characters had been known. The nature of the invention plainly shows it to have been one of those gross and rude essays towards Writing, which were adopted in the early ages of the world; in order to extend farther the first method which they had employed of simple pictures, or representations of visible objects. Indeed, in after-times, when alphabetical Writing was introduced into Egypt, and the hieroglyphical was, of course, fallen into disuse, it is known, that the priests still employed the hieroglyphical characters, as a sacred kind of Writing, now become peculiar to themselves, and serving to give an air of mystery to their learning and religion. In this state, the Greeks found hieroglyphical Writing, when they began to have intercourse with Egypt; and some of their writers mistook this use, to which they found it applied, for the cause that had given rise to the invention.

As Writing advanced, from pictures of visible objects, to hieroglyphics, or symbols of things invisible;

from these latter, it advanced, among some nations, to simple arbitrary marks which stood for objects, though without any resemblance or analogy to the objects signified. Of this nature was the method of Writing practiced among the Peruvians. They made use of small cords, of different colours; and by knots upon these, of various sizes, and differently ranged, they contrived signs for giving information, and communicating their thoughts to one another.

Of this nature also, are the written characters, which are used to this day, throughout the great empire of China. The Chinese have no alphabet of letters, or simple sounds, which compose their words. But every single character which they use in Writing, is significant of an idea; it is a mark which stands for some one thing, or object. By consequence, the number of these characters must be immense. It must correspond to the whole number of objects, or ideas, which they have occasion to express; that is, to the whole number of words which they employ in Speech: nay, it must be greater than the number of words; one word, by varying the tone, with which it is spoken, may be made to signify several different things. They are said to have seventy thousand of those written characters. To read and write them to perfection, is the study of a whole life; which subjects learning, among them, to infinite disadvantage; and must have greatly retarded the progress of all science.

Concerning the origin of these Chinese characters, there have been different opinions, and much controversy. According to the most probable accounts, the Chinese Writing began, like the Egyptian, with pictures, and hieroglyphical figures. These figures being, in progress, abbreviated in their form, for the sake of writing them easily, and greatly enlarged in the number, passed, at length, into those marks or characters which they now use, and which have spread themselves through several nations of the East. For we are informed, that the Japanese, the Tonquinese, and the Coroeans, who speak different languages from one another, and from the inhabitants of China, use, however, the same written characters with them; and, by this means, correspond intelligibly with each other in Writing, though ignorant of the Language spoken in their several countries; a plain proof, that the Chinese characters are, like hieroglyphics, independent of Language; are signs of things, not of words.

We have one instance of this sort of Writing in Europe. Our cyphers, as they are called, or arithmetical figures, 1, 2, 3, 4, &c. which we have derived from the Arabians, are significant marks, precisely of the same nature with the Chinese characters. They have no dependence on words; but each figure denotes an object; denotes the number for which it stands; and, accordingly, on being presented to the eye, is equally understood by all the nations who have agreed in the use of these cyphers; by Italians, Spaniards, French, and English, however different the Languages of those nations are from one another, and whatever different names they give, in their respective Languages, to each numerical cypher.

As far, then, as we have yet advanced, nothing has appeared which resembles our letters, or which can be called Writing, in the sense we now give to that term. What we have hitherto seen, were all direct signs for things, and made no use of the medium of sound, or words; either signs by representation, as the Mexican pictures; or signs by analogy, as the Egyptian hieroglyphics; or signs by institution, as the Peruvian knots, the Chinese characters, and the Arabian cyphers.

At length, in different nations, men became sensible of the imperfection, the ambiguity, and the tediousness of each of these methods of communication with one another. They began to consider, that by employing signs which should stand not directly for things, but for the words which they used in Speech for naming these things, a considerable advantage would be gained. For they reflected farther, that though the number of words in every Language be, indeed, very great, yet the number of articulate sounds, which are used in composing these words, is comparatively small. The same simple sounds are continually recurring and repeated; and are combined together, in various ways, for forming all the variety of words which we utter. They bethought themselves, therefore, of inventing signs, not for each word, by it-

self, but for each of those simple sounds which we employ in forming our words; and, by joining together a few of those signs, they saw that it would be practicable to express, in Writing, the whole combinations of sounds which our words require.

The first step, in this new progress, was the invention of an alphabet of syllables, which probably preceded the invention of an alphabet of letters, among some of the ancient nations; and which is said to be retained, to this day, in Ethiopia, and some countries of India. By fixing upon a particular mark, or character, for every syllable in the Language, the number of characters, necessary to be used in Writing, was reduced within a much smaller compass than the number of words in the Language. Still, however, the number of characters was great; and must have continued to render both reading and writing very laborious arts. Till, at last, some happy genius arose; and tracing the sounds made by the human voice, to their most simple elements, reduced them to a very few vowels and consonants; and, by affixing to each of these the signs which we now call Letters, taught men how, by their combinations, to put into Writing all the different words, or combinations of sound, which they employed in Speech. By being reduced to this simplicity, the art of Writing was brought to its highest state of perfection; and, in this state, we now enjoy it in all the countries of Europe.

To whom we are indebted for this sublime and refined discovery, does not appear. Concealed by the darkness of remote antiquity, the great inventor is deprived of those honours which would still be paid to his memory, by all the lovers of knowledge and learning. It appears from the books which Moses has written, that, among the Jews, and probably among the Egyptians, letters had been invented prior to his age. The universal tradition among the ancients is, that they were first imported into Greece by Cadmus the Phoenician; who, according to Sir Isaac Newton's system, is contemporary with King David. As the Phoenicians are not known to have been the inventors of any art or science, though, by means of their extensive commerce, they propagated the discoveries made by other nations, the most probable and natural account of the origin of alphabetical characters is, that they took rise in Egypt, the first civilized kingdom of which we have any authentic accounts, and the great source of arts and polity among the ancients. In that country, the favorite study of hieroglyphical characters, had directed much attention to the art of Writing. Their hieroglyphics are known to have been intermixed with abbreviated symbols, and arbitrary marks; whence, at last, they caught the idea of contriving marks, not for things merely, but for sounds. Accordingly, Plato (in Phaedro) expressly attributes the invention of letters to Theuth, the Egyptian, who is supposed to have been the Hermes, or Mercury, of the Greeks. Cadmus himself, though he passed from Phoenicia to Greece, yet is affirmed, by several of the ancients, to have been originally of Thebes in Egypt. Most probably, Moses carried with him the Egyptian letters into the land of Canaan; and there being adopted by the Phoenicians, who inhabited part of that country, they were transmitted into Greece.

The alphabet which Cadmus brought into Greece was imperfect, and is said to have contained only sixteen letters. The rest were afterwards added, according as signs for proper sounds were found to be wanting. It is curious to observe, that the letters which we use at this day, can be traced back to this very alphabet of Cadmus. The Roman alphabet, which obtains with us, and with most of the European nations, is plainly formed on the Greek, with a few variations. And all learned men observe, that the Greek characters, especially according to the manner in which they are formed in the oldest inscriptions, have a remarkable conformity with the Hebrew or Samaritan characters, which, it is agreed, are the same with the Phoenician, or the alphabet of Cadmus. Invert the Greek characters from left to right, according to the Phoenician and Hebrew manner of Writing, and they are nearly the same. Besides the conformity of figure, the names of denominations of the letters, alpha, beta, gamma, &c. and the order in which the letters are arranged, in all the several alphabets, Phoenician, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman, agree so much, as amounts to a demonstration, that they were all derived originally from the same source. An invention so useful and simple, was greedily received by mankind, and propagated with speed and facility through many different nations.

The letters were, originally, written from the right hand towards the left; that is, in a contrary order to what we now practice. This manner of Writing obtained among the Assyrians, Phoenicians, Arabians, and Hebrews; and from some very old inscriptions, appears to have obtained also among the Greeks. Afterwards, the Greeks adopted a new method, writing their lines alternately from the right to the left, and from the left to the right, which was called "Boustrophedon"; or, writing after the manner in which oxen plow the ground. Of this, several specimens still remain; particularly, the inscription of the famous Sigaeon monument; and down to the days of Solon, the legislator of Athens, this continued to be the common method of Writing. At length, the motion from the left hand to the right being found more natural and commodious, the practice of Writing, in this direction, prevailed throughout all the countries of Europe.

Writing was long a kind of engraving. Pillars, and tables of stone, were first employed for this purpose, and afterwards, plates of the softer metals, such as lead. In proportion as Writing became more common, lighter and more portable substances were employed. The leaves, and the bark of certain trees, were used in some countries; and in others, tablets of wood, covered with a thin coat of soft wax, on which the impression was made with a stylus of iron. In later times, the hides of animals, properly prepared, and polished into parchment, were the most common materials. our present method of writing on paper, is an invention of no greater antiquity than the fourteenth century.

Thus I have given some account of the Progress of these two great arts, Speech and Writing; by which men's thoughts are communicated, and the foundation laid for all knowledge and improvement. Let us conclude the subject, with comparing in a few words, spoken Language, and written Language; or words uttered in our hearing, with words represented to the eye; where we shall find several advantages and disadvantages to be balanced on both sides.

The advantages of Writing above Speech are, that Writing is both a more extensive, and a more permanent method of communication. More extensive; as it is not confined within the narrow circle of those who hear our words, but, by means of written characters, we can send our thoughts abroad, and propagate them through the world; we can lift our voice, so as to speak to the most distant regions of the earth. More permanent also; as it prolongs this voice to the most distant ages; it gives us the means of recording our sentiments to futurity, and of perpetuating the instructive memory of past transactions. It likewise affords this advantage to such as read, above such as hear, that, having the written characters before their eyes, they can arrest the sense of the writer. They can pause, and revolve, and compare, at their leisure, one passage with another; whereas, the voice is fugitive and passing; you must catch the words the moment they are uttered, or you lose them for ever.

But, although these be so great advantages of written Language, that Speech, without Writing, would have been very inadequate for the instruction of mankind; yet we must not forget to observe, that spoken Language has a great superiority over written Language, in point of energy or force. The voice of the living Speaker, makes an impression on the mind, much stronger than can be made by the perusal of any Writing. The tones of voice, the looks and gesture, which accompany discourse, and which no Writing can convey, render discourse, when it is well managed, infinitely more clear, and more expressive, than the most accurate Writing. For tones, looks, and gestures, are natural interpreters of the sentiments of the mind. They remove ambiguities; they enforce impressions; they operate on us by means of sympathy, which is one of the most powerful instruments of persuasion. Our sympathy is always awakened more, by hearing the Speaker, than by reading his works in our closet. Hence, though Writing may answer the purposes of mere instruction, yet all the great and high efforts of eloquence must be made, by means of spoken, not of written, Language.

LECTURE VIII

The STRUCTURE of LANGUAGE

After having given an account of the Rise and Progress of Language, I proceed to treat of its Structure, or of General Grammar. The Structure of Language is extremely artificial; and there are few sciences, in which a deeper, or more refined logic, is employed, than in Grammar. It is apt to be slighted by superficial thinkers, as belonging to those rudiments of knowledge, which were inculcated upon us in our earliest youth. But what was then inculcated before we could comprehend its principles, would abundantly repay our study in maturer years; and to the ignorance of it, must be attributed many of those fundamental defects which appear in writing.

Few authors have written with philosophical accuracy on the principles of General Grammar; and, what is more to be regretted, fewer still have thought of applying those principles to the English Language. While the French Tongue has long been an object of attention to many able and ingenious writers of that nation, who have considered its construction, and determined its propriety with great accuracy, the Genius and Grammar of the English, to the reproach of the country, have not been studied with equal care, or ascertained with the same precision. Attempts have been made, indeed, of late, towards supplying this defect; and some able writers have entered on the subject; but much remains yet to be done.

I do not propose to give any system, either of Grammar in general, or of English Grammar in particular. A minute discussion of the niceties of Language would carry us too much off from other objects, which demand our attention in this course of Lectures. But I propose to give a general view of the chief principles relating to this subject, in observations on the several parts of which Speech or Language is composed; remarking, as I go along, the peculiarities of our own Tongue. After which, I shall make some more particular remarks on the Genius of the English Language.

The first thing to be considered, is, the division of the several parts of Speech. The essential parts of Speech are the same in all Languages. There must always be some words which denote the names of objects, or mark the subject of discourse; other words, which denote the qualities of those objects, and express what we affirm concerning them; and other words, which point out their connections and relations. Hence, substantives, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, prepositions, and conjunctions, must necessarily be found in all Languages. The most simple and comprehensive division of the parts of Speech is, into substantives, attributives, and connectives. Substantives, are all the words which express the names of objects, or the subjects of discourse; attributives, are all the words which express any attribute, property, or action of the former; connectives, are what express the connections, relations, and dependencies, which take place among them. The common grammatical division of Speech into eight parts; nouns, pronouns, verbs, participles, adverbs, prepositions, interjections, and conjunctions, is not very logical, as might be easily shewn; as it comprehends, under the general term of nouns, both substantives and adjectives, which are parts of Speech generically and essentially distinct; while it makes a separate part of speech of participles, which are no other than verbal adjectives. However, as these are the terms to which our ears have been most familiarized, and, as an exact logical division is of no great consequence to our present purpose, it will be better to make use of these known terms than of any other.

We are naturally led to begin with the consideration of substantive nouns, which are the foundation of all Grammar, and may be considered as the most ancient part of Speech. For, assuredly; as soon as men had got beyond simple interjections, or exclamations of passion, and began to communicate themselves by discourse, they would be under a necessity of assigning names to the objects they saw around them; which, in Grammatical Language, is called the Invention of substantive nouns. And here, at our first setting out, somewhat curious occurs. The individual objects which surround us, are infinite in number. A

savage, wherever he looked, beheld forests and trees. To give separate names to every one of those trees, would have been an endless and impracticable undertaking. His first object was, to give a name to that particular tree, whose fruit relieved his hunger, or whose shade protected him from the sun. But observing, that though other trees were distinguished from this by peculiar qualities of size or appearance, yet, that they also agreed and resembled one another, in certain common qualities, such as springing from a root, and bearing branches and leaves, he formed, in his mind, some general idea of those common qualities, and ranging all that possessed them under one class of objects, he called that whole class, "a tree". Longer experience taught him to subdivide this genus into the several species of oak, pine, ash, and the rest, according as his observation extended to the several qualities in which these trees agreed or differed.

(I do not mean to assert, that, among all nations, the first invented words were simple and regular substantive nouns. Nothing is more difficult, than to ascertain the precise steps by which men proceeded in the formation of Language. Names for objects must, doubtless, have arisen in the most early stages of Speech. But, it is probable, as the learned Author of the Treatise, "On the Origin and Progress of Language", has shown [vol. i. p. 371 395.], that, among several savage tribes, some of the first articulate sounds were formed, denoted a whole sentence rather than the name of a particular object; conveying some information, or expressing some desires or fears, suited to the circumstances in which that tribe was placed, or relating to the business they had most frequent occasion to carry on; as, the lion is coming, the river is swelling, &c. Many of their first words, it is likewise probable, were not simple substantive nouns, but substantives, accompanied with some of those attributes, in conjunction with which they were most frequently accustomed to behold them; as, the great bear, the little hut, the wound made by the hatchet, &c. Of all which, the Author produces instances from several of the American Languages; and it is, undoubtedly, suitable to the natural course of the operations of the human mind, thus to begin with particulars the most obvious to sense, and to proceed, from these, to more general expressions. He likewise observes, that the words of those primitive tongues are far from being, as we might suppose them, rude and short, and crowded with consonants; but, on the contrary, are, for the most part, long words, and full of vowels. This is the consequence of their being formed upon the natural sounds which the voice utters with most ease, a little varied and distinguished by articulation; and he shows this to hold, in fact, among most of the barbarous Languages which are known.)

But, still, he made use only of general terms in Speech. For the oak, the pine, and the ash, were names of whole classes of objects; each of which included an immense number of undistinguished individuals. Here then, it appears, that though the formation of abstract, or general conceptions, is supposed to be a difficult operation of the mind; such conceptions must have entered into the very first formation of Language. For, if we except only the proper names of persons, such as Caesar, John, Peter, all the other substantive nouns which we employ in discourse, are the names, not of individual objects, but of very extensive genera, or species of objects; as, man, lion, house, river, &c. We are not, however, to imagine, that this invention of general, or abstract terms, requires any great exertion of metaphysical capacity: For, by whatever steps the mind proceeds in it, it is certain, that, when men have once observed resemblances among objects, they are naturally inclined to call all those which resemble one another, by one common name; and of course, to class them under one species. We may daily observe this practiced by children, in their first attempts towards acquiring Language.

But now, after Language had proceeded as far as I have described, the notification which it made of objects was still very imperfect: For, when one mentioned to another, in discourse, any substantive noun; such as, man, lion, or tree, how was it to be known which man, which lion, or which tree he meant, among the many comprehended under one name? Here occurs a very curious, and a very useful contrivance for specifying the individual object intended, by means of that part of Speech called, the Article.

The force of the Article consists, in pointing, or singling out from the common mass, the individual of

which we mean to speak. In English, we have two Articles, “a” and “the”; “a” is more general and unlimited; “the” more definite and special. “A” is much the same with “one”, and marks only any one individual of a species; that individual being either unknown, or left undetermined; as, a lion, a king. “The”, which possesses more properly the force of the Article, ascertains some known or determined individual of the species; as, the lion, the king.

Articles are words of great use in Speech. In some Languages, however, they are not found. The Greeks have but one which answers to our definite, or proper Article, “the”. They have no word which answers to our Article “a”; but they supply its place by the absence of their Article. The Latins have no Article. In the room of it, they employ pronouns, as, hic, ille, iste, for pointing out the objects which they want to distinguish. NOSTER FERMO, says Quintilian, ARTICULOS NON DEFIDERAT, IDEOQUE IN ALIAS PARTES ORATIONIS SPARGUNTUR. This, however, appears to me a defect in the Latin tongue; as Articles contribute much to the clearness and precision of Language.

In order to illustrate this, remark, what difference there is in the meaning of the following expressions in English, depending wholly on the different employment of the Articles: THE SON OF A KING -- THE SON OF THE KING -- A SON OF THE KING’S. Each of these three phrases has an entirely different meaning, which I need not explain, because any one who understands the Language, conceives it clearly at first hearing, through the different application of the Articles, “a” and “the”. Whereas, in Latin, FILIUS REGIS, is wholly undetermined; and to explain, in which of these three senses it is to be understood, for it may bear any of them, a circumlocution of several words must be used. In the same manner, ARE YOU “A” KING? ARE YOU “THE” KING? are questions of quite separate import; which, however, are confounded together in the Latin phrase, ESNE TU REX? THOU ART “A” MAN, is a very general and harmless position; but, THOU ART “THE” MAN, is an assertion, capable, we know, of striking terror and remorse into the heart. These observations illustrate the force and importance of Articles: And, at the same time, I gladly lay hold of any opportunity of showing the advantages of our own Language.

Besides this quality of being particularized by the Article, three affections belong to substantive nouns, number, gender, and case, which require our consideration.

Number distinguishes them as one, or many, of the same kind, called the Singular and Plural; a distinction found in all Languages, and which must, indeed, have been coeval with the very infancy of Language; as there were few things which men had more frequent occasion to express, than the difference between one and many. For the greater facility of expressing it, it has, in all Languages, been marked by some variation made upon the substantive noun; as we see, in English, our plural is commonly formed by the addition of the letter S. In the Hebrew, Greek, and some other ancient Languages, we find, not only a plural, but a dual number; the rise of which may very naturally be accounted for, from separate terms of numbering not being yet invented, and one, two, and many, being all, or, at least, the chief numeral distinctions which men, at first, had any occasion to take notice of.

Gender, is an affection of substantive nouns, which will lead us into more discussion than number. Gender, being founded on the distinction of the two sexes, it is plain, that, in a proper sense, it can only find a place in the names of living creatures, which admit the distinction of male and female; and, therefore, can be ranged under the masculine or feminine genders. All other substantive nouns ought to belong, to what grammarians call, the Neuter Gender, which is meant to imply the negation of either sex. But, with respect to this distribution, somewhat singular hath obtained in the structure of Language. For, in correspondence to that distinction of male and female sex, which runs through all the classes of animals, men have, in most Languages, ranked a great number of inanimate objects also, under the like distinctions of masculine and feminine. Thus we find it, both in the Greek and Latin Tongues. “Gladius”, a sword, for instance, is masculine; “sagitta”, an arrow, is feminine; and this assignation of sex to inanimate objects,

this distinction of them into masculine and feminine, appears often to be entirely capricious; derived from no other principle than the casual structure of the Language, which refers to a certain gender, words of a certain termination. In the Greek and Latin, however, all inanimate objects are not distributed into masculine and feminine; but many of them are also classed, where all of them ought to have been, under the neuter gender, as, “templum”, a church; “sedile”, a seat.

But the genius of the French and Italian Tongues differs, in this respect, from the Greek and Latin. In the French and Italian, from whatever cause it has happened, so it is, that the neuter gender is wholly unknown, and that all their names of inanimate objects are put upon the same footing with living creatures; and distributed, without exception, into masculine and feminine. The French have two articles, the masculine “le”, and the feminine “la”; and one or other of these is prefixed to all substantive nouns in the Language, to denote their gender. The Italians make the same universal use of their articles “il” and “lo”, for the masculine; and “la”, for the feminine.

In the English Language, it is remarkable that there obtains a peculiarity quite opposite. In the French and Italian, there is no neuter gender. In the English, when we use common discourse, all substantive nouns, that are not names of living creatures, are neuter, without exception. “He, she”, and “it”, are the marks, of the three genders; and we always use “it”, in speaking of any object where there is no sex, or where the sex is not known. The English is, perhaps, the only Language in the known world (except the Chinese, which is said to agree with it in this particular), where the distinction of gender is properly and philosophically applied in the use of words, and confined, as it ought to be, to mark the real distinctions of male and female.

Hence arises a very great and signal advantage of the English Tongue, which it is of consequence to remark. Though in common discourse, as I have already observed, we employ only the proper and literal distinction of sexes; yet the genius of the Language permits us, whenever it will add beauty to our discourse, to make the names of inanimate objects masculine or feminine in a metaphorical sense; and when we do so, we are understood to quit the literal style, and to use one of the figures of discourse.

For instance; if I am speaking of virtue, in the course of ordinary conversation, or of strict reasoning, I refer the word to no sex or gender; I say, VIRTUE IS ITS OWN REWARD; or, IT IS THE LAW OF OUR NATURE. But if I chuse to rise into a higher tone; if I seek to embellish and animate my discourse, I give a sex to virtue; I say, SHE DESCENDS FROM HEAVEN; SHE ALONE CONFERS TRUE HONOUR UPON MAN; HER GIFTS ARE THE ONLY DURABLE REWARDS. By this means, we have it in our power to vary our style at pleasure. By making a very slight alteration, we can personify any object that we chuse to introduce with dignity; and by this change of manner, we give warning, that we are passing from the strict and logical, to the ornamented and rhetorical style.

This is an advantage which, not only every poet, but every good writer and speaker in prose, is, on many occasions, glad to lay hold of, and improve: and it is an advantage peculiar to our Tongue; no other Language possesses it. For, in other Languages, every word has one fixed gender, masculine, feminine, or neuter, which can, upon no occasion, be changed. for instance, in Greek, “virtus” in Latin, and “la vertu” in French, are uniformly feminine. “She”, must always be the pronoun answering to the word, whether you be writing in poetry or prose, whether you be using the style of reasoning, or that of declamation: whereas, in English, we can either express ourselves with the philosophical accuracy of giving them gender, and transforming them into persons, we adapt them to the style of poetry, and, when it is proper, we enliven prose.

It deserves to be further remarked on this subject, that, when we employ that liberty which our Language allows, of ascribing sex to any inanimate object, we have not, however, the liberty of making it of what

gender we please, masculine or feminine; but are, in general, subjected to some rule of gender which the currency of Language has fixed to that object. The foundation of that rule is imagined, by Mr. Harris, in his PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY INTO THE PRINCIPLES OF GRAMMAR, to be laid in a certain distant resemblance, or analogy, to the natural distinction of the two sexes.

Thus, according to him, we commonly give the masculine gender to those substantive nouns used figuratively, which are conspicuous for the attributes of imparting, or communicating; which are by nature strong and efficacious, either to good or evil; or which have a claim to some eminence, whether laudable or not. Those again, he imagines, to be generally made feminine, which are conspicuous for the attributes of containing, and of bringing forth; which have more of the passive in their nature, than the active; which are peculiarly beautiful, or amiable; or which have respect to such excesses as are rather feminine than masculine. Upon these principles he takes notice, that the sun is always put in the masculine gender with us; the moon in the feminine, as being the receptacle of the sun's light. The earth is, universally, feminine. A ship, a country, a city, are likewise made feminine, as receivers, or containers. God, in all Languages, is masculine. Time, we make masculine, on account of its mighty efficacy; virtue, feminine, from its beauty, and its being the object of love. Fortune is always feminine. Mr. Harris imagines, that the reasons which determine the gender of such capital words as these, hold in most other Languages, as well as the English. This, however, appears doubtful. A variety of circumstances, which seem casual to us, because we cannot reduce them to principles, must, unquestionably, have influenced the original information of Languages; and in no article whatever does Language appear to have been more capricious, and to have proceeded less according to fixed rule, than in the imposition of gender upon things inanimate; especially among such nations as have applied the distinction of masculine and feminine to all substantive nouns.

Having discussed gender, I proceed, next, to another remarkable peculiarity of substantive nouns, which, in the style of grammar, is called, their declension by cases. Let us, first, consider what cases signify. In order to understand this, it is necessary to observe, that, after men had given names to external objects, had particularized them by means of the article, and distinguished them by number and gender, still their Language remained extremely imperfect, till they had devised some method of expressing the relations which those objects bore, one towards another. They would find it of little use to have a name for man, lion, tree, river, without being able, at the same time, to signify how these stood with respect to each other; whether, as approaching to, receding from, joined with, and the like. Indeed, the relations which objects bear to one another, are immensely numerous; and therefore, to devise names for them all, must have been among the last and most difficult refinements of Language. But, in its most early periods, it was absolutely necessary to express, in some way or other, such relations as were most important, and as occurred most frequently in common Speech. Hence the genitive, dative, and ablative cases of nouns, which express the noun itself, together with those relations, "of," "to," "from," "with," and "by"; the relations which we have the most frequent occasion to mention. The proper idea then of cases in declension, is no other than an expression of the state, or relations, which one object bears to another, denoted by some variation made upon the name of that object; most commonly in the final letters, and by some Languages, in the initial.

All Languages, however, do not agree in this mode of expression. The Greek, Latin, and several other Languages, use declension. The English, French, and Italian, do not; or; at most, use it very imperfectly. In place of the variations of cases, these modern Tongues express the relations of objects, by means of the words called Prepositions, which denote those relations, prefixed to the name of the object. English nouns have no case whatever, except a sort of genitive, commonly formed by the addition of the letter "s" to the noun; as when we say DRYDEN'S POEMS, meaning the Poems of Dryden. Our personal pronouns have also a case, which answers to the accusative of the Latin, "I, me -- ye, him, -- who, whom". There is nothing, then, or at least very little, in the Grammar of our Language, which corresponds to declension in

the ancient Languages.

Two questions, respecting this subject, may be put. First, Which of these methods of expressing relations, whether that by declension, or that by prepositions, was the most ancient usage in Language? And next, Which of them has the best effect? Both methods, it is plain, are the same as to the sense, and differ only in form. For the significance of the Roman Language would not have been altered, though the nouns, like ours, had been without cases, provided they had employed prepositions; and though, to express a disciple of Plato, they had said, DISCIPULUS DE PLATO, like the modern Italians, in place of DISCIPULUS PLATONIS.

Now, with respect to the antiquity of cases, although they may, on first view, seem to constitute a more artificial method than the other, of denoting relations, yet there are strong reasons for thinking that this was the earliest method practiced by men. We find, in fact, that declensions and cases are used in most of what are called the Mother Tongues, or Original Languages, as well as in the Greek and Latin. And a very natural and satisfied account can be given why this usage should have early obtained. Relations are the most abstract and metaphysical ideas of any which man have occasion to form, when they are considered by themselves, and separated from the related object. It would puzzle any man, as has been well observed by an Author on this subject, to give a distinct account of what is meant by such a word as “of”, or “from”, when it stands by itself, and to explain all that may be included under it. The first rude inventors of Language, therefore, would not, for a long while, arrive at such general terms. In place of considering any relation in the abstract, and devising a name for it, they would much more easily conceive it in conjunction with a particular object; and they would express their conceptions of it, by varying the name of that object through all the different cases; “hominis”, of a man; “homini”, to a man; “homine”, with a man, &c.

But, though this method of declension was, probably, the only method which men employed, at first, for denoting relations, yet, in progress of time, many other relations being observed, besides those which are signified by the cases of nouns, and men also becoming more capable of general and metaphysical ideas, separate names were gradually invented for all the relations which occurred, forming that part of Speech which we now call Prepositions. Prepositions being once introduced, they were found to be capable of supplying the place of cases, by being prefixed to the nominative of the noun. Hence, it came to pass, that, as nations were intermixed by migrations and conquests, and were obliged to learn, and adopt the Languages of one another, prepositions supplanted the use of cases and declensions. When the Italian Tongue, for instance, sprung out of the Roman, it was found more easy and simple, by the Gothic nations, to accommodate a few prepositions to the nominative of every noun, and to say, “di Roma,” “al Roma,” “di Carthago,” “Carthaginem”, which the use of declensions required in the ancient nouns. By this progress we can give a natural account how nouns, in our modern Tongues, come to be so void of declension: A progress which is fully illustrated in Dr. Adam Smith’s ingenious Dissertation on the Formation of Languages.

With regard to the other question on this subject, Which of these two methods is of the greater utility and beauty? We shall find advantages to be balanced on both sides. There is no doubt that, by abolishing cases, we have rendered the structure of modern Languages more simple. We have disembarassed it of all the intricacy which arose from the different forms of declension, of which the Romans had no fewer than five; and from all the irregularities in these several declensions. We have thereby rendered our Languages more easy to be acquired, and less subject to the perplexity of rules. But, though the simplicity and case of Language be great and estimable advantages, yet there are also such disadvantages attending the modern method, as leave the balance, on the whole, doubtful, or rather incline it to the side of antiquity.

For, in the first place, by our constant use of prepositions for expressing the relations of things, we have filled Language with a multitude of those little words, which are eternally occurring in every sentence, and may be thought thereby to have encumbered Speech, by an addition of terms; and by rendering it more prolix, to have enervated its force. In the second place, we have certainly rendered the sound of Language less agreeable to the ear, by depriving it of that variety and sweetness, which arose from the length of words, and the change of terminations, occasioned by the cases in the Greek and Latin. But, in the third place, the most material disadvantage is, that, by this abolition of cases, and by a similar alteration, of which I am to speak in the next Lecture, in the conjugation of verbs, we have deprived ourselves of that liberty of transposition in the arrangement of words, which the Ancient Languages enjoyed.

In the Ancient Tongues, as I formerly observed, the different terminations, produced by declension and conjugation, pointed out the reference of the several words of a sentence to one another, without the aid of juxtaposition; suffered them to be placed, without ambiguity, in whatever order was most suited to give force to the meaning, or harmony to the sound. But now, having none of those marks of relation incorporated with the words themselves, we have no other way left us, of showing what words in a sentence are most closely connected in meaning, than that of placing them close by one another in the period. The meaning of the sentence is brought out in separate members and portions; it is broken down and divided. Whereas the structure of the Greek and Roman sentences, by the government of their nouns and verbs, presented the meaning so interwoven and compounded in all its parts, as to make us perceive it in one united view. The closing words of the period ascertained the relation of each member to another; and all that ought to be connected in our idea, appeared connected in the expression. Hence, more brevity, more vivacity, more force. That luggage of particles (as an ingenious Author happily expresses it), which we are obliged always to carry along with us, both clogs style, and enfeebles sentiment.

Pronouns are the class of words most nearly related to substantive nouns; being, as the same imports, representatives, or substitutes, of nouns. "I," "thou," "he," "she," and "it," are no other than an abridged way of naming the persons, or objects, with which we have immediate intercourse, or to which we are obliged frequently to refer in discourse. Accordingly, they are subject to the same modifications with substantive nouns, of number, gender, and case. Only, with respect to gender, we may observe, that the pronouns of the first and second person, as they are called, "I" and "thou," do not appear to have had the distinctions of gender given them in any Language; for this plain reason, that, as they always refer to persons who are present to each other, when they speak, their sex must appear, and therefore needs not be marked by a masculine or feminine pronoun. But, as the third person may be absent, or unknown, the distinction of gender there becomes necessary; and accordingly, in English, it hath all the three genders belonging to it; "he," "she," "it." As to cases; even those Languages which have dropped them in substantive nouns, sometimes retain more of them in pronouns, for the sake of the greater readiness in expressing relations; as pronouns are words of such frequent occurrence in discourse. In English, most of our grammarians hold the personal pronouns to have two cases, besides the nominative; a genitive, and an accusative -- I, mine, me; --thou, thine, thee; --he, his, him; --who, whose, whom.

In the first stage of Speech, it is probable that the places of those pronouns were supplied, by pointing to the object when present, and naming it when absent. For one can hardly think that pronouns were of early invention; as they are words of such a particular and artificial nature. "I," "thou," "he," "it," it is to be observed, are not names peculiar to any single object, but so very general, that they may be applied to all persons, or objects, whatever, in certain circumstances. "It," is the most general term that can possibly be conceived, as it may stand for any one thing in the universe, of which we speak. At the same time, these pronouns have this quality, that, in the circumstances in which they are applied, they never denote more than one precise individual; which they ascertain, and specify, much in the same manner as is done by the article. So that pronouns are, at once, the most general, and the most particular words in Language. They are commonly the most irregular and troublesome words to the learner, in the Grammar of all

Tongues; as being the words most in common use, and subjected thereby to the greatest varieties.

Adjectives, or terms of quality, such as, “great,” “little,” “black,” “white,” “yours,” “ours”, are the plainest and simplest of all that class of words which are termed attributive. They are found in all Languages; and, in all Languages, must have been very early invented; as objects could not be distinguished from one another, nor any intercourse be carried on concerning them, till once names were given to their different qualities.

I have nothing to observe in relation to them, except that singularity which attends them in the Greek and Latin, of having the same form given them with substantive nouns; being declined, like them, by cases, and subjected to the like distinctions of number and gender. Hence it has happened, that grammarians have made them to belong to the same part of Speech, and divided the noun into substantive and adjective; an arrangement, founded more on attention to the external form of words, than to their nature and force. For adjectives, or terms of quality, have not, by their nature, the least resemblance to substantive nouns, as they never express any thing which can possibly subsist by itself; which is the very essence of the substantive noun. They are, indeed, more a-kin to verbs, which, like them, express the attribute of some substance.

It may, at first view, appear somewhat odd and fantastic, that adjectives should, in these ancient Languages, have assumed so much the form of substantives; since neither number, nor gender, nor cases, nor relations, have any thing to do, in a proper sense, with mere qualities, such as, “good” or “great,” “soft” or “hard”. And yet “bonus”, and “magnus”, and “tener”, have their singular and plural, their masculine and feminine, their genitives and datives, like any of the names of substances, or persons. But this can be accounted for, from the genius of those Tongues. They avoided, as much as possible, considering qualities separately, or in the abstract. They made them a part, or appendage, of the substance which they served to distinguish; they made the adjective depend on its substantive, and resemble it in termination, in number, and gender, in order that the two might coalesce the more intimately, and be joined in the form of expression, as they were in the nature of things. The liberty of transposition, too, which those Languages indulged, required such a method as this to be followed. For, allowing the related words of a sentence to be placed at a distance from each other, it required the relation of adjectives to their proper substantives to be pointed out, by such similar circumstances of form and termination, as, according to the grammatical style, should show their concordance. When I say, in English, the BEAUTIFUL WIFE OF A BRAVE MAN, the juxtaposition of the words prevents all ambiguity. But when I say, in Latin, FORMOSA FORTIS VIRI UXOR; it is only the agreement, in gender, number, and case, of the adjective “FORMOSA”, which is the first word of the sentence, with the substantive “UXOR”, which is the last word, that declared the meaning.