

# AMERICAN DICTIONARY

## OF THE

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

A

A

A

**A** is the first letter of the Alphabet in most of the known languages of the earth; in the Ethiopic however it is the *thirteenth*, and in the Runic the *tenth*. It is naturally the first letter, because it represents the first vocal sound naturally formed by the human organs: being the sound uttered with a mere opening of the mouth without constraint, and without any effort to alter the natural position or configuration of the lips. Hence this letter is found in many words first uttered by infants; which words are the names of the objects with which infants are first concerned, as the breast, and the parents. Hence in Hebrew **א** *am*, is mother, and **אב** *ab*, is father. In Chaldee and Syriac *abba* is father; in Arabic, *aba*; in Ethiopic, *abi*; in Malayan and Bengalese, *bappa*; in Welsh, *tad*, whence we retain *daddy*; in Old Greek and in Gothic *atta*; in Irish, *athair*; in Cantabrian, *ata*; in Lapponic, *atki*; in Abyssinian, *abba*; in Amharic, *aba*; in Shilluk and Melintane, African dialects, *baba*; and *papa* is found in many nations. Hence the Latin *materna*, the breast, which is, in popular use, the name of mother; in Swedish, *amma*, is a nurse. This list might be greatly extended; but these examples prove **A** to be the first natural vocal sound, and entitled to the first place in alphabets. The Hebrew name of this letter, *aleph*, signifies an *ox* or a *leader*.

**A** has in English, three sounds; the long or slender, as in *place*, *fate*; the broad, as in *wall*, *fall*, which is shortened in *salt*, *what*; and the open, as in *father*, *glass*, which is shortened in *rather*, *fancy*. Its primitive sound was probably *au*. **A** is also an abbreviation of the Saxon *an* or *ane*, *one*, used before words beginning with an articulation: as a table, instead of *an table*, or one table. This is a modern change; for in Saxon *an* was used before articu-

tions, as well as vowels, as, *an tid*, a time, *an gear*, a year [See *An*.]

This letter serves as a prefix to many English words, as in *asleep*; *awake*; *afoot*; *aground*; *agoing*. In some cases, this is a contraction of the Teutonic *ge*, as in *asleep*, *awake*, from the Saxon *geslapan*, to sleep; *gewerian*, to beware; the Dutch *gevear*. Sometimes it is a corruption of the Saxon *on*, as *again*, from *on* *gean*, *awake* from *on* *weccian*, to watch or wake. Before participles, it may be a contraction of the Celtic *ag*, the sign of the participle of the present tense; as, *ag-radh*, saying; *a saying*, *a going*. Or this may be a contraction of *on*, or what is equally probable, it may have proceeded from a mere accidental sound produced by negligent utterance. In some words, **A** may be a contraction of *at*, of *in*, *to*, or *an*. In some words of Greek origin, **a** is privative, giving to them a negative sense, as in *anonymous*, from *a* and *onyma* name.

Among the ancients, **A** was a numeral denoting 500; and with a dash **A** 5000. In the Hebrew, Syr. Ch. Sam. and Ar. it denotes one or unity. In the Julian Calendar, **A** is the first of the seven dominical letters. Among logicians, **A**, as an abbreviation, stands for a universal affirmative proposition. **A** asserts; **E** denies. Thus in *barbara*, a thrice repeated denotes so many of the propositions to be universal.

The Romans used **A** to signify a negative or dissent in giving their votes; **A** standing for *antiquo*, I oppose or object to the proposed law. Opposed to this letter were **U R**, *uti rogās*, be it as you desire—the words used to express assent to a proposition. These letters were marked on wooden ballots, and each voter had an affirmative and a negative put into his hands, one of which at pleasure he gave as his vote.—In criminal trials, **A** stood for *absolvo*, I acquit; **C** for *condemno*, I con-

demn; and **N L** for *non liquet*, it is not evident; and the judges voted by ballots thus marked.—In inscriptions, **A** stands for *Augustus*; or for *ager*, *avint*, *aurum*, *argentum*, &c.

**A** is also used for *anno*, or *ante*; as in *Anno Domini*, the year of our Lord; *anno mundi*, the year of the world; *ante meridiem*, before noon; and for *arts*, in *artium magister*, master of arts. Among the Romans, **A U C** stood for *anno ab urbe condita*, from the building of the city or Rome. In *algebra*, **a** and the first letters of the alphabet represent known quantities—the last letters are sometimes used to represent unknown quantities.

In *music*, **A** is the nominal of the sixth note in the natural diatonic scale—called by Guido *la*. It is also the name of one of the two natural moods; and it is the open note of the 2d string of the violin, by which the other strings are tuned and regulated.

In *pharmacy*, **a** or *aa*, abbreviations of the Greek *ana*, signify of each separately, or that the things mentioned should be taken in quantities of the same weight or measure.

In *chemistry*, **A A A** stand for *amalgama*, or *amalgamation*.

In *commerce*, **A** stands for *accepted*, as in case of a bill of exchange. Merchants also number their books by the letters—**A B C**, instead of figures. Public officers number their exhibits in the same manner; as the document **A**, or **B**.

Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek Alphabet, are used in Scripture for the *beginning* and *end*—representative of Christ.

In *mathematics*, letters are used as representatives of numbers, lines, angles and quantities. In *arguments*, letters are substituted for persons, in cases supposed, or stated for illustration, as **A** contracts with **B** to deliver property to **D**.—In the English