

INTRODUCTION.

The HERMES of HARRIS, according to Dr. Lowth, "is the most beautiful and perfect example of analysis, that has been exhibited since the days of Aristotle." This, in my opinion, is not the character of the work, which, for the most part, consists of passages from the works of Aristotle, Ammonius, Apollonius, Priscian, and other grammarians. It is little more than a collection of the opinions of the ancient writers on philology, whose metaphysical subtleties rather obscure than illustrate the subject. To show how easily men may be misled by metaphysics, when applied to the plainest subject imaginable, take the following example from the *Hermes*.

"A respects our *primary* perception, and denotes individuals as *unknown*; the respects our *secondary* perception, and denotes individuals as *known*." [This is nearly a literal translation of a passage in Priscian, lib. 17.] To illustrate the truth of this observation, the author gives the following example: "The man with the long beard" — indicating that the man had not been seen before, and therefore *a* denotes the primary perception. A week after the man returns and I say, "There goes the beggar with the long beard," the article *the* here indicating the secondary perception, that is, that the man had been seen before. All this is very well. But we may try the rule by other examples, and find it to be true. Let us say that it is the peculiar and proper office of *an* or *a* to denote primary perception.

"The article *a*, says Harris, leaves the individual *unascertained*." Let us examine this position.

"But Peter took him, saying, stand up; I myself also am a man." Now, according to Harris, *a* here denotes the *primary* perception, and the individual is *unascertained*. That is, this man is one, I have never seen before.

"He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is *a* rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Whether *a*, in this sentence, denotes first perception, I cannot determine; but sure I am the individual is not left *uncertained*.

A B says to me, "I have lately dismissed *an* old servant, who has lived with me for thirty years." Here *an* may present a primary perception to the hearer, but not so to the speaker. To both, the individual must be well *ascertained*.

It appears then that this definition of *an* or *a* is incorrect, and the pains of these metaphysical writers who form such *perfect analyses* of language, is little better than *learned trifling*. On testing the real character of *an* or *a* by usage and facts, we find it is merely the adjective *one*, in its Saxon orthography, and that its sole use is to denote *one*, whether the individual is known or unknown, definite or indefinite.

Again Harris translates, and adopts the definition which Aristotle has given of a conjunction. "An articulate sound or part of speech devoid of signification by itself, but so formed as to help signification, by making two or more significant sentences to be one significant sentence."

This is so far from being true, that some of the conjunctions are verbs equivalent to *join, unite or add*, in the imperative mood. In like manner, the prepositions called inseparable, and used as prefixes, are all significant *per se*, although by custom, they sometimes lose their appropriate use. For example, *re*, which denotes repetition, has lost its use in *recommend*, which is equivalent to *commend*, without the sense of repetition. But still it has ordinarily an appropriate sense, which is perfectly understood, even when first prefixed to a word. Let any person prefix this word to *pronounce* for the first time, and direct a boy of fourteen years old to *repronounce* his oration, and he would perfectly well understand the direction.

Bryant, the author of "An Analysis of Ancient Mythology" whose works I should love to read, if I could have confidence in his opinions, has given to the public a history of the Cuthites or descendants of Ham, a race of bold adventurers, who, as he supposes, made expeditions by sea and land, introducing arts, founding cities, and corrupting religion by the propagation of Sabianism. For proof of his opinions, he relies very much on etymology and the signification of names. Two or three examples of his deductions will be sufficient to show his manner of proof. *Hann* or *Cham*, signifying heat and the sun, he deduces from 𐤠𐤏𐤍 to be hot, to heat. So far he may be correct. But he goes on to deduce from this root, also, as *Castle* had done before him, the Greek $\kappa\alpha\sigma\iota\alpha$, heat, not considering that this is from $\kappa\alpha\iota\omicron$, to burn, in which *m* is not radical, but probably *s* is the radical consonant, as this occurs in the derivatives. *Kargha* has no connection with *Hann*, from *Cam* or *Cham*, as he deduces. The Latin *Camera*, Gr. $\kappa\alpha\mu\alpha\alpha$, at a distance whence our *chamber*, though it is not easy to discover the connection between this word and heat, and from the same root, he deduces *Canillus*, *Canilla*, and many other words, without any support for his opinions, but a mere similarity of orthography in the first syllable. In all this, he is certainly wrong.

The Greek *Θεός*, God, he supposes most unwarrantably to be formed from the Egyptian *Theuth* or *Thoth*, Mercury.

The sun he supposes to have been styled *El-ue*; *El* [^{solis}] and *ue* or *och*, a title of honor among the Babylonians. This word, says Bryant, the Greeks changed into *lucor*, [a wolf], and hence the Latin *luc*, *lucere*. A strange conjecture this, not to call it by a harsher name. Now if Bryant had examined the Teutonic dialects, and the Welsh, he would have seen his mistake; for the Saxon *leoht*, *liht*, Dutch and German *light*, are from the common root of the Welsh *llug*, a shooting or gleaming, *luciw*,

throw, *luc*, a darting or flashing, the root of *luceo*; a simple root, that can have no connection with *El-uc*.

Excepting Faber's work on the Cahiri, I have seen scarcely a book in any language, which exhibits so little etymological knowledge, with such a series of erroneous or fanciful deductions, as Bryant's *Analysis*. Drummond's *Origines* abounds with etymological deductions of a similar character.

Gebelin, a French writer, in his *Monde Primitif*, has bestowed much labor in developing the origin and signification of words; but a large part of his labor has produced no valuable effect. His whole system is founded on a mistake, that the noun is the root of all other words.

Of all the writers on etymology, whose works I have read or consulted, Spelman and Luyd are almost the only ones, in whose deductions much confidence can be placed. I do not name Camden, Hicks, Selden and Gibson, as their etymological inquiries, though generally judiciously conducted, were very limited. This is true almost to some degree of Spelman and Luyd; but the researches of Spelman into the origin of law terms, and words of the middle ages, have generally produced very satisfactory results. From the limited nature of the designs of Spelman and Luyd, errors may have occasionally escaped them; but they are few, and very pardonable.

I know of no work in any language in which words have been generally traced to their original signification, with even tolerable correctness. In a few instances, this signification is too obvious to be mistaken, but in most instances, the ablest etymologist is liable to be misled by first appearances, and the want of extensive investigation. I have been often misled myself, by these means, and have been obliged to change my opinions, as I have advanced in my inquiries. Hence the tendency of my researches has been very much to increase my caution in referring words to their originals; and such, I am persuaded, will be the result of all critical and judicious investigations into the history and affinities of language.

A principal source of mistakes on this subject, is a disregard of the identity of the radical consonants, and a licentious blending and confounding of words, whose elementary letters are *not commutable*. Another source of error is an unwarrantable license in prefixing or inserting letters, for the purpose of producing an identity or resemblance of orthography; a fault very justly opposed by Sir William Jones.

The learned Dr. Good, in his *Book of Nature*, Lecture IX., of the second series, suggests it to be probable that both *papa* and *fater*, issued from the Hebrew word פֶּאֶר , פָּאֵר . He then fearlessly ventures to affirm, that there is scarcely a language or dialect in the world, polished or barbarous, in which the same idea is not expressed by the radical of one or the other of these terms. True; the letter P is found in most words of this signification; although our knowledge of languages is too limited to warrant such a broad assertion. But the attempt to deduce all words signifying '*father*' from the Hebrew must certainly fail, for we know from history that many nations of Europe were inhabitable before the existence of the Hebrew nation. Besides, a large portion of the European population have no word for *father* which can be rationally deduced from פֶּאֶר . The Welsh *tad*, whence our *daddy*, the Gothic *atta*, Irish *aithair*, Basque *aita*, and Laponic *atki*, cannot be formed from the Hebrew word, the letter D and T not being commutable with B . One would suppose that a learned physiologist could not fail to assign the true cause of the similarity of words, bearing the sense of *father* and *mother*, among the nations of the earth. The truth is, the sound of a very early and probably common name of children, was the simple syllable *pa*; and the probability about an exertion of the tongue to modulate the sound. So also the articulations *b*, *m*, and *d*, or *t*, issuing natural and easy, will generally enter into the first words formed by children. The labials are formed by simply closing the lips, and the dentals, by placing the tongue against the root of the upper teeth; the position which it naturally occupies in a healthy child. From these circumstances, we may fairly infer, *a priori*, that such words as *ab*, *aba*, *papa*, *tad*, *nanna*, must be the first words uttered by mankind, and that *fa*, *ma*, *mo*, *ma-mo*, may be the first significant names for *father*, *mother*, and *nurse*, since the latter names would be formed by a great portion of mankind, without any communication between different nations.

The author further observes, that the generic terms for the Deity are chiefly the three following, *Al or Allah, Theus or Deus, and God*. " Besides these, there is scarcely a term of any kind, by which the Deity is designated, in any part of the world, whether among civilized or savage men. Yet these proceed from the same common quarter of the globe." True: men, and of course words, all came from a common quarter of the globe. But it so happens, that these three terms must have originated among different families, or from different sources, for they are all formed with different radicals, and can have had no connection with common roots. But happily, the term *God*, in the terms as far as I can learn, exists among all the Sino-Tibetan nations, who compose a large portion of all the population of Europe, and whose name of God is *Bog*, a word radically distinct from all which the author has mentioned.

The author proceeds to say, "that the more common etymon for *death*, among all nations, is *mor*, *mort* or *mut*." But if either of these terms for *death*, is a native word among the great Gothic, Teutonic, and Slavonic families, which constitute the half or two thirds of all the inhabitants of Europe.