

# INTRODUCTION.

which it has cost me more labor to unlearn than to learn; that if I can prevent my fellow-citizens, who have a taste for this study, from being subjected to the same evils, I shall think the advantage obtained more than a balance for any unmerited imputation.

The first example of etymology which I shall mention, is that of Josephus, the historian of the Jews, who informs his readers, that the first man "was called *Adam*, which in the Hebrew tongue signifies one that is *red*, because he was formed out of *red earth*, compounded together; for of that kind is virgin, and true earth." Here is a mistake proceeding from a mere resemblance of words; it being certain that *Adam* no more signifies *red earth*, than it does *red cedar*. This mistake is connected with another, that *Adam* was the proper name of the first man, an individual; whereas the word is the generic name of the human species, and like *man* in English, signifies form, shape, image, expressing distinctively the characteristic eminence or distinction of form of the human race. This fact explains the use of the plural pronoun, in the account of the creation of the species, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, &c." Gen. i. 26. It is evident also that the words used in relation to the species, the *image*, the *likeness* of God, have reference, not only to their intellectual and moral faculties, but also to their external form; and so the Apostle interprets the words, 1 Cor. xi. 7. Not that God has any bodily shape of which man can be the image, but that man has a superior or super-excellent form, corresponding to his intellectual powers, and distinguishing him from all other animals. Now the mistake of Josephus, and indeed of all Christian writers for eighteen hundred years, and the mistake, with erroneous inferences from it, enters into the most recently published systems of theology.

Among the most celebrated authors of antiquity, who have written on the subject of language, is Varro, who has left a treatise *De Lingua Latina*. On this author's learning, Cicero, Quintilian and Augustine have bestowed the most unbounded praises. He is pronounced to have been *vir egregius, eruditissimus Romanorum; peritissimus lingue Latine et omnis antiquitatis, sine ulla dubitatione, doctissimus*. He was doubtless a man of uncommon erudition for the age in which he lived; and his etymological treatise may be consulted with advantage by persons who have knowledge enough of this subject to separate the *certain* or *probable* from the *improbable* and *conjectural*. But it is certain from what remains of his treatise, that his knowledge of the origin of words did not extend beyond the most obvious facts and principles. Thus he deduces *initium* from *ineo*; *exitus* from *exeo*; *victoria* from *vinco*. All this is well; and we have reason to think him correct, in deducing *vellus*, fleece, from *vellere*, to pluck, as doubtless fleeces were plucked from sheep, before the use of shears; and we have reason to believe him when he informs us that *imber* was originally written *humber*; that *hircus* was written by the Sabinæ *ficus*, and *kædus*, *fedus*.

Very different must be our opinion of the etymologies.

*Pater*, says Varro, is from *patefacio*; *ager cultus* is so called because it seeds coalesce or unite with the earth; referring *ager* perhaps to the root of *agger*, or the Greek *aggros*. *Campus*, he says, was so named because fruits were first gathered from the open field, deducing the word from *capio*. Next to this, were the hills, *colles*, so named *colendo*, from *colo*, because these were cultivated next to the open plain. That land or field which appeared to be the *foundation* of cattle and money was called *fundus*, or it was so called because it pours forth [*fundat*] annual crops. He deduces *cogitare* from *cogendo*; *concilium* from *cogitatione*; *cura* from burning *car*, the heart; *volo* from *voluntas*, and a *volat*, a flying, because the mind flies instantly whither it will. How low must have been the state of philology, when such improbable conjectures as these could attract the encouragement from Cicero, Quintilian and Augustine!

The reader will find many things in Isidore and Priscian, worthy of his attention, though much of what their works contain is now so familiar to scholars of moderate attainments, as scarcely to repay the labor of perusal. But he who learns that Isidore makes *oratio*, a compound of *oris ratio*; *no-men*, a contraction of *notamen*; and that he derives *verbum*, from *verberato* *are*, will hardly think it worth his labor to pursue his researches into that author's works. Nor will he be disposed to relish Priscian's deduction of *littera* from *legere*, *opera*, because a letter affords the means of reading, or from *lituro*, to obliterate, because the ancients used to write on wax tables, and afterwards to obliterate what they had written.

Vossius wrote a folio on the etymology of Latin words; but from repeated examinations of his book, I am persuaded that most of his deductions are far-fetched, conjectural and fanciful; many of them are certainly croneous.

Menage and Minshew I have not consulted; chiefly because from such extracts as I have seen, from their writings, I am certain that little reliance can be placed on their opinions, except in cases too plain to be mistaken.

Junius and Skinner, the authorities for most of the etymologies of Bailey and Johnson, are sufficiently correct in referring English words to the lan-

guage from which they are immediately derived, especially when the orthography is too plain to be mistaken. They inform us that *father* is from the Saxon *fæder*, that *drop* is from Sax. *droppan*, that *picket* is from the French *piquet*, and the like. So Johnson informs us that *accent* is from the Latin *accentus*, and accept from the French *accepter*, Latin *accipio*. All this is well, but it can hardly be called etymology, or the deduction of words from their originals.

Whiter, in his *ETYMOLOGICON MAGNUM*, the first volume only of which I have perused, began his work on a good plan, that of bringing together words of the same or of cognate radical letters, and in pursuance of his plan, he has collected many real affinities. But he has destroyed the value of his work by mistaking the radical sense of many words, and by confounding words of different elements.

Jamieson, in his *ETYMOLOGICAL Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, has collected the affinities of words in that language, particularly words of Gothic and Teutonic origin, with industry and probably with judgment, and a good degree of accuracy. In some instances, I think he has departed from correct principles of etymology, and mistaken facts, and he, as well as Whiter, falls very short of truth in a most important particular, a clear understanding of the primary sense of words. Jamieson's Dictionary however contains a valuable addition to our stock of etymological materials.\*

To Horne Tooke are we indebted for the first explanation of certain indeclinable words, called conjunctions and prepositions; and for this let him have all merited praise. But his researches were very limited, and he has fallen into most material errors, particularly in his second volume. I have made no use of his writings, in this work.

\* Thus far had I written, before I had seen this author's *HERMES SCYTHICUS*. By this work I find the author agrees with me in regard to the identity and common origin of many of the Gothic and Greek prepositions. Indeed I had supposed that proof of such an obvious fact could hardly be necessary, in the present state of philological knowledge. Some of these prepositions he has illustrated with a good degree of accuracy; although should this work ever fall into his hands, I think he will be convinced that in one or two important points, his explanations are defective. In regard to other prepositions, I am satisfied the author has ventured upon unsafe ground, at least his opinions appear to me not to be well supported.

In respect to his explanations of the names of the mythological deities, it is indeed I must confess, the author, like all other authors whose works I have seen, wanders in darkness. From all my researches into the origin of words, I have drawn this conclusion, that the pagan deities are mostly the powers or supposed powers of nature, or imaginary beings supposed to preside over the various parts of creation, or the qualities of men, *deified*, that is, exalted and celebrated as supernatural agents. There are few of the names of these deities which I pretend to understand; but there are a few of them that seem to be too obvious to be mistaken. No person, I think, can doubt that the *Druids* are named from *tree*, an oak, or tree. Hence I infer that this name was applied to certain imaginary beings inhabiting the forests.

No person can doubt, that *Nereus*, the deity of the sea, and the *nereids*,

nymphs of the sea, are named from the oriental نهر در a river, from the corresponding verb, to flow. No person doubts that *Flora*, the goddess of flowers, is merely a flower deified.

Hence I infer that the true method of discovering the origin of the pagan deities, is to find the meaning of their names.

Now *Diana* is the goddess of hunting. What quality then is most necessary for a hunter? What quality would rule men, destitute of the weapons which we possess, most valuable as useful in obtaining subsistence? Doubtless courage and swiftness. Thus we have substantial reasons for believing that *Diana* is the *Celtic* *du* or *dian*, which signifies bold, strong, vehement, impetuous, the author of *Danube*, *Dan*, and other names of large rivers.

If we examine the name of *Minerva*, we shall find that the first syllable contains the elements of *manus*, the hand, and of *mind*; and the last constituent part of the word corresponds well with the German *arbeit*, *D. arbeit*, work, the last consonant being lost. Well, what are the characteristics of *Minerva*? Why, she is the goddess of wisdom and of the arts. The sense of *work*, would give one of her characteristics, and that of *manus* and *arbeit*, the other; but which is the true word, I do not know.

The two circumstances which chiefly distinguish Hercules are his *labora* and his *club*. We never hear of Hercules but with these accompaniments. Now the first syllable of his name is precisely the root of the Greek *εργον*, *ergon*, that is, *work*, which would give the sense of work, labor. Whether the last constituent of the name is *arbeit* or from that root, I shall not pretend to affirm. Indeed, I offer these explanations rather as *probable*, than as clearly proved; but they do appear to be *probably* well founded. *Hercules* then was a name given to any bold, heroic leader of a tribe of rude men, who was distinguished by his achievements as a warrior; and this name must have originated in very early ages, when *clubs* were the principal weapons of war, and instruments of defense. And hence probably the origin of the scepter, as a badge of royalty. Now it is worthy of remark that the war club of rude nations, at this day, especially of the savage nations of the south sea isles, is of the same shape as the ancient scepter.

\* Of the full value of these encomiums we can hardly judge, as most of Varro's writings have perished, and some of those which survive appear in a mutilated form. But the greater his erudition, the more striking will appear his ignorance of this subject.