

Everts (0.)

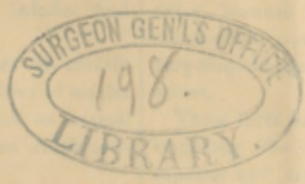
Reprint from CINCINNATI LANCET AND CLINIC, Nov. 10, 1883.

THE DESPOTISM OF WORDS IN RELATION
TO SCIENCE.

BY

ORPHEUS EVERTS, M.D.,

COLLEGE HILL, O.



E DESPOTISM OF WORDS IN RELATION TO SCIENCE.

By O. EVERTS, M.D., College Hill, O.

There is a certain degree of natural science which proceeds from and attaches to every organized being, corresponding in generals and particulars to the necessities of such being.

Language, embracing all possible methods of intercommunication of intelligence among animals, including man, represents a degree or part of such science.

The languages of man, leading, as he does, by reason of the superiority of his intellectual capabilities, the grand procession of living beings across the plains of nature, correspond in complexity to the superiority, hence necessities, of such capabilities.

Word language—speech—is a response to the necessities of mankind which require the formation of ideas too complex for communication by gestures or inarticulate sounds.

Man is not the only animal gifted with vocal organs, or that utters intelligible sounds with a definite purpose, to be definitely understood. But the spoken language of mankind, at its zero of simplicity, is far more complicated than that of any other animal at its highest degree of complexity.

Words being a response to a necessity for the formulation of complex ideas, must correspond in complexity to the ideas to be formulated, or fail to satisfy the need.

Mankind, as an individual and a race, having been growing in intellectual capabilities through a long but continuous process of development, his necessities increasing with the increase of his capabilities, it follows that there has been a corresponding growth of words. Hence the extent and complexity of the vocabularies of superior and learned people as contrasted with the simple and limited vocabularies of the inferior and ignorant.

Ideas are phenomenal sequences of certain activities of force, affecting the motions of matter previously specialized by organization as animal mechanisms, notably the mechanisms which constitute a human being.

Ideas, therefore, which are the result of certain activities of force, affecting certain motions of matter in the mechanism of any given person, can

only be communicated, or made intelligible, to another person, by an excitation in the mechanism of such other person of activities and motions identical with the activities and motions which took place in the mechanism of the first person, resulting in the ideas to be communicated.

Identity of precedent conditions being essential to identity of phenomenal sequences, it is evident that responsive ideas are, perhaps, never identical with original ideas; being only more or less accurate reflections or resemblances of the original. All individual or racial differences of structure, of a quantitative or qualitative character; hereditary or acquired habits; education, and the influence of environments, are so many difficulties in the way of a community of ideas, of languages, or of men.

Words, like ideas, having been developed by growth, men of superior capabilities and education, by their familiarity with all of the lower degrees of development, having themselves grown up through them, may comprehend with great accuracy the mental phenomena of inferior and uneducated men by their expression; but the inferior and illiterate, nowever slight the degree of their inferiority or lack of education, may fail to comprehend the more complex ideas of the superior and learned, however expressed, without difficult and diligent labor. It is much easier to pronounce such ideas absurd, false or dangerous, than to ascertain their true value by studying and comprehending them.

The growth of words, as formatives and vehicles of ideas, being responsive and essential to the growth of ideas—the formation and expression of new ideas is attended by more or less embarrassment, inaccuracy, misconstruction, and delay, because of the immediate incapacity of old words to communicate new ideas, before undergoing changes of structure or definition themselves.

These facts find illustration in the difficulties attending the communication of ideas from a superior and learned to an inferior and ignorant people of a different tongue, by translating the words of the one into the words of the other. Take, for example, the Anglo-Saxon word "God."

As now understood by the most capable and learned English-speaking Christians, the word "God" formulates an exceedingly complex idea. No less, indeed, than that of an uncreated, self-sustaining being—sole Creator and sustainer of the Universe; immanent in all things; the absolute and infinite of all things—of all abstract principles—love, wisdom, truth, beauty, good; of all knowledge,—hence omniscient; of all power,—hence omnipotent; but when translated into the vernacular of a pagan, heathen, or so-called savage people, it fails to convey to that people such an idea of a supreme being; or any other idea than that which the pagan, heathen, or savage equivalent word, into which it had to be translated, had already commemorated—still a pagan, heathen or savage idea of a God, no matter what that may have been. Hence it was, in the propagandism of Christianity by Emperors and Crusader, before education preceded "conversion," that pagan, heathen and savage people, in adopting the new religion, did not change, materially, their old ideas of supernatural beings; nor relinquish altogether the forms and ceremonies of their old worship, which still embarrass genuine Christianity, as survivals of ignorance: which is superstition.

Words commemorate ideas by rendering them not only uncommunicable among contemporaries, but transmissible from generation to generation, and from one people to another, however removed by time or space, with approximative accuracy.

Thus, and thus only, do ideas become cumulative, and contribute to the intellectual growth of mankind, as a race, beyond the limitation of individual possibilities, fixed by the condition of individual existence.

A general recognition of the wisdom of experience (accumulation of ideas) and natural affection of children for parents, beget, in mankind, respect for the ideas of "the fathers," amounting to veneration for the wisdom of "the ancients."

This characteristic of mankind is powerfully conservative of ideas—resisting and resenting, as it does, all innovation. Thus the wisdom of the fathers comes to be, in the course of time, the wisdom of the ancients—and the wisdom of the ancients comes to be mythical, sacred and divine. Words by which such wisdom may have been commemorated acquire a rigidity of structure and meaning capable of resisting every expansive force, save that of growth: a force which no despotism of ideas or words is capable of arresting, however it may be retarded or embarrassed.

These facts find illustration in the character

and history of the Mosaic account of creation which is an example of commemoration and transmission by words of ancient ideas respecting the origin of the earth and its inhabitants. How long these ideas were traditional, simply the wisdom of the fathers, before they became mythical and sacred, can not be told. That the commemorative words of the first chapter of Genesis, in common with other Scriptures ascribed to the same author, have been accepted by the most intelligent and learned people of the world, as sacred—inspired by the Creator—hence infallible—the word of God—for thousands of years—is known to us all. That the growth of science was, for centuries, and is yet, embarrassed by the despotism of words thus acquired, and characterizing this example, is a matter of fact which does not admit of argument. It is by such despotizing of words, indeed, by which ideas become encrusted, that the living are ruled by the dead.

It is because of the resistance thus offered to the growth of ideas, hence to the progress of the age, that so large a margin of the present lies forever within the shadow of the past. It is true that the capable and learned, generally, but reluctantly, have conceded the necessity of a reconstruction of the words, or a repudiation of the statements, of Moses, respecting the creation of the universe; yet the ideas of the multitude of believers in the sanctity of antiquity, and infallibility of ancient Scripture, calling themselves Christians, are held in thrall, and overshadowed by the despotism of words in which such ideas have been handed down to them.

But that words are thus despotic, and errors of fact, and falsity of belief, are thus perpetuated for centuries or ages, can not be, should not be, charged to "the fathers" as a fault—nor yet to "the ancients."

To review, to criticise, to comprehend the past by climbing higher and seeing farther than our fathers did, is not necessarily to arraign nor to condemn our ancestors, not even to treat them with disrespect. Our knowledges are but expansions by growth of what they knew, as we ourselves, are inseparable extensions of generations which preceded us. The errors of belief, which was according to knowledge, of "the fathers", were to them not errors.

Whatever is on the level of human understanding, without respect to time or persons, is, or inevitably appears to be, true. Whatever is below that level, which, as individuals or a race, we may have outgrown, becomes, by virtue of its relation to our perceptions, untrue. Nor is our

tion of the errors of the past, as errors, of value, other than as witnessing our own attainment of higher altitudes—and the effect which such perceptions may have upon the future, which is forever emanating from the present. Only the absolute is unrelated.

Another illustration of the despotism of words as affecting the growths of science, is to be found in the embarrassment met by students of psychology—a branch of knowledge now struggling to become a science—resulting from the use of words despotised by time and veneration for old beliefs, in the formation of new ideas.

Psychology itself is almost a despotic word—so nearly so, indeed, that I have need to say, now, and here, that I do not mean, by the word 'psychology,' "the science of the human soul"—as defined by Webster:—but "the science conversant with the phenomena of () mind"—as defined by Sir William Hamilton, amended by leaving out the definite article "the" from before 'mind.' A branch of knowledge which is destined to incorporate all other branches, and embrace, within itself, all knowledges. Hence to become the science of sciences.

The despotism which obstructs the growth of psychology attaches, and adheres to all such words as by their construction, and long accepted definitions, suggest an identity of that which is phenomenal, hence sequential, with that which is antecedent and substantial.—All words, the tendency of which is to identify or confound thought with that which thinks; and such as imply the interposition of a hypothetical person, tangible or intangible, between the phenomena of mind, and the organization, or mechanism, from which such phenomena appear, invariably to proceed. Such words, for example as 'soul,' 'spirit,' 'ghost,' 'immortal part' and "the mind"—when used as synonyms for an imaginary, impalpable, hypothetical entity; capable of not only thinking, but of taking possession of the real, palpable, human body, and controlling its activities and motions—entities, or beings of which we have no real knowledge—and for which science has no need.

'Materialism'—is another word, that in a different way, exercises despotic power in retarding the growth of science;—especially the science of psychology. How many timid students, whose draughts of knowledge have not been deep nor many, cower, and withdraw from the brilliant light of science into the marginal shadow of superstition, at the sound of this terrible word! And yet, in view of all present knowledges, such timidity and conduct are both childish and irrational. Because the man who ascribes the phe-

nomena of mind to a soul, ghost, or spirit, instead of to a man, does not escape from the danger of materialism by so doing—inasmuch as the phenomenal in nature, under every circumstance, implies material, as unavoidably as form implies substance.

Form without substance, and phenomena without causes—antecedent conditions of matter and force—are alike unthinkable.

There may be forms of substances too attenuate for our sensuous perceptions. But if so, still they must be material, although we can have no real knowledge of them. To talk about an incorporeal *corpus*, or immaterial matter, is to talk nonsense. Besides it is quite as easy of belief and comprehension that a man thinks, as that a ghost thinks! It is true, that by reason of dissolution, as a uniform result of natural proceedings, men cease to think. But as matter, however attenuate, in a state of mobility, is prerequisite to the performance of function; whatever body or mechanism, short of the absolute, may be capable of thinking, must be subject to changes—to evolution and involution—hence without a miraculous interposition, liable to final dissolution.

So that as a matter of fact, the scientist, who ascribes to the human body all of the qualities and conditions necessarily antecedent to the phenomena of mind, sustained by the evidence of all known facts, confirmed by the most exacting logic, is no more materialistic than the metaphysician who ascribes similar qualities and conditions to a hypothetical body, supported by no more trustworthy evidence that is derivable from the phenomena of dreams—testimony by which it may be and is as clearly demonstrated, that all other animal bodies, as well as man's, are but temporary tabernacles for the accommodation of spiritual beings—and that all other objects with which the dreamer may have been familiar, or that he may have seen in dreams, both animate and inanimate, even to the garments which we wear, have their ghostly and immortal counterparts.

It is time, therefore, that this bugbear, 'materialism,' from which the ignorant and superstitious, who neither comprehend nor trust the uniform procedures and events of nature, shrink and fly as from an ogre, be banished from all scientific considerations. It is time, also, that intelligent men should see, and the timid should be assured, that that, to all men, inestimable boon of faith—that conservator of life and growth—that aspiration of the imperfect toward perfection—of the finite toward infinity, which seems to characterize all of the movements of nature, which,

culminates in a vision of immortality seen through death, in man; does not depend upon, nor can be in any way affected by, man's knowledge, or opinions of himself, or by his speculations concerning the unknowable.

But without pressing the discussion further in this direction, I will limit it to a few general considerations, and some practical suggestions respecting the use of a few words in the development of psychology, as already defined—and at the risk of some repetition of ideas, will state, that if there is anything which science teaches more authoritatively than another, it is this:

Mankind does not constitute a kingdom of nature—not even an entire class of natural objects. Man, is therefore not to be considered, scientifically, as an exceptional being, miraculously created, and set apart upon the earth.

Structurally and phenomenally, man is continuous with all other beings—but standing in relation to all other beings as an inevitable sequence, or ultimatum; he represents the sum and attainment of all organic forms and substances.

Structure and phenomena uniformly occupying the relation toward each other of necessary precedent and inevitable sequent, it is rational to ascribe the highest phenomena of which we have knowledge, to the highest structure of which we know anything. The educated man is compelled to do so; and is therefore compelled, in view of the fact that the phenomena of human consciousness, and human thought, are invariably and sequentially associated with human structures, growing with their growth, disordered by their disorders, and disappearing with their dissolution, to ascribe consciousness and thought to human beings.

Should we not then say, understandingly, "man thinks?" Certainly any other method of expression—any use of words, by which a direct or indirect ascription of the function of thinking to an impalpable, immaterial, hence incogitable, mechanism is unscientific and irrational, as well as tributary to the survival of ancient errors.

"I think, therefore, I am. I know that I think, therefore I know that I am" is the boast, whatever Descartes may have thought of it, of self-conscious man—not of self-consciousness. Of a sensible sentient being, not of an abstraction, nor of an unimaginable hypothesis.

The use therefore of such words and phrases as "the mind," "the faculties or powers of the mind," "manifestation of the mind," "diseases of the mind," and all other words and phrases of the same category, should be so modified as to commemorate scientific ideas, instead of perpetuating

superstition. For example, such words and phrases as "the imagination," "the judgment," "the will," etc., as signifying so many independent elements, power or personages of mind, which, when confederated, constitute "the mind" are all obstructive to the growth of psychology, and conservative of error. We need not lose the use of such words as mind, intellect, faculty, power, imagination, judgment, will, emotion, feeling, memory, reason, etc., etc., because of such necessary modification of their significance and use. They would remain still useful and indispensable in characterizing various phases of mental phenomena, or of such phenomena in the aggregate. For example, we might say with scientific propriety, "phenomena of mind," "disordered imaginations," "defective memory," "violent emotion," "lack of will" etc., etc., and be understood as ascribing each phase of mental phenomena to antecedent conditions of matter and force, instead of to an hypothetical medium; recognizing each by its order of evolution, and degree of complexity in relation to other phases with which it is continuous; and the development of structures upon which it is contingent. Science, which refers all phenomena to natural causes, and endeavors to explain them by ultimate principles, demands this modification, of the use of words, as used by psychologists. Only the ignorant, who in all ages, have ascribed the phenomenal in nature to supernatural causes, and endeavored to explain it by referring special phases of phenomena to specific, or individual, supernatural beings, Gods or demons; faculties or powers—will fail to comprehend the necessity, and continue to use the old phrases with their old significance.

That such a transition from the habitual to the needful will be slow, and is difficult, may be known from the fact that modern writers of ability and reputation, claiming to be authorities on psychological subjects, who may, and possibly do, recognize the true relation of psychological phenomena to antecedent physical conditions, still adhere to the linguistic formulas of metaphysical and scholastic assumption; seemingly unmindful of the consequent confusion of ideas, and doubts of comprehension, which must embarrass a thoughtful student of their texts, unless already qualified by education to infer correct meanings from words and phrases which were constructed and have been used, time out of mind, to commemorate very different ideas.

For example, the distinguished author of a recently published treatise on insanity, of whose scientific attainment it would be presumptuous to

respectfully, strikes out boldly with the
ns :

"The brain is the chief organ from which the
"force called the mind is evolved. * * * *
"It is with the mind developed by the brain that
"we have to concern ourselves. * * * *
"By mind, therefore, I understand a force pro-
"duced by nervous action, and in man especially
"by the action of the brain. * * * * It is
"contended that the brain is only the tool or
"organ of which the mind makes use in man to
"manifest itself. According to this view there is
"in every human being a mind not dependent
"upon the nervous system for its existence. On
"the other hand it is asserted that the mind is
"directly the result of nervous action, and espe-
"cially of the brain, and if there were no nerve
"substance there would be no mind. This view
"is that held by the majority of scientific writers
"of the present day, etc., etc."

From all of which (sample quotations) it would not be difficult for one familiar with modern science to classify the author as one who accepts the physiological view of the genesis of mind, and the relation of the phenomenal in nature to the material. The inexperienced student cannot fail to be confused, however, by other statements, the words and phrases of which either obscure the ideas or pervert the meaning of the author. For example, he says: "The several categories of facts which go to establish the connection between the mind and the brain * * * are, in general character, similar to those which exist between any other viscus and the *product* of its action."

What does he mean by product? A phenomenon? Or a substance? How is the student, who should be taught that all psychical phenomena are but the manifestations of the activities of force affecting motions of matter, specialized as nerve, to escape the conclusion that the author means by 'product' something other than a manifestation; something substantial, indeed; corresponding to bile, urine, saliva, or the waste products of muscular motion it may be? Perhaps he will find light upon the subject further on. Yes. Here is an explicit statement:

"The mind, like some other forces, is compound—that is, made up of several sub-forces. These are, perception, intellect, emotions, and will." Now we understand the author. The brain produces a compound force, made up of four simple forces. One of which is perception, one intellect (remember that), one emotions (we are not told how many), and one will. The question which is naturally suggested to the student

of psychology by reading so far must be—what is force? single or compound. When, on reflection, he determines that he has no knowledge of force other than by phenomenal manifestations, sequential to the motions of matter effected by force, he is pleased with the author's more lucid statement, that "All of the *manifestations* (mark the word) of which the brain is capable, are embraced in one or more of these parts." Meaning to teach, after all, that mind is phenomenal, not material—a manifestation—not an object—not even a force—and that perception, intellect, emotions and will, are but characteristic phases, or appearances of the manifestations of force and matter in activity and motion, and not independent mechanisms or forces capable of performing functions.

The next assertion, however, is calculated to excite fresh doubts as to the author's teaching. It is this: "Either one of these parts (perception, intellect, emotions, will) may be exercised independently of the other, though they are very intimately connected and in all continuous mental passages are brought more or less into relation and consecutive action." An assertion which again confuses the student, inasmuch as, while he can think, clearly, of the continuity, or interrupted relations, of phenomena, or manifestations of activity, predicable of matter and force, he can not conceive of anything being 'exercised'—in the sense of being brought into action—that has not both the mechanism of matter and the potentiality of force. The confusion, thus begun, is only increased by the succeeding statement, which is by way of explanation, and reads as follows: "By perception is to be understood that part of the mind whose office it is to place the individual in relation with external objects."

Does not this assertion, because of the despotism of words used, distinctly formulate and convey the idea that the mind is a hypothetical entity interposed between the man, 'the individual,' and external objects?—a sort of medium occupying an intermediate and official relation to the body, yet not of it. But such being the character of "perception," what constitutes "intellect?" According to the language of the author, "intellect is a perception resolved into an idea," and "to the formation of an idea" the author says (whatever he may mean by the saying), "several important faculties and modes of expression of the *intellect* contribute." Which is equivalent to saying, the intellect contributes by the kind offices of its own faculties to its own genesis and existence. Of "the emotions" he says: "An idea, in its turn, excites another part of the brain to

action, and an emotion is produced." And "the will," he says, "is that mental force by which the emotions, the thoughts, and the actions are controlled."

Has not the brain, by the activities of which the whole mind is produced, something to do with the character of emotion, or of thought? Does the will, which we have been told is a force evolved from the brain—a product of brain action, turn about and control the brain in the production of the emotions?

That the author regards "the will," or is willing that his students should so regard it, as a hypothetical mechanism capable of performing function, in the same sense that he represents the brain as a functioning organ, is manifest from the fact that he represents it as producing something, saying: "The production of the force (the will) is called a volition." Also the fact that he represents "the will" as subject to disease. A most formidable disease, if names signify anything—no less a disease than that of "aboulomania" or "paralysis of the will."

But as these quotations and comments have been made with a purpose of illustration only, and not as an analysis or review of the book alluded to, of the general merits of which no opinion is expressed, I will close by saying that one meets with too many such examples of confusion of expressions resulting from the careless use of words in many modern books and essays which are designed to teach psychology; or to illustrate some special phases of psychical phenomena—examples that can only be accounted for by the supposition that they are the productions of authors, who in their mercenary, or ambitious haste to occupy this particular field of science with their literature, have, by too hastily rambling over the

field, made themselves familiar with its only. Authors, who, notwithstanding a tedious display of bibliography, liberal quotations, exhibit, in their own work, an unbecoming lack of solid information; or an indisposition (I will not say inability) to reduce information to knowledges and knowledges to science (in accordance with the more distinctive definitions of these terms) by integrations and inductions. Authors who manifest a greater desire to appear learned than to be so in reality—to be read and admired, perhaps envied, by the half-educated many, than to be appoved and applauded by the more cultivated few.

Therefore, it is, that the apparently increasing rapidity of human progress, the continuously increasing scope of human observation, widening ever, as the intellectual horizon of the race expands; the constant integration of new and far-reaching perceptions into new and more comprehensive ideas—in short, the never ceasing transition from old to new, as the present is forever being pushed forward by and out of the past, demand that the vocabularies of science be expurgated; and if not enlarged by new words, that old words be so modified as to adapt them to new uses. There is no other method by which the growth of science can be more practically aided; or by which students, especially students of psychology, can be more certainly protected from the dangerous imposition of *pseudo* scientific authors, who are often the most popular book-makers of the day, but who escape from detection and condemnation behind the confusion of their expressions and the despotism of words which they use without discrimination.

Cincinnati Sanitarium, Oct. 25, 1883.

