

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

During the year ending in May, 1862, there were baptized 8,575 persons ; confirmed, 3,895.

Total: 1 general synod, 2 synods, 26 classes ; 421 ministers, 1,122 congregations, 100,987 members ; 11,894 baptisms, and 5,635 confirmations. The congregations are located principally in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, and Virginia.

ARTICLE II.

ENGLISH LEXICOGRAPHY.¹

BY REV. NOAH PORTER, D.D., PROFESSOR, ETC., YALE COLLEGE, CONN.

TIMES have somewhat changed with the English people since the tradition concerning the elder Pitt was quoted and received with a look of wonder, "that he had actually read Bailey's Dictionary twice through in course." 'Indeed! and what could have been his motive? What possible interest could a man of his genius feel in a task so irksome?' The

¹ 1. *On the Study of Words.* By Richard Chenevix Trench, D.D. New York: Redfield. 1857.

2. *On the English Language Past and Present.* By Richard Chenevix Trench, D.D. New York: Redfield. 1859.

3. *A Select Glossary of English Words used formerly in Senses different from their Present.* By Richard Chenevix Trench, D.D. New York: Redfield. 1859.

4. *Rambles among Words: Their Poetry, History, and Wisdom.* By William Swinton. New York: Charles Scribner. 1859.

5. *An American Dictionary of the English Language.* By Noah Webster, LL.D. Revised and enlarged by Chauncey A. Goodrich. With Pictorial Illustrations, Appendix of New Words, Synonyms, etc. etc. Springfield: George and Charles Merriam. 1859. pp. 1750.

6. *A Dictionary of the English Language.* By Joseph E. Worcester, LL.D. Boston: Hickling, Swan, and Brewer. 1860. pp. 1854.

7. *Proposal for the Publication of a New English Dictionary by the Philological Society.* London: Trübner and Co. 8vo. pp. 32.

8. *Lectures on the English Language.* By George P. Marsh. Revised and enlarged edition. New York: Charles Scribner. 1862. 8vo.

reply was always given, that he wished in this way to enlarge his vocabulary. Thus, in order that his ready mind need never be at a loss for the precise word which he needed, and his facile tongue never trip in uttering it, he had imposed on himself a discipline of the driest and most tedious of all kinds of reading. At that time the readers of dictionaries were esteemed the most stupid description of people, save one, and they were the makers of dictionaries. These last were looked upon as a necessity indeed, and therefore to be tolerated in the field of letters; literary drudges, for the convenience of the thinkers and speakers whose genius could turn to splendid account the materials which they collected with so great pains — “stone-breakers,” as we once heard them called, who prepared the highways and byways through the fields of knowledge, for the more luxurious and respectable to walk in. But now the study of words has become invested with an almost poetic interest. For we have learned that, as we trace out the history of words through the tortuous and dusty labyrinth of the past, we are confronted at every turn with the men and women, the manners and usages, the clothing and armor, the houses and fields of the times when this or that antiquated meaning was full of life and significance.

But, as we have said, all this is recent. It is not long since Coleridge, in the preface to his *Aids to Reflection*, declared it to be one object of that work “to direct the reader’s attention to the value of the science of words, their use and abuse, and the incalculable advantages attached to the habit of using them appropriately, and with a distinct knowledge of their primary, derivative, and metaphorical senses.” He thus addresses his reader: “Reflect on your own thoughts, actions, circumstances, and — which will be of especial aid to you in forming a *habit* of reflection — accustom yourself to reflect on the words you use, hear, or read; their birth, derivation, and history. For if words are not *things*, they are *living powers*, by which the things most important to mankind are actuated, combined, and humanized.” The thought of Coleridge was not new; but

it was uttered at the right time, by one who was able to transform common truths into seed-thoughts; his genius giving them the charm of novelty, and his ardor imparting to them germinant life. It was received by that large and miscellaneous school of thinkers who acknowledged Coleridge as in some sense their master. Its germination was also favored by other circumstances. It speedily sprung into life, and is now bearing abundant fruit.

During these latter years, comparative philology has been perfecting its results. On the European continent the study of words has been prosecuted in the spirit of an enlarged and elevated philosophy, with the enterprise and perseverance that is fostered by sound and varied learning. The modern languages of Europe have been grouped in their proper family relations, and traced to their original stock, and the pedigree of individual words has been followed up and down, forward and backward, this way and that, with all the keenness and persistency characteristic of the entire genus of genealogists. As the consequence of these investigations, immense stores of knowledge have been gathered, to illustrate the etymology of the living languages of Europe, while the history of each and all has been ascertained, with a good measure of certainty and success. The results are also beginning to be seen in the improved vocabularies of these languages, both in their present form and in the ancient and mediaeval dialects from which they have emerged. It is equally interesting to recognize the more rational views which are now taken of language itself. Whereas it was once regarded as the accidental embodiment of thought, it is now known to be its necessary and natural product; and so intimately connected with the spirit which gives its life and shapes its forms, that the study of language is and must be a study of thoughts. It is true this had been asserted here and there before, by some daring etymologist or eccentric word-hunter, who was sure to be laughed at for his pedantry. Horne Tooke ventured to prefix to his presumptuously entitled *Diversions of Purley*, the more presumptuous phrase, *ἔπεα πτερόεντα*, thus claiming for words a winged life;

though he sadly clipped and soiled the wings of certain sacred and venerable terms, by his shallow sophistry. But now no one hesitates to admit for language, as a study, claims far more exalted than any which Tooke dreamed of asserting; and the pursuit of philology is acknowledged both to require and to favor the most profound and elevated philosophy. It now excites no marvel to hear from two scholarly men of genius the question and answer, which is quoted by Mr. Swinton as the motto to his spirited volume: "What do you read, my lord?" "Words — words — words."

But what fruits have already been gathered for our English tongue from this newly-awakened zeal in word studies? and what may we expect and require as the product of investigation? This question suggests the thought, that there is no subject which is of less interest to English scholars and the English people, than the scientific study of their own mother-tongue. No language ought to be more attractive than ours to scholars; for none is more multifarious in its composition, more diversified in its elements, more arbitrary in its orthography, more abnormal in its spelling, or more complex in its history. Each of these features is a standing invitation to men eager to determine an unsolved problem. Yet how few have been the English scholars who have sought to master one of these problems! Where has been the man of philological genius, with the requisite knowledge, who has given his life and his learning to the history, development, and structure of the sweet and stately English tongue? German philologists treat of the English *en passant*, along with half a score of Teutonic dialects; and from these researches, conducted *à side* from the special object of illustrating the English language, its student can gather richer harvests than from any single treatise written by an English philologist on his own tongue. The English universities have graduated many men of the requisite taste and genius for such researches,—men not averse to the needful toil,—as has been shown in what they have done in Greek and Latin philology. The dialects of these languages have been mastered, in all their evanescent peculiar-

ities. Their particles have been tossed to and fro by discussion, till forced to give up the most attenuated shade of signification which in any connection or by any possibility they could bear. The whole library of Greek and Roman authors extant, has been read, reperused, and winnowed like wheat, to find a new word, or an old word with a new meaning. And these philologists belong to and constitute a multitude, an organized commonwealth, of scholars. But the students of Anglo-Saxon and the provincial dialects of England, have never been numerous enough, in any one generation, to constitute the smallest fraternity; and the few that have chosen such departments, have been regarded as men of strange and unaccountable literary tastes. And now that the great Philological Society of England finds it necessary to take measures to hunt old words or old meanings among the early English writers, its enterprising secretary presses some scores of volunteers into the service, each taking a single book or writer; whereas an ardent devotee of such a speciality, upon the continent, would gather the whole library about himself, in a small closet some ten feet by twelve, and in a few years of working at nothing else some fourteen hours a day, would exclaim, *Le voila* — the work is done!

Not only has the English nation failed to furnish a sufficient number of philologists for the special scientific study of the origin and history of the language of which they are so proud, but the direct study of this language, as an instrument for use, has been by no means prominent in our courses of education. In the English universities, as it is well known, the student learns to write English by practising the writing of *Latin*; and he learns to write English so well, that we do not know that any argument against the method can be drawn from the defects of its results. In the classical schools, writing Latin is still the only writing that is enforced or criticised; and so the well-educated Englishman finds himself in possession of a manly and idiomatic English style, without knowing by what method or system he acquired it. And yet he has attained this possession.

His style is, as it were, a part of himself—so easily does it glide in the narrative, so compactly does it gather and condense itself in the despatch, so proudly does it soar in the apostrophe, and so fiercely does it charge in the appeal or the invective. He is not formally put to the study of its powers and resources in his matchless literature. He may have never—in the majority of cases he never has—read a history of English literature, or analyzed the style of a single distinguished English writer—untwining, as it were, the sinews of his strength, and tracing out the secret of his power. Much less will he be likely to have studied the growth and development of this literature in a philosophic spirit, and learned to apply to each writer, as seen in and as formed by, his age, all the critical formulæ “for such cases made and provided.” And yet, he will read for the hundredth time his Milton or his Shakspeare, and is quite at home in the prose of Dryden and Burke, of Bacon and Jeremy Taylor. But as to commentaries, and philosophical criticisms upon his favorite authors, in these he has but little interest: he had much rather enjoy the poets, than speculate about them. He would vastly prefer to be lifted and refined by their power, than to ask, wherein lies the secret of their strength.

On the continent, the education of every young gentleman, and even of every young miss, would be considered as greatly neglected if he or she had not been carefully drilled to the correct use and the nice proprieties of their own language; and not to have studied a finished philosophical course of French or German literature, would indicate almost barbarism or rustic neglect. The well-educated German is captivated by Faust, its daring speculation, its touching pathos, and its matchless style; but he is certain also to have read more than one of the scores of commentaries and lectures that have been written about him by philosophical critics.

This English neglect of the critical study of his own language and literature, is but a special example of the influence of that practical spirit which characterizes the

nation. Language is to them a means, and not an end. Hence they study it enough to use it with effect, and to improve it by all the new applications which it must be made to serve. Literature is in their view a means to splendid achievements, or to the noblest enjoyments; and literature is cultivated in this spirit—for what it is in itself, and not because it gratifies a speculative curiosity that is chiefly curious to inquire how its effects are produced.

In their dictionaries, and in dictionary-making, the English have been true to their instincts and traditional spirit. The first English dictionaries did not attempt to define or explain the words of ordinary use, in life or literature. The first collections of English words were made in connection with, and for the use of, dictionaries of foreign languages. The earliest English dictionaries proper, were chiefly designed to explain the hard words of the language. The first of these — published first in 1616 — contained in the eighth edition, of 1688, only five thousand and eighty words; and professes in its title to give only “the interpretation of the hardest Words, and the most useful Terms of Art used in our Language,” etc. The “New World of English Words,” prepared by Edward Phillips, Milton’s nephew, promises “the Interpretation of such hard words as are derived from other Languages, whether Hebrew, Arabick, Syriack, Greek, Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, British, Dutch, Saxon, etc., their Etymologies and perfect Definitions.” This contains only about thirteen thousand words. It impresses us with the defects of the literary apparatus in earlier times, and our own advantages, to reflect that the settlers of Boston and of Hartford, and the founders of Harvard and Yale could have had no better dictionaries than these. Even the justly celebrated and much-used dictionary of Nathan Bailey, at least in its earlier editions, is principally made up of careful definitions of the hard or, so called, dictionary words in the language; and either entirely omits, or very briefly defines, those words which are in fact the most important — the so-called common words, which every one is supposed to understand, but which no man can easily define — words

which, at the first aspect, seem to have but a simple and that a very generic and vague signification, but which are found to answer to a score or two of diverse, specific applications. It deserves to be noticed, in these days of pictorial dictionaries, that Bailey's edition of 1730 is "illustrated with near five hundred cuts, for giving a clearer idea of those figures not so well apprehended by verbal description."

The much celebrated dictionary of Dr. Johnson, was published in 1755. It cost its author seven years of constant labor, in which he was aided by several copyists and assistants; for all of which he received fifteen hundred and seventy-five pounds sterling. The publication of this dictionary forms an era in English lexicography, in the following particulars. It was, in the best sense of the word, an original work. The words were either collected by the author from his own reading, or verified by that reading. Johnson employed his own time in reading the best English writers, with reference to the selection, the definition, and the illustration of his words. The passages marked by him were copied by his clerks. As many as were required were transferred to the dictionary at once, to suggest and illustrate its signification by examples of its actual use. From the special reading of years, and from Johnson's exact and abundant memory, which so well retained the treasures of his previous studies, there was gathered an immense number of words which Bailey had overlooked; so that Johnson's was in fact the first dictionary with anything like a complete vocabulary. This vocabulary, however, represented the language of books more perfectly than that of common life. Books were preëminently the world in which Johnson lived, and with which he was familiar. Beyond this region he could not conveniently, nor would he willingly, go. For he would encounter difficulties similar to those which he so characteristically describes as likely to attend the search after the technical terms that each trade and workshop had created for itself: "What favorable accident or easy inquiry brought within my reach, has not been neglected; but it had been a hopeless labor to glean up words by courting living

information, and contending with the sullenness of one and the roughness of another." The early English he does not give. "I have fixed Sidney's work for the boundary, beyond which I make few excursions." Had he wrought the soil with faithfulness up to this boundary, there had been less reason to complain. But though he may have omitted few words used by the Elizabethan writers, it was by no means true that he gave all the peculiar senses in which these earlier writers employed their words. Even the writers of a century later, as Barrow, South, and others, employ not a few words in certain antiquated meanings, which Johnson was not careful to notice, and which certainly he did not note. The reason is obvious enough. Johnson wished to define the language as, in his opinion, it ought to be, or could properly be used. For such proper use of words he was willing to give an authority; but if the authority vouched for certain uses which he did not like, he quietly omitted to cite him.

The definitions of Johnson, aside from the illustrative quotations, have no striking merit. They are often given by single words, which are really no definitions at all. If the defining word is an exact synonyme of the term defined, then the only reason why it is to be preferred, is, that the signification may happen to be more familiar to the mind. But when this familiar or better-understood term is itself to be defined, nothing else can be done than to explain this in its turn by the word which is less familiar. The only proper definitions are propositions; by which we mean an ampliative or explicated phrase, that may be or is predicated of the word defined. It may be objected, that the defining propositions must consist of words the meaning of which must be supposed to be known. It is true we cannot escape beyond the domain of words. In all our defining, we must ever suppose the meaning of some words to be already known. But what we seek to do, even in defining what seem to be well-known words, is to expand the dim conception which is suggested by the word itself into that fulness of import which can only be expressed by a sentence.

If the word is literally unknown, it is even never necessary that its significance should be fully developed into a full enumeration of the constituent elements of the conception for which it stands. Even the names of what are called simple ideas, of which it is so often said we are unable to give any definition, can be so fully described that the great object of defining shall be accomplished, which is to awaken or suggest to the mind what the meaning is. This can be effected only by some descriptive phrase which sets forth the circumstances under which the action, being, or relation appears, or by some concrete example which enables us to determine and identify, or in other words fully to recognize, the object defined. Any other idea of a definition than this, must of necessity mislead and confuse. If no two words have precisely the same meaning, — and that they have not is well nigh demonstrated by the circumstance that two in *fact* exist, — thento define one by the other, is to confues rather than to enlighten the mind; it is to blend objects that ought to be kept apart, rather than to define them, i. e. to bound them off by distinct lines of demarcation. This is both assumed and conceded in the attempt to explain words that are miscalled synonymous. Every such effort is a tacit confession that the more nearly the meaning of words is alike, the more important is it to distinguish between them, and that this can only be effected by means of minute explanations and dexterously selected illustrations of their use.

It is clear from the observations in Johnson's Preface, that he had thought earnestly on the nature and ideal of a just definition, and was sensitively alive to the various difficulties to be encountered and overcome. It does not appear, however, either from his principle or his practice, that he had matured his views into any settled convictions, or that he was very careful in all cases to apply the principles which had suggested themselves to his thoughts. As we have already said, he relied very much upon his quotations to suggest the definition, and thus to satisfy the mind. The selection and arrangement of these quotations, it is true, indicate the solid

sense and the vigorous judgment of the great critic. Every explanation which is given, and every thought expressed, has a robust aspect, and leaves a weighty impression.

We notice also in Johnson the tendency to define technical terms at great length with which English lexicography began, aiming to exhibit in this way the science of the times. Thus under *animal*, Johnson copies Mr. Ray's schemes or tables of classification, occupying more than a quarter of a folio page, and adds a quotation from Arbuthnot, thus: "Vegetables are proper enough to repair *animals*, as being near of the same specific gravity with the animal juices, and as consisting of the same parts with animal substances, spirit, water, salt, oil, earth; all which are contained in the sap they derive from the earth." Under *anemoscope*, we have the following curious piece of information: "A machine invented to foretell the changes of the wind. It has been observed that hygrosopes, made of cat's-gut, proved very good *anemoscope*; seldom failing, by the turning the index about, to foretell the shifting of the wind." Under *crystal*, we have a rather curious definition, and more curious quotation. Under *nitre*, instead of a definition we have a dissertation half a page long, upon its nature, mode of production, etc., taken from Hill's History of Fossils, at which a modern chemist would be appalled. The botanical dissertations are somewhat extended, and intermingled with occasional hints on the cultivation of plants, and good farming in general. Occasionally gruff Sam Johnson speaks out, with a well-satisfied twinkle of the eye, and a manifest inward chuckle, as in the well-known definition of *excise*: "A hateful tax levied upon commodities, and adjudged not by the common judges of property, but wretches, hired by those to whom excise is paid." *Oats* excite him to the following utterance, which he doubtless penned with sardonic satisfaction: "A grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people."

The dictionary of Johnson was received with favor. Some over-nice and captious critics discovered faults and urged objections; but it was so immeasurably superior to every

dictionary before it, that it was speedily acknowledged as the standard of the language. It fixed the orthography in great measure, though some of the modes of spelling recommended by the author were not received. But as a whole, Johnson's dictionary so well represented its author, and its author so well represented the English people, that for three fourths of a century it held undivided sway. Johnson through his dictionary spake dogmatically, as was his wont when alive: 'For all the practical exigences of the population of Great Britain and the colonies, the dictionary is amply sufficient; and the upstart who shall have the audacity to dispute its authority, or the presumption to conjecture that he could compose its superior, deserves to be rebuked for his pretensions, and chastised for his insolence.' To this decisive declaration, all England responded in consenting acquiescence. Nay, in this faith not a few intelligent Englishmen remain to this very day. From Johnson to Webster, there was no lexicographer worthy of special notice, although a large number of dictionaries were prepared and published. The most of these were spelling dictionaries, very compendious—designed to serve as manuals, to be consulted by children and shopkeepers, etc., when at a loss to know how to spell a word correctly. Sheridan began the series of pronouncing dictionaries, which was designed for the special object indicated by their appellation. Perry, Ashe, and others deserve to be mentioned with honor for original contributions to the vocabulary and definitions of words. The vocabulary collected by Johnson was enlarged from one work to another, and as new words were inserted, new definitions were framed, such as they were. One of the most important contributions of this sort was furnished by Henry John Todd, who, in 1818, issued his first edition of the work so familiarly known as Todd's Johnson's Dictionary. Todd added many thousand words to the then collected vocabulary, and his definitions were acknowledged to be good.

In the year 1828, Dr. Noah Webster published in two quarto volumes his American Dictionary of the English

Language. The preparation of an original work of this character by an American scholar, at that time, when all the literary appliances for such an undertaking were far more scanty than at present, and when the opportunities for leisure and research were immeasurably fewer than they now are, would of itself deserve to be named with honor, even if the merits of the work were far less than they really were. The publication of a work so expensive and bulky, is honorable to the zeal and enterprise of the publisher; and the sale of the first edition at the high price of twenty dollars the copy, was, when we consider the population and condition of the country, most creditable to the American people. When we consider, also, that it was the product of the untiring labor of twenty-seven years, spent in original research, reading, and thought, at a period when there was scarcely a living man in England or America who was animated by a similar spirit, and only here and there one to be found to give its author a word of sympathy or encouragement, and not an individual on whom he could rely for substantial aid, we cannot withhold from this man of tenacious purpose and unflagging zeal, our most profound respect. To qualify himself for his work, he gathered dictionaries and grammars, and plunged into the driest studies, that he might gather the material for wide inductions; thus striking out for himself the plan, and prosecuting the labors, such as since his time have issued in the modern science of comparative philology. It ill becomes the scholars who enter into the labors which two generations of inquirers have placed at their disposal, to despise the researches of the American pioneer, who, with only Horne Tooke, Skinner, Menage, and Jamieson to excite him, conceived the possibility of a wider comparison of languages, and a more subtle analysis of their radicals, in order to illustrate their application, derivation, and mutual dependence. The relation of the Indo-Germanic languages to the Sanskrit, and to one another, had only then been dreamed of, not demonstrated. The principles of syllabic changes, and of the interchange of letters, had not been derived by comprehensive inductions.

The results of these great and fundamental discoveries had not been placed at the command of the student in digests and special dictionaries, from which a competent and dexterous compiler can so easily glean and gather so many felicitous and novel illustrations to English etymology. Let any man, with these facts in view, carefully study the introduction to the quarto dictionary, and he cannot avoid feeling the highest respect for the scholar-like aims and labors of its author, as well as for the sagacity and profoundness of many of his results. It was inevitable that some of his conclusions and conjectures should be superseded by the advance of the very science to which he gave so important an impulse. It is not surprising that some of his etymologies, especially the Semitic and African, should not be sustained when the line should be sharply drawn between the different families of languages. Dr. Webster was impelled by the faith common to most of the Christian scholars of his time, that the Semitic languages were to be regarded as the original stock. It is no matter of wonder that he should have been misled by comparisons founded on this presumption. Rather are we surprised that he was so often correct, and that his etymological researches yielded so much fruit that will remain.

His other contributions of new words, and of new or improved definitions, were most important, and what is more to the purpose, they were the product of original research and reflection. It is true he had Johnson before him, and he constructed his definitions with those of Johnson in his eye. Many of the illustrative passages quoted by him had been selected by the old lexicographer. But it is also true that, in defining, he made great improvements upon Johnson. And these improvements were so various and important as justly to entitle his work to be considered original. Many significations which had been overlooked by Johnson, were supplied by Webster, showing therein thoughtful labor upon every important word. His distinguishing peculiarity was, that he defined by carefully studied propositions, and not by so-called synonymes or equivalent terms, as Johnson so often

did, or by loosely constructed phrases, in which Johnson frequently indulged. Nothing but a defining phrase can be a definition; and Johnson, in not attempting, in every case, to construct such phrases, shows how greatly he failed to conceive the real nature of his work. In a multitude of cases, as we have already remarked, it is obvious enough that he relied upon his quotations to suggest the full meaning of the word as used in a particular connection, by the author from whom he cites. Had Webster done no more than attempt a more philosophical method of defining, he would deserve much credit for the effort only. But his success was marvelous. To estimate it, one needs take only a score of words and endeavor to express their meaning in concise and felicitous assertions, being careful that his proposition is not so wide as to cover the conceptions denoted by a half dozen words besides, or so narrow as not to meet half the cases to which it may be applied. Supposing that a single meaning only is to be thus expressed, the task will be sufficiently difficult. But if we add the many senses — literal, tropical, and transitive, — which pertain to the most important words, the burden will be greatly increased; and before our enterprising and confident novice has completed his task of defining twenty words, he will be quite ready to resolve that he will never undertake another. By this time also, he will be qualified to judge of the labor, and to appreciate the service rendered by an independent worker in this department of science. "The writers on logic, in the middle ages," says Whewell, "made definition the last stage in the progress of knowledge," and with justice; for the power to define implies the actual knowledge of all the relations of the things and thought, which a word expresses, the capacity to summon these to mind when the word is to be explained, as well as the power to express them in well-chosen language, by a compact and clearly uttered proposition. We do not consider Webster perfect as a definer. He often failed in his ideal, and oftener in the realization of his own conception. But he deserves more credit than he always receives for the important advance which he made upon Johnson and Johnson's editors.

Webster was not a profound philosopher. He had not reflected, with any special insight or scientific reach of thought, upon the nature of language or the requisites of a perfect definition; but he was a close observer, a clear thinker, and a precise writer, and he knew enough about definitions to be perfectly aware that they ought to distinguish the object defined from any and every other thought or thing. He had also a decidedly practical understanding. He kept in his eye the persons for whom he wrote, and he aimed to satisfy common minds by clear and plain language, even at the expense of elegance or delicacy. He had little respect for mere authority, having sufficient self-reliance and pertinacity of his own to enable him to maintain his own clear judgment against the *prestige* of the greatest names in letters. His remarks in the introduction to his dictionary, upon the various writers of note who had preceded him, indicate that he had a fair share of the *nil admirari* in his character. But he had a plain common-sense, acute, if not subtle, discrimination, untiring industry, an unquestioned love for his work, and a conscientious love of exact knowledge and plain speech. To these qualities of the man is to be ascribed the great superiority of his definitions.

Webster not only greatly enlarged and improved the definitions of the words which Johnson and Johnson's editors had collected, but he collected many thousand words from his own reading and that of his friends. He was an extensive and careful reader all his life. After he conceived the project of his American dictionary, he read many of the standard English and American authors, with pencil in hand, noting the words and senses which were not already found in Johnson. He was not an indiscriminate collector of all the things called words, which he found in books and newspapers. He was rather precise and fastidious on this point. If he discovered a word which did not suit his fancy, or please his taste, he was rather slow to accept it, even from the highest authority, or to yield it a place in his dictionary. On the other hand, if a word had been long in use, especially in the use of common life, and was a part of the speech of

plain country-folk, he did not care how homely it was, but readily acknowledged it to be English though homespun. His contributions of words that had been overlooked, and yet that were neither new-fangled nor compounded, were not inconsiderable.

His attention to scientific and technical terms was quite characteristic. Since Johnson, all the sciences known in his time had become greatly enlarged in their terminology; and the terms themselves, both new and old, had acquired a far more precise and definite meaning. The sciences also, which, in Johnson's time, were just in their infancy, had been developed into a mature and perfect life. Others, like chemistry and mineralogy, and the elements of geology, had come into being; the first with a very precise, and beautiful, and copious nomenclature. The terms of all the sciences, as well as the technical names of the various arts and professions, were carefully collected, and no pains were spared to find their special and exact signification. Upon these terms of art, Webster bestowed a still more careful attention than had been the fashion with any of his predecessors, though all of these had made these hard words the object of their special regard. To satisfy his inquiries, he consulted not books only, but also men; and recorded all that he could learn, with accurate and painstaking scrupulousness. So desirous was he to give knowledge, that he would often add a little special information, which he thought might be of use; as though the thought had struck him: 'it is a pity that the man who turns to this word to learn its meaning, should fail of this additional bit of information.' Occasionally he gives a hint in agricultural or domestic economy, or adds a fact of geographical or general interest, as Johnson had been fond of doing before him. More frequently he appends some useful thought of practical or religious wisdom that is quite fatherly or pedagogical; and we find not a little good advice, as well as weighty moral truth, scattered along his pages.

He called his work an American dictionary of the English language. But why did he use the word *American*? This

question has been often asked, and to this day remains unanswered to many minds. As long as it is unexplained, it may be made the ground of unfavorable judgments respecting the modesty or the good taste of Webster. To understand his reasons, we must go back to the times when the plan of the dictionary was conceived and the first edition was published. We find that so entire was the acquiescence in the perfection of Johnson, and its complete adequacy for the wants of the English people and of English scholars, that it would have been deemed an intolerable stretch of presumption for Webster to justify his aim solely on the ground that a new dictionary was needed for the English people; and that therefore he chose to justify himself in part, by the consideration that a new dictionary might be and was needed for the Americans, in consequence of the new words and the new meanings of old words which had grown out of their institutions. In connection with this unquestioned fact, Webster very properly urged that the best American writers used the English language with as great propriety, purity, and force as their brethren across the water; and that their authority might as properly be cited to illustrate and justify the use or meaning of a word. This was a second reason given by Webster for making a new dictionary, and for calling it an American dictionary.

Those who live in these times, when Webster has so far been acknowledged by the English people as to furnish the chief material out of which some half dozen dictionaries, large and small, have been worked up for the English market, cannot easily conceive the state of public opinion when Webster was forced to seek so great a variety of excuses for his presumption in asking for his dictionary the leave to be. It was, in those days, an act of presumption to question the infallibility, and the perfect sufficiency, of Johnson for all the uses of the most accomplished English scholar; as it has not altogether ceased, in these days, to be somewhat presumptuous, to differ from some indefinite though variable English standard of pronunciation and orthography.

If any of our readers are curious to understand and esti-

mate the strength and character of this feeling, they have only to consult the very able and candid review of Webster's quarto dictionary, published in Vol. XXXVIII. of the *North American Review*. The author of that critique was one of the most truth-loving, and yet one of the most sensitive of the scholars of New England. Especially was he sensitive in respect to any innovation which concerned the purity of the English language. He would have shrunk with a disgust which amounted to abhorrence, from justifying any American deviations from English usage because they were American. The daintiest and most refined of those whose predilections or associations have been shocked by Webster's innovations, could not be more sensitive to any upstart pretensions of American confidence. But while he was, in all his associations, thoroughly deferential and English, he was also a keen discerner of the truth, and had an honest respect to the claims of truth and the authority of reasoning. He abhorred all shams—the sham of American impudence in reform, and the equally transparent sham of American Anglo servility.

It is interesting to those who knew the author, to trace, in this review, the evidence, on the one hand, of his sensitiveness to the strong prejudices which he knew that Webster was certain to encounter, and the equally obvious indications of his convictions that there was ample reason for the publication of a new dictionary. One or two of his remarks we quote, not merely because they were eminently characteristic of the writer, but because they have been so strikingly fulfilled. "One proof that this dictionary contains improvements, will probably soon be furnished in the use that will be made of it in compiling others. The author must prepare himself, if he is ever so greedy of praise, to be complimented in this way, to his entire satisfaction. No new English dictionary will hereafter serve, either at home or abroad, for popular use, which does not contain many of the additions and corrections of this."

But while Webster was justified, in his own view and in that of his friends, in calling his work an American dictionary, he insisted with the utmost pertinacity that the English

language had not been corrupted in this country, but that it was spoken and written with as much precision and purity among us as it was in England. The contemptuous use of the term "Americanism," and the charge implied in it, he carefully sifted, and demonstrated to the satisfaction of truth-loving men, that the majority of the so-called new Americanisms were good old popular English, which were still to be found in the common speech of the country-folk in the mother-land. Later researches by the English themselves, since attention has been given to the spoken and provincial dialects, have demonstrated that his opinion was just, and that many of the so-called Americanisms are of the earliest and the most idiomatic English. Webster never, for a moment, justified or rejected a word or phrase simply because it was American. If we have institutions and customs peculiar to ourselves, he contended we must have peculiar words, and these words must be current in our speech and writings. For the adoption and familiar use of such words, we need make neither excuse nor apology.

Webster's views of pronunciation occasioned some offence at the time his dictionary was first published. Walker had been much in vogue in parts of our country, and a somewhat affected and artificial method of pronouncing certain consonants, and of accenting certain syllables, had extensively prevailed. It is now generally conceded that Walker's extremes did not represent the usage of the truly cultivated portion of the English people, — neither their usage now, nor their usage then. Webster insisted upon this with great pertinacity, and thereby greatly offended those teachers in colleges and schools who had followed Walker, and also those professional gentlemen who had piqued themselves on great nicety in this particular. Against all these affectations, our somewhat positive and perhaps narrow New Englander set himself with no little energy of displeasure, first taking care to assure himself by positive information, concerning the actual practice of the English public speakers and gentlemen. He insisted that Walker's extremes represented the rhetoricians and the actors only. In this he was right, and

we are not a little indebted to his positiveness that the prevailing tendency to follow Walker did not sweep over the country, and become fixed as the habit of our people. It would have been especially unfortunate had this been superadded to our other American peculiarities and provincialisms.

He differed, also, from the practice, introduced by Walker, and since extensively followed, of indicating the pronunciation of words by spelling them anew, or by any very minute notation, intended to indicate the less obvious *nuances* of vowel sounds. These, he contended, could not, by any such method, be conveyed to the eye so as to be fixed for the ear; for the most of these arise naturally from the connection in which they occur, whether with this or that consonant, or before or after a syllable, as accented or unaccented. In this judgment he was directed by the austere simplicity of his own tastes, and the practical singleness of his aims, which prompted him to reach his end by the simplest methods possible. There are some very striking remarks in vindication of Webster's views upon these points, in the review from the late Professor Kingsley, to which we have already referred.

Dr. Webster's orthography also, was, in some respects, novel, and gave serious offence at first. We do not propose to discuss this much vexed question over again, as we are not committed to all his peculiarities, and care too little for it to dwell upon it at all. We are quite content with the very just and candid observations on this subject which Webster's first critic has published in this review. If these had been regarded with candor, much of the needless asperity and recrimination would have been spared, which have been occasioned by the orthographical controversy. It was natural for a student of English, like Webster, to propose some changes in our confessedly anomalous and variable orthography. Such changes have actually been proposed by one and another distinguished writer and critic, with and without general acquiescence. Other changes have made or found their way into general use, without the

formality of a recommendation by any dictionary maker or critic, simply from considerations of convenience and analogy. The great majority of those urged by Webster have some show of reason in their favor. But on such a point it is not to be expected that reason, but custom, should decide. A few that were obviously suggested by reasons which would only have weight with an etymologist, naturally found no response in the minds of the mass of educated men, and cannot and ought not to be urged.

In 1829, an abridgment, in octavo, of the quarto dictionary was prepared by Mr. J. E. Worcester and Prof. C. A. Goodrich. This dictionary gives the definitions very much abridged, and omits the illustrative quotations and the extended etymologies. It was designed to serve as a dictionary for the uses of all those who could not afford the expense of the larger work. It was received with great favor, and had an extensive circulation, and soon became the popular dictionary of the country. In this edition, certain extreme peculiarities of Webster, in respect to orthography, were not insisted on.

A few years after, a reprint of the quarto was effected in England, under the supervision of Mr. E. H. Barker; but neither the title, *American Dictionary*, nor the reputation of its editor, recommended it to general favor. Though Webster's improvements were acknowledged to be important, yet the prestige of Johnson had not been weakened, and the new zeal for the study of English philology had not been kindled. The merits of Webster as a definer were acknowledged by the English, by borrowing liberally of his materials to construct dictionaries of their own.

In 1841, Dr. Webster published a second edition of the large dictionary in two royal-octavo volumes. A large list of new words was appended to the original, with brief definitions. Some special labor was bestowed in revision, but the work was not greatly altered nor much improved.

In 1848, an entirely new issue of Webster, as revised by Prof. C. A. Goodrich, was published in a single crown octavo or small quarto volume. Great pains were bestowed

upon this edition by the editor and publishers. The matter of the two previous editions was carefully revised. Many new words were added. New definitions were given to explain new senses of old words, and to fix more precisely those which had already been current. Nearly all the matter of the original edition, with very much that was new, was compressed into a single handsome volume, and brought within the reach of almost every citizen. To avoid all reasonable objections on the score of orthography, the words, the spelling of which had been most complained of, were spelled in the two methods. The publication of this edition of Webster, was a memorable event in the history of lexicography in America. Mr. Worcester's dictionary, in large octavo, had been published the year previous, and an earnest and somewhat acrimonious controversy arose between the publishers and friends of the two dictionaries, which has continued, with some abatements, till the present time. Simultaneously with this issue of the original unabridged dictionary, appeared a revised edition of the octavo abridgment, with the addition of groups of synonymous words, without definitions.

In 1859, the large dictionary was again issued, in what is called the pictorial edition. Some fifteen hundred handsome cuts were furnished in an appendix, the most of which illustrate to the eye objects that cannot be described to the ear, in conformity with a suggestion originally given by Locke, and followed to a limited extent by Bailey. An appendix of some ten thousand new words, with carefully considered definitions, was also added. An appendix of synonyms, newly defined and discriminated, by Professor Goodrich, was also added, which give a special value to this edition. Without committing ourselves to the accuracy and justness of all these distinctions, we think it is no more than true to say, that, for compactness, convenience, and general usefulness, it is the best dictionary of English synonyms to be found in the language

We have already quoted from Prof. Kingsley the prophecy written in 1829, that "no new English dictionary will

hereafter serve, either at home or abroad, for popular use, which does not contain many of the additions and corrections of Webster." This prophecy has been fulfilled, as the schoolmen would say, *in sensu eminentiori* — far more widely and emphatically than could have been anticipated. Since that time, every defining dictionary published in England has borrowed liberally from Webster. Even Smart's enlargement of Walker, though designed chiefly as a pronouncing dictionary, has taken words and definitions from this source. The most important dictionaries published since Webster's, are Boag's Imperial Lexicon, 1848; Craig's Etymological, Technological, and Pronouncing Dictionary, 1849; Ogilvie's Imperial Dictionary, English, Technological, and Scientific, 1850; and Wright's Universal Pronouncing Dictionary and General Expositor, 1855. Of these, the largest, the most expensive and the best, is Ogilvie's Imperial Dictionary, which is published in two volumes, with a supplement. It is handsomely printed, and was the first of modern dictionaries to introduce a second time the fashion of illustrating by cuts, which Bailey had original introduced. This dictionary has taken at least three fourths of its matter from Webster, with few alterations. Some additions have been made, and some improvements. Craig is excellent and original in his definition of technological terms, and in this particular is deserving the highest confidence and respect; but the impression of Webster is seen on every page. Wright is Websterian throughout; and Boag, which is an inferior book, has also taken liberally from Webster. Even the supplement of Ogilvie is largely indebted to Goodrich's revision of Webster in 1848. So entire, obvious, and acknowledged are the transfers from Webster in Ogilvie, that it cannot be reprinted or imported into this country, under the law of copyright.

But notwithstanding these attestations to the excellence of Webster's as a defining dictionary, we are far from believing that it is perfect even in this respect. The defects of Webster as a definer, are, first, that he has not always exhibited the various senses of words in the order of their

actual growth and historical development. Dr. Webster, in noticing the principal faults of Johnson's Dictionary, very justly observes: "There is a primary sense of every word, from which all the others have proceeded; and whenever this can be discovered, this sense should stand first in order." We observe that in the arrangement of his own definitions, Webster aims in general to follow this rule; but he does not do this invariably. Occasionally, we may say not unfrequently, a secondary meaning is given first of all, and afterwards the primary. Again, Webster does not seem clearly to have fixed in his own mind which is to be regarded as a primary meaning; whether the generic or general meaning, as philosophically conceived, or the physical, sensuous use, to which in the order of time it was first applied. The last is often indicated by the etymology; and it would seem that, whatever be the principle of arrangement adopted, it should be followed with uniformity and rigor, so that the mind should follow, from one meaning to another, aided by the natural development of the thoughts.

Again, Webster often gives as a distinct meaning, that which is simply a special application of a meaning already defined. His numbered meanings are far too numerous, and the attempted definition of each of these, tends to confusion and embarrassment. The eye runs down a long list numbering ten, twenty, or thirty so-called meanings of a familiar word. If one half or one third of those are in no sense distinct conceptions, but only particular applications of a meaning already defined, the mind is thrown out of harmony with its own sense of order. In obedience to its author's guidance, it seeks to find a difference where there is none, and gaining no satisfaction, is confused, bewildered, and disgusted. This fault is not peculiar to Webster, but was adopted by him from Johnson. It was in strict accordance with the theory of constructing definitions on which Johnson acted; namely, the theory that the meaning was to be suggested by quoting a passage from an eminent author, rather than explicated in a comprehensive and clear proposition. Webster's theory was different from that of Johu-

son, so far as either had a theory ; but Webster was greatly influenced by the practice of the great lexicographer ; and while he would fain introduce a new element, he was not always true to his own better method, if indeed he was distinctly aware of what his method was.

Webster is untrue to himself in another particular. We often find that he appends a string of words to a clear and well-announced definition, as though any effect could follow from such a course except that of bewildering the mind. It is as though a man should treat you to the sight of a picture sharply drawn and finely colored, giving you time to take from it a clear impression, and should then thrust hastily before your eyes some half dozen somewhat like the original, which rude and badly-colored drawings you see but imperfectly for a moment, and then they are gone.

Again, Webster is sometimes over-diffuse, pedagogical, telling what everybody knows, and which no one needs or cares to hear. Sometimes he is excessively homely, and his plainness and preciseness of speech lead him to violate neatness and good taste, in choosing his words and constructing his sentences. Yet, with all these abatements, he is so thorough and exact, so comprehensive and clear, so painstaking and precise, that, as a defining dictionary, the dictionary of Webster, as a whole, stands foremost in the language. We mean the dictionary in its present form. For we trace in its several editions that constant and steady progress which is the result of faithful consultation of the best authorities, both books and men, and a careful consideration of the thought and language of the new matter which leads to the recasting of borrowed definitions by independent thought. Some of the old matter may be rough in its form, and diffuse in its language ; but, taken together, the old and the new furnish more valuable stores of knowledge, and a better discipline of thought, than can be derived from any other dictionary. We may be amused at Webster's elucidation of the doctrine of *boots*, and his careful enumeration of the several species of that very convenient article. We may laugh outright when told, under

sauce, that "sauce, consisting of stewed apples, is a great article in some parts of New England; but cranberries make the most delicious sauce"; and feel disposed to add, in the strain of friendly admonition so often assumed: "but at the present price of the fruit, it cannot be recommended for general use." So too we may enjoy the dry satire with which he defines a *dandy*, to be "a male of the human species who dresses himself like a doll, and who carries his character on his back." But, viewed in another light, these are examples of that striking individuality which has impressed itself upon the body of his definitions, and made them to be so often the fresh and living thoughts which are adapted to take root in the soil of an inquisitive and earnest spirit, and to bear fruit and grow.

It ought also to be remembered that Webster, as we have it now, is the fruit of a half century of labor from a single mind, and has been quietly appropriating to itself the thought and knowledge of scores of superior men, with whom its author and editors have come in contact. Like an old growth of any kind, it bears marks of earlier times. But, though old, it has not ceased to grow, and its newest wood is fresh and vigorous, while many of its fruits are both fair and mature.

In the year 1839, Dr. Charles Richardson published the first edition of his *New Dictionary of the English Language*. The reader of the Introduction would gather from its somewhat confused and pedantic exposition of the author's plan and principles, that he was about to furnish a philosophical dictionary of the language, developed from its etymology. He contends, with great earnestness, that a word has but a single proper meaning, and fortifies himself by the authority of Scaliger, who says: "*Unius namque vocis una tantum sit significatio propria ac princeps.*"

But he does not inform his readers what he means by the proper meaning of the word, whether the original signification of its root, so far as that can be traced up to a sensuous origin, or that generic meaning which is rarely explained in dictionaries, and of which the so-called different senses of a

word are only specific and subordinate conceptions, made special by the *differentiae* that its various uses develop. The illustrations given of his doctrine would lead us to conclude that he means the first, for he quotes from Locke the oft-repeated example that *spirit* originally signified *breath*, and that the several senses of spirit are to be explained by a reference to its origin. But he leaves us still in doubt whether this original sense is the single and proper sense of the word. His own practice in defining does not relieve our embarrassment. We consult his pages and select at random word after word, expecting to find that his method of defining will illustrate his principles of definition. But we are disappointed in finding no method at all. It is true he arranges groups or classes of words about the root-word, or the word which is nearest the root. The signification of this primitive, he seeks to derive from its etymology. But this sense is often not clearly and vividly given ; and when it is distinctly given, it is not made the starting point of a series of well-developed and historically arranged secondary significations, but these significations are huddled together with little order, with no felicity of expression, and scarcely a trace of that lucid arrangement which, of itself, indicates the history of their growth. The definitions are usually not by propositions, but by words or phrases. Many important senses are not stated. The significations appropriate to the noun, the verb, the adjective, and adverb belonging to a common group, are rarely separated, and never distinctly considered, each in their place. A few terms, having more or less appropriateness to the root-word and its derivatives, are hastily huddled together, and the work is laid aside as complete. We know of no work of such pretensions in which the performance so wretchedly belies the promise, and the attainment is such a mockery of the aims, as does this dictionary of Richardson. Its chief value consists in its quotations, which, being selected in so great measure from the earlier English writers, present to the eye the history of many a word, as it glances down the well-arranged series of sentences that illustrate the progress and changes of its

meanings. These quotations, to the philosophic student, do, of themselves, supersede the necessity of formal definitions in a great measure; and hence, to the critic of English literature, Richardson's dictionary is a most instructive and delightful book; and the philosophical and curious student of words will find mines of wealth in its well-stored pages. But there are few that understand its value, or are interested in its contents. For the ordinary purposes of a dictionary of reference and consultation, it is simply worthless, and it stands upon the book-shelves, or lies upon the table of many a well-furnished library, simply as a necessary incumbrance or an ornamental piece of literary furniture, for which there is no imaginable use or possible application.

In the year 1846, Mr. J. E. Worcester gave to the public his *Universal and Critical Dictionary of the English Language* in large octavo. It had the largest vocabulary of English words, and words called English, that at that time had been collected for any English dictionary, and was in all respects creditable to the industry, taste, and judgment of its author. Unfortunately for its widest circulation, it soon encountered a formidable rival in the unabridged Webster, which was published the year after, and which was offered at so low a price as to attract public attention. The points in which superiority was claimed for Worcester were, the conformity of its orthography to actual English usage, its careful notation of the pronunciation of each vowel sound, the complete historical exhibition of the several methods of pronunciation adopted by all the eminent orthoepists, given in a very compact form, and the general excellence and accuracy of its definitions. In one of these particulars, its superiority cannot be questioned. Its historical account of the various modes in which every word has been pronounced, is complete, and, to those curious in such matters, is interesting and instructive. The definitions were necessarily, to a great extent, expressed by single words. They could not be given by propositions, within the limits of an octavo volume. As in the great mass of English dictionaries, these are thrown together with little or no arrangement according to their

history or development, and are held together by few threads of connection. Upon its claim to superior merits as a standard of orthography and pronunciation, we express no opinion. The question would, in any country but ours, be dismissed as unworthy of popular discussion. The differences would be regarded as trivial, in comparison with other points, and a greater liberty would be accorded to the preferences of individual philologists and scholars than our very knowing but tyrannical democracy are disposed to allow.

Encouraged by success, Mr. Worcester devoted himself for years to the enlargement of his octavo edition, and with the aid of accomplished assistants, in 1860, issued a very large quarto volume; the latest, but we presume not the last, of the series of American dictionaries. It is a beautiful volume; the library edition being, in binding, paper, and type, altogether unexceptionable. The page is one on which the eye rests with entire satisfaction, which, as we notice the variety of its letter and the judicious skill shown in the distribution of its paragraphs, rises to positive delight. The vocabulary is enormous, presenting over one hundred thousand words. In orthography and pronunciation it is substantially like the octavo, there being no occasion to enlarge it in these particulars. In etymology and definition it is so greatly altered as to be an entirely new work. In both these respects it is a compilation from all accessible English authorities not founded upon Webster, and has been executed with taste, accuracy, and skill. Besides, there are distinct traces of original research bestowed here and there upon single words, which show the hand and sagacity of a genuine word-hunter, and make us wish that the whole work was less a compilation and more an original. We are sorry that the author was shut off from the use of Webster's labors, in the original and the English copyists, for otherwise we should have had from him a *dictionnaire des dictionnaires*. We think, however, Worcester has quite too often relied upon other dictionary makers, especially in his treatment of *special* or *quasi-technical* words. In many such cases we would rather have the mature opinion of

Mr. Worcester himself, formed by the aid of his authorities, than the definitions which he quotes in their words. For example, in defining *chemistry*, Mr. Worcester, like Dr. Webster, quotes from authorities, neither of them giving an original definition. Unfortunately the best definition quoted by Worcester from *Brande*, is inferior to the best quoted by Webster from *Ure*, and the definition of neither comes up to our present conceptions of the science. What we need and what we require is, not that the dictionary maker should surround himself with authorities, and cull the best fruit which they offer, but that he should, with the aid of authorities, work out an independent product of his own. Under *imagination*, *nature*, *idea*, which are very richly illustrated, we gain more information from the materials cited from authors of mark, than from the conceptions elaborated by the author himself. Again, it is to be remembered that dictionary makers, even the makers of special dictionaries, are often men of second-rate ability and of superficial research, and that so-called authorities are therefore anything but authority. Even such books as Taylor's *Elements of Thought*, and Fleming's *Dictionary of Philosophy*, should both be used with caution, and need that to them the consulter "bring a judgment equal or superior." We regret that Mr. Worcester did not avail himself of Heyse's *Fremdwörterbuch*, for he would have found him most serviceable and trustworthy in interpreting more satisfactorily a large class of words of foreign origin. For example, in seeking an exact explanation of *brocard*, a word used by Sir William Hamilton, we found no satisfaction in Worcester, but were completely answered in *Heyse*.

In his etymologies, Worcester exhibits the results of industrious compilation, in respect of words of which the derivation is tolerably well settled; but there is little evidence of special research beyond that of the compiler. He spares us the fanciful and fantastic conjectures of Webster, but he is not so full in giving the kindred words and roots in other languages. Nor do his etymologies serve to stimulate to this kind of study. The history of the word's derivation is

not so distinctly indicated as it ought to be; the successive forms it has assumed since it left the root, in the different languages and dialects through which it has passed, should be given in all their fulness, and arranged in the exactest order. This can be done most successfully in those words which have originated in the Romanic languages, a class of words of which Mr. Worcester's etymologies have been less thoroughly wrought. Much remains to be done in this department. The new veins which have been worked by the comparative philologists on the continent, can be made to yield far richer and more satisfactory results for our English etymology than have yet been given to the English reader. We have before us better and more satisfying etymologies than Worcester has given to the following words: *crawl*, *crayon*, *creak*, *creance*, *crease*, *creat*, *creel*, *creese*, *creole*, *crest*, *crimp*, *crimson*, *crude*, *crust*, *cry*, *cubeb*, *cucking-stool*, *cuckold*, *cudden*, *cuddy*, *cuirasse*, *culdee*, *cullion*, *cullis*, *cumber*, *curd*, *daint* and *dainty*, *dairy*, *dais*, *dame*, *damp*, *damsel*, all occurring within twelve pages.

The definitions of Worcester are given, to a good degree, in propositions; and these are numbered, and often accompanied with illustrative passages from the best authors. The number of special definitions is generally less than in Webster, who, as we have already observed, is, like Johnson, quite too fond of making distinctions where there are no differences. We have noticed occasionally that Worcester omits an important signification given by Webster. In respect to fulness and precision, he falls below Webster in general, though in some words he surpasses him greatly. In respect of neatness and taste he is rarely open to exception, which is more than can be affirmed of Webster. He has to a far greater degree the same fault which we have already noticed in Webster, of following a clear and good definition with a string of quasi-synonymous words, which in such a connection should always be spared, tending only to vagueness and confusion. In respect of that prime requisite, an orderly development from the primary sense to the secondary, and so on to the more remote, that *lucidus ordo*

which by the force of juxta-position causes a train of light to flash along a line of what would otherwise be dead and abstract propositions; in respect to this prime requisite of a perfect dictionary we discern no improvement upon his predecessors.

We ought not to omit the illustrative cuts, which though not so numerous nor so large as those in Webster, are far more convenient for use, being inserted upon the page, and at the word which they illustrate. The synonyms, also, have been carefully compiled from the highest English authorities, and though they are not as thoroughly wrought, nor as invigorating as those of Goodrich, are a very valuable feature of the edition. The notes, often given as post-scripts, frequently convey much useful and pertinent matter.

The advocate of Worcester would insist, very properly, on its general excellence as a whole, and on the uniform good taste, correctness, and trustworthiness which characterize every feature. The advocate for Webster would, on his part, recommend Webster for the greater fulness, thoroughness, sprightliness, and thought-awakening power which belong to its definitions, and to the various excellencies which can only be secured by the labor and care of years.

But comparisons are said to be always odious, and we know that in this case they will be especially so, as they will be little likely to satisfy the ardent partisans of either dictionary: "Non nostrum tantas componere lites." There are points of superiority which are peculiar to each. For special purposes, each has the advantage. In certain particulars each suffers under serious defects. They are both most honorable to the scholarship of our country.

But while we show, in these dictionaries of Webster and Worcester, what America has done for English lexicography in the past, the mother country is in the field with an imposing project for the future. The newly-formed Philological Society of London has issued proposals for the co-operation of English scholars, at home and abroad, in a thorough reading of all accessible English literature, so that every word ever used by any English writer and its meaning may be devel-

oped from, and illustrated by, some passage in which it occurs. The project is very comprehensive, and if it is thoroughly executed must lead to the collection of a vast mass of materials for the use of some body of competent elaborators, if such a body can be found. It is obvious that, after all this reading shall have been done, and its products returned to the head bureau, and even after these shall have been properly arranged, indexed, and transcribed, that then the proper work of the dictionary maker will commence. He must look through the various passages cited, eliminate from the frightful masses that present themselves in connexion with single words, all those which repeat and illustrate the same meaning, arrange those retained, after some principle of development and order, and then begin to think about them. Let us suppose the process to be successfully achieved, and each word to have been decomposed by the solvent of analysis, and recomposed and arranged by some master of the architectonic art. The result will be an immense, voluminous thesaurus of old English literature, exhibiting the uses of myriads of half-formed and unformed English words, that are now disused altogether; among which there are here and there to be seen the germs of our developed English speech. What a contribution of words, meanings, and illustrative quotations will such a book as Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* present! What massive and resplendent stores will the writings of our affluent and golden-mouthed Jeremy Taylor pour forth! We say nothing of quaint John Donne and a score of divines who, like him, rioted in their own creative energy.

We wish this project success. Whatever comes of it, whether little or much, will be good, and can only tend to good. It is most refreshing to observe in it a sign of awakening interest in the language itself. As the result of it, the studies of our younger scholars will be directed to English philology, and the ardor which might have been expended upon fields more remote and less promising, will be kindled at the prospect of throwing new light upon the derivation and syntax of the dear old English. The study of comparative

philology now so fascinating, and soon so likely to be generally prosecuted, will be pursued with special reference to the illustration of the origin and meaning of our household words. The history of this complex and conglomerate structure, called the English language, will be traced out step by step, so far as extant books and records will allow, and English scholars will no longer be forced to confess, with shame, that foreign students can give them lessons in their mother tongue.

But while we are waiting for the fruits of this complicated scheme of coöperative labor, that will certainly be cumbrous in its movements, and perhaps doubtful in its results, we may express the hope that a better English dictionary than any we have yet seen, will sooner or later be at the service of the educated men of our country, and will lend its plastic influence to the training of our youth. We ought not to be content with what Webster and Worcester have done. However high may be our opinion of the value of their labors, and however hearty our gratitude for their unthanked perseverance and fidelity, we cannot but be aware that our neighbors on the continent are provided with better dictionaries than the best of our own. We have at hand the very common German dictionary of Heyse; and to give an example of the way in which he develops the meaning of a word, we translate the following:

‘*Seele* (*the soul*), from the same root with *see* (Goth. *saiws*); therefore the original signification is, moving power. 1. The original ground or faculty of life and sensation; or that spiritual substance which gives life and motion to every living creature, in contrast with body (even animals have *souls*, but the *soul* of man only is rational). In the case of man (*a*), in the widest sense, the whole spiritual substance endowed with reason and will, including the intellect and heart (hence we say, etc.); (*b*) in a narrow sense the capacity or seat of the sensations and feelings, and the consequent emotions, inclinations, etc., in contrast with the thinking power (as when we say, etc.). 2. A being endowed with a rational soul; a man or person (as when we say, she is a

good *soul*; the city numbers ten thousand souls, etc.). 3. Improperly, i. e. by transfer, the element of anything that gives life, efficiency, or activity; also the constituent that is preëminent, most important, or essential (as, for example, he was the *soul* of the company; love is the *soul* of the Christian virtues, etc.). 4. The interior or inmost part of a body, particularly if it is hollow, or filled with loose, transparent material (as, in firearms, the hollow space of the barrel; the pith of a quill, etc.). 5. A kind of fish. (Then follow the various compounds).'

This may serve as a single example of the management of a word requiring a brief explication. The life and spirit in this case, depends in a great degree on the illustrations, of which we have given but a small portion.

We might refer our readers to Freund's Latin Lexicon, as edited by Andrews, also to Liddell and Scott's Greek Lexicon, for examples of definitions that are superior, in completeness and especially in order and development, to the majority of those found in our best English dictionaries.

We have made these extracts and references to show that we may and ought to expect a more perfect dictionary of the English language than has yet been furnished. Whether this dictionary is to grow out of the investigations set on foot by the Philological Society and the materials which will in this way be gathered, or whether it shall come from a recasting of Webster or Worcester, or of both combined, or whether it shall be the product of the life-labors of some veteran philologist and his helpers, it will certainly come; for it is demanded by the wants of our scholars, and, sooner or later, it will appear in answer to that demand.

What ought to be its vocabulary? On what principles should its words be selected or rejected? Should all the words that have ever been used by any English author be included, however obsolete or antiquated, however foreign or fantastical? If any words are to be rejected, at what date shall we begin, and what principle of elimination shall we adopt? It is easier to ask than to answer these questions. One or two principles can only be indicated. How-

ever desirable it would be to have a complete vocabulary of all the words ever used by any English author, a *Thesaurus totius Anglilitatis*, the attempt to attach one to a dictionary adapted for common use even of scholars, would fail by reason of its own bulkiness. Such a vocabulary would require extended explanations and references, and it must necessarily leave in the shade the more modern English words and their definitions. There seems to be no escape from this difficulty, except by having two dictionaries: one of *Archaic*, and the other of *Modern English*. But how shall we fix the limits between the old and the new? Perhaps the period fixed by Johnson is as appropriate as any at which to draw the line: only it should be understood that every antiquated or disused meaning of what are by this rule determined to be modern words, should be carefully explained; and the more carefully, if it throws any light on the history of the word, or carries us a single step nearer to the sensuous meaning of its root. To all such significations, special prominence and the fullest explanations should be accorded, in order to secure spirit and intellectual interest. Then, again, if the new English word is clearly traceable to the older forms, which occur in Tyndale and Chaucer, all these older forms should be given, in their historical order, as a part of the development of the etymology of the word in question. If this is thoroughly done, much of the old English would in fact be incorporated in the lexicon of the new, and in the way in which it is interesting to an ordinary scholar, by illustrating the history of the words with which he is familiar.

Especial pains should be taken to collect and trace out the language of common life, even its homeliest words and its most familiar phrases. Wherever these are to be found, whether they linger in the remoter districts of old or New England, or can be detected in the outlandish dialect of neglected families and unvisited hamlets; whether they are preserved in the ballads or stories of other generations, or have vexed the critics of the older writers of plays, they should all be incorporated in the vocabulary. These are all

worthy objects of the quest of the hunter of words. The botanist penetrates into the darkest swamps and the most hidden glens, that he may find a new moss or track out an unnamed fern. The entomologist casts his net at evening twilight in all by-places and low valleys, that he may entangle some mote that has before been unobserved, or ensnare some insect that has been so unhappy as not to be arranged in his appropriate company, and to be designated by some unpronounceable name. Surely the object is as worthy, and should be prosecuted with equal zeal, when we seek to find an old but lost word or phrase which has been current in other generations, which gave a more pointed expression to every day wisdom, or vividly spoke some striking thought or warm emotion, or which casts new light upon the outer or inner life of our forefathers. It has been too much the custom with the makers of English dictionaries, to overlook this class of words, as altogether unworthy of their notice; and to consider the so-called language of books to be alone sufficiently dignified to command their attention. The general opinion of scholars now inclines in the opposite direction: and with good reason; for it is believed that in the common speech of common men much of pure and idiomatic English can either be detected or accounted for. Surely it is of far greater importance that words of this class should be carefully gathered up, than that the vocabulary should be ambitiously swelled by words which have emerged from the addled brain of some affected scribbler to fall dead at the moment of their birth; and which, having never passed into the common life of the language, would be forgotten forever, if the author of the dictionary did not set up a monument to their memory. It is a pity also that it should be so often his painful duty to bestow so much space that might be better employed, upon long rows of compounded words which explain themselves, and which propagate faster than they can be written down.

It is a more difficult question to answer, whether terms strictly scientific should appear at all in a dictionary which has for its chief end to exhibit and explain the language of

common life and literature. We have observed that the earlier dictionaries were devoted especially to the explanation of the more uncommon words, and that Johnson was very copious upon all the scientific terms of his time, so that his dictionary was in some sort a miniature encyclopaedia. Webster also took great pains to collect and define the scientific terms of the newer and older sciences, and to define them with the exact and technical precision which professors and text-books require. Worcester has followed the example of Johnson and Webster.

We question somewhat whether it is wise to attempt to include all the terms of science and art in a dictionary for common use. It is far easier to collect such terms than it is the words of common life and of common books; for they are easily found in technical dictionaries and scientific treatises, and it costs less effort to find and arrange a score of them, than it does to develop a single special signification of a so-called common word. It is comparatively easy to define them with exact precision, and in most learned phrase, for the work of science consists in making definitions, and she records and indicates her progress by these formal petrifications. Hence dictionary makers are tempted to expend much space and zeal upon them, and to enlarge greatly on the importance of having at hand the ready means of explaining the technical and scientific terms which occur in our reading. But here the question presents itself: in what kind of reading? If it be the reading of common books, then it is reasonable to provide the explanation. Such words as *polarization* and *polarized*, are supposed to be so generally used and known that almost any author would not hesitate to employ them, if he had occasion. But when the terms are not so far popularized that they would be freely used—when they would not be likely to occur, except in writing or discourse that is properly scientific, they seem to be out of place in a dictionary for general use. Every science and art has its glossary, dictionary, or encyclopaedia. Definitions severely scientific can only be given in technical language, and hence, cannot readily be

understood by the very persons for whom the definition should be given in a dictionary, if given at all. To introduce such terms and definitions beyond the limits prescribed, seems to be an affectation. The effect must be to occupy a large and still larger portion of the space which might be better used, and to leave little room for the results of a more faithful consideration and a more copious illustration of what are properly English words.

On the other hand, wherever the words of conversation and literature have technical as well as general meanings, whether these be legal, military, or maritime, etc., or a more special and limited signification, as in the moral or political sciences, the rule which we have given would require that these technical meanings be indicated and defined.

But if we suppose the words to be selected, the next question is: What shall we do with them? We reply, first of all we must ascertain whence they came, and what are the changes which they have undergone—the metamorphoses through which they have passed—since they came into being. To trace the history of a word from the beginning, through the various phases it has assumed, is to give its etymology. Sometimes the root lies far back in the past, and can be traced through the Romanic dialects, by a regular succession of changes, to the Latin, and thence still further. Sometimes the word is taken from the Latin or the Greek by direct transfer, as is the case with a multitude of terms in law, science, and art. Sometimes the root is out of sight, and cannot be unearthed, but shows its being and its fruitfulness by the cognate and similar growths which reveal unmistakably a common origin, as is the case in the great number of words of the Teutonic family, where the root may not be reached, but the sprouts are seen to come from one centre of life. The use of these etymological researches, when they carry us out of the domain of our own language, are manifold to the scholar. On these we need not here enlarge. To the common man they are of little interest, except their results are so exhibited as to throw light upon the meaning of the word, and waken a

more vivid apprehension of its real import. This result is most effectually accomplished, when the sensuous origin of a word or thought or feeling is developed, and our apprehension of its meaning becomes thereby intensely real and startling.

If the word has sprung up within our own soil, and undergone important changes of form by contraction or composition, the explication of its history, if it be properly so-called, or its etymology, as we usually say, has a fascinating interest for all classes of men. Many of the etymologies which Trench so happily illustrates, are of this character; and the interest with which his volumes have been received, is an indication of how important it is that this part of every dictionary should be fully treated. It is to be remembered, also, that a very considerable portion of those who use an English dictionary, may be supposed to know something of one or more languages besides their own. All these comprehend something of the doctrine of the derivation of words, and are capable of following with interest the history of a word to its radical, and of finding instruction in the several phases which the common root assumes in different languages and dialects.

Whether the etymologies be given for any or all of these classes, it is essential that they be given in the most complete and thorough manner possible. It serves no purpose whatever, except to make a show of learning, to give the root-word, or a few cognate forms, if no thought or history is either suggested or derived. The rule should invariably be observed, to give the whole of what may be called the underground existence of the word which the recent philology has been able to track out, to give every part of it in historical order, not omitting a single phase or step in the progressive growth. Let all the offshoots and side-growths into other languages be given, so far as any purpose of instruction or convenience can thereby be suggested. Especially let the strange and capricious formations which have sprung up within the English soil, be as thoroughly sought out and explained as the means of the student will

allow. Above all, let all the etymological researches and conclusions be so conducted and exhibited as to throw the clearest and happiest light upon the meaning.

This leads to the *Haupt-Sache* in the dictionary — the definition. We have insisted abundantly that this should not, because in ordinary cases it cannot, be given by a single word. It must be expressed by a phrase; or, in more technical language, a sentence-form which fully explicates or unfolds all the distinctive qualities, attributes, and relations which are implied or unfolded in the conception denoted by the word. Without discussing the metaphysical question whether there is or can be more than a single meaning to a word, and whether it is possible to express this, we accept the commonly received notion that one word has several senses. If this be assumed, it may also be taken for true, that the word did not have all these meanings at the outset, but that they were developed one from the other by historical growth. This is indicated by the actual history of a multitude of words, which can be traced backward, step by step, from the tropical to the literal sense, from the transitive or derived to the primitive or original. If there were any need or occasion, this progressive development could be demonstrated to be necessary, from the laws of the mind itself, and the processes by which the intellect builds up its conceptions; advancing from the sensuous to the spiritual, from the near and simpler to the remote and complex. What the mind of the individual must do in forming its conceptions, that the mind of the race has done in developing the meanings of its words.

It is the duty of the definer, first, to be well assured that he has collected all the senses of his words; then, that he has expressed them in well-thought and adequate phrases; and then that he has arranged them in the order of their development and historic growth. The last duty is of equal importance with either of the others. The successful discharge of this duty will contribute quite as much to the value and the instructive interest of his work, as the satisfactory performance of the other two. Nay, it will do more

than anything besides to elevate the dictionary from being a dry and lifeless aggregation of unorganized matter to a living and organized product that is animate itself, and can quicken to life in others. The mere arrangement of well-chosen definitions, in such an order, must be a discipline of thought to the dullest intellect. Even if it cannot see the the relations after which the arrangement proceeds, or the principle which gives it beauty and order, it cannot fail to be impressed by the order and beauty itself, and to feel itself taken up and carried forward from one sense to another by an energy that it can feel, but cannot explain. But more can be done than simply to arrange the meanings in the order of their history. The development of one from another can be explained by a word or a phrase. It can be shown how and why one meaning has followed another; how a word which signifies one thing at one time, has come, by an unlooked-for yet not a violent transition, to mean something very unlike. A single phrase, or connecting clause, will often explain some of these capricious changes by which a word takes a sense directly the opposite to that which it ought properly to bear. Indeed, there is scarcely any limit to the light and interest which a few brief words, rightly disposed and uttered in the right places, might diffuse over the otherwise dreary pages of the dictionary. Were due attention given to this single requisition, the dictionary, instead of being a stupid and repulsive book, might even become one of the liveliest and the most attractive. If this rule were observed, it would follow of course that the order of definitions would, in every case when it was possible, be drawn from its etymology. Starting from the sensuous image, of which every word, even the most unsensuous, is the "faded metaphor," it would proceed to the next remove, and then to the next, till all the senses—the real, spiritual, literal, tropical, the obvious and natural, the transitive and the capricious—had been developed; and the whole should be so presented as to form a naturally developed and symmetrical unity; the whole series should seem, as it were, to grow before the eye. Then following

backward the word, through the history of its root, the growth of this organic whole beneath the ground and out of sight, would seem to be as natural and as beautiful as that which had been traced in its developed significations. Etymology and definition would be seen to be bound together, by one law, into one life, as are the root that grows beneath the soil and the stately tree that towers in the sky. The definer should not stop here, nor be content if he can add anything besides that will impart knowledge or awaken thought, provided it be *apropos* to his great objects. The variety and fulness of Webster, in efforts of this kind, is greatly to be commended, though it led him to an occasional error of judgment and taste.

The definitions should be illustrated by quotations, showing the actual use of the word in a given meaning by a writer of authority, when such a quotation is required to substantiate the legitimacy of the word, or to explain and enforce its signification. Indeed such quotations are often required to impart a concrete and living interest to what would be otherwise an abstruse and abstract explanation, or to serve as an example guiding to the full apprehension of the real meaning and proper use of the word. Words are made for sentences; they have their life and meaning from their connection; and it is only as seen in living and connected discourse that their import or use can be fully understood. By all means, then, let us have illustrative quotations, given freely and variously, from authors new and old, high and low, wherever quotations are needed; but let them not be introduced for the sake of the form, where the meaning does not need to be sustained or illustrated in this way. We scarcely need say that some regard should be had to the literary value of the quotation itself, in addition to its value for the use of the dictionary. It were desirable, certainly, that the pages, which are usually somewhat dull, should sparkle, occasionally with a pithy proverb, a lively simile, or a stirring truth.

Quotations are often and properly introduced as authorities for the proper use and proper definition of a word.

Ought authorities to be given for new words or new meanings, when no quotation is made? Should the name of an author be given in whom the word happens to be found, or the name of the person or the author be stated, to whom the maker of the dictionary is indebted for a definition? In certain cases this may be done. If the word is a novelty, and its legitimacy is likely to be questioned; if the inquiry be started whether it has ever been sanctioned by an author of repute, it is well to refer to the author by name; though, in such a case, it were better to quote the passage also. But if no question about the word is likely to arise, then it seems a mere affectation to name an authority. This is especially apparent when the word has passed into very general use, and when the names of fifty authors could as readily be given for it, as the name of one. The same remark will hold good of the definitions. We do not care to be referred to some antediluvian or mythical personage called an encyclopaedia, as voucher for the correctness of a definition, or to be confronted, at every turn, with some dictionary or personage, known or unknown, as the responsible originator of an unquestioned definition, even though it be scientific and technical. If there be a difference of opinion as to the appropriate definition of a term or word, or if the phraseology used be matter of question, then it may be proper to indicate the one preferred, and the authority. One objection to the continued reference to authorities for the form's sake, is, that it is merely a form, and means nothing, while it seems to have great significance. We have another objection which is more serious; and that is, that the practice sinks the responsible author or editor into a mere collector of the opinions of other men, who distrusts his own judgment so far as not to be willing to be held accountable for his own thinking. We do not expect him to be *an courant* with all science and literature, but we desire him to assume the attitude of a man who is able to judge of the correctness of his definitions, or of the competence of those authorities, living or dead, books or men, from whom he derives them. Any other attitude than this, however modest or

deferential it may seem, is likely to sink the maker of a dictionary into a mere collector of things of doubtful trustworthiness, and to train him to think his responsibility is fully discharged, when he has cited some sort of a dictionary or encyclopaedia. We do not object that the author should give due credit, in his preface, to any sources from which he has derived assistance, but we would prefer that a dictionary might seem to be the work of its author, as it ought to be in fact, and that we might have the comfort of believing in its infallible authority, without being reminded at every turn, of the poor mortal who furnished the meaning, and being obliged to ask "Who is he?" or, what is still worse, without being referred to some antiquated dictionary, that we more than suspect is of second-rate or doubtful authority. We know that Johnson set a bad example in this direction; but the example is a bad one for all that, and we wish it might be abandoned.

But our reader will by this time be ready to exclaim: 'Enough, thou hast convinced us that a perfect English dictionary can never be produced.' We beg pardon; the inference is not warranted by the data. Rather should we infer, if Johnson, Webster, and Worcester have done so much to improve our English lexicography, and if the lexicography of other languages has been so nearly perfected, we may certainly hope to see, at some time, an approximation to the ideally perfect English dictionary.