

# 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](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

## ARTICLE XI.

## PROFESSOR MAX MÜLLER AND HIS AMERICAN CRITICS.

LIKE the mills of the gods spoken of by the heathen poet, the Quarterly Reviews grind slowly — much more slowly than the daily and weekly press. Whether or not they grind more surely it would be presumptuous in us to say. At any rate the subject of this Article cannot have passed wholly from the minds of the class of readers who are most interested in our pages; and there are several incidental lessons to be learned from the misunderstanding which has arisen between Professor F. Max Müller and his American critics which are too important to be lost. If, however, some of the reviewers ask concerning this Article, as they have asked of some others that have appeared in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, how we stretch the word “*Sacra*” to cover the subject here treated of, we reply, that justice, charity, and the Christian courtesies of civilized life are to be reckoned among sacred things. The efforts of some of our high-toned political journals to infuse, during this Centennial year, a more judicial and rational spirit into our party politics, can but be greatly hindered by the example of such literary criticism as we are here compelled to notice. If we can render them any aid from our quarter, by rebuking that intemperance of speech which in this case has invaded even the higher critical journals of the land, we will gladly do so.

Furthermore, Professor Müller really seems to us to have received scant justice at the hands of the most of his American critics, and gross injustice from some; and his reputation is so great and of such a nature that he has a special claim to some words of defence on this side of the water and before the theological public. Our readers, we cannot doubt, are of a class to have a peculiar interest in his good name. His missionary addresses, and his wide correspondence with missionaries; his lectures on comparative religion and mythology, and upon Darwinism and language; the philosophical acumen which he has shown in his treatment of the origin and growth of language; and, finally, the prominent position he has occupied in resuscitating Sanscrit, the sacred literature of India; all this, and much more, give him a claim upon the attention of educated Christian teachers. It is not, then, an ordinary case of individual controversy; for nothing which such a man does in the line of his special calling is of private interpretation. We would not, however, set ourselves up as umpires upon all the matters in dispute between him and his American critics. Several of the points in controversy pertain to

Sanskrit literature, and other recondite matters, which must be left to the decision of scholars who have paid special attention to those subjects. In our criticism, in the *Bibliotheca Sacra* of last July, we carefully limited ourselves to such points as were within the range of ordinary scholars, and upon some matters spoke with so much brevity as, perhaps, to be obscure.

It will be a great gain if those who indulge in writing caustic book reviews, shall be put on their guard and rendered more modest by observing how misunderstanding and ill-feeling have arisen in the case under consideration. The occasion for no small part of Professor Müller's rejoinders, is to be found in Professor Whitney's two volumes, entitled "Oriental and Linguistic Studies," which are mainly collections of book reviews published in the periodical literature of this country. Like too many who do much of that class of labor, Professor Whitney, so it seems to us, had for a long time used words of criticism recklessly, without due consideration as to the full amount of opprobrium which was contained in them; and without sufficient regard to the question whether this style of criticism were called for. Indeed, he confesses, himself, that his form of expression is sometimes too strong. In criticising the sharpness of Professor Müller's reply, we should remember that he is speaking in self-defence, and has much more liberty in that position than would otherwise be proper. We wish that with the rest of the good which may come out of the evil of this personal controversy, it might open the eyes of readers as well as writers, to the dangers which arise when the taste for book reviews is largely cultivated and gratified. As in the case in hand, this class of literature is almost sure to be destructive rather than constructive. The temptation is well-nigh irresistible for the critic to revel in sparkling phrases, which skim the surface of the subject only, and are prized chiefly for the sting they leave behind them. Science will have gained much when there shall be less desire to see adversaries demolished, than to see the truth rising in the grandeur of her own proportions.

We find, for instance, one of the critics saying, that Professor Müller charges his American rival with having "*stolen*<sup>1</sup> from his accuser much of the best he had put forth as his own." The same writer represents Professor Müller as accusing Professor Whitney of having "*purloined* from his own [Müller's] *Science of Language*," what was most valuable in Professor Whitney's "*Language, and the Study of Language*." And it is said that Professor Müller has made a "bungling and strained effort" "to prove a *flagrant plagiarism*" against Professor Whitney. The critic, moreover, regards his review as a defence of the "*integrity* of our American scholar." Now these offensive words are not found in Professor Müller; and due attention to the general scope of his replies will show that the animus of them has to be read in between the lines. Another

<sup>1</sup> Italics our own.

point elaborated in the aforesaid review gives us opportunity to expand a remark we dropped six months ago; namely, that the questions over which the dispute waxed hottest belong to "metaphysics." For example, Professor Müller classified language among physical sciences. The reviewer in question "marked not less than fifteen passages" in a single lecture, in which Professor Müller seems to hold that "growth, or change [in language], is completely beyond the control or agency of man." We venture to affirm that no one can write intelligently fifteen pages upon the question, whether language is a "physical science" or a "historical science" without seeming to speak as many as fifteen times on both sides of it. To our apprehension, Professor Müller and Professor Whitney have both written well upon the subject; and the difference between them is not so profound as the public is led to imagine. In his first series of lectures on the "Science of Language," published fifteen years ago, Professor Müller well remarked, that "the process through which language is settled and unsettled, combines in one the two opposite elements of necessity and free-will." Certainly students of theology should be able to appreciate the difficulties which beset the scientific treatment of such a subject, in which there is individual freedom of the agent who uses language, and, at the same time, a law of development so uniform that these acts of freedom can be studied like any other law of nature. Man has both a free-will and a nature. The question pertaining to the "origin of language," which brought this unfortunate personal controversy to a head, is, like that regarding the "origin of species," largely one of terminology. In either case, evolution is but a method of creation; and resolves itself in the end into a mere question as to how long the steps are through which the progress is attained. Evolutionists may be held to the etymology of the word *gradual*, which they use so much.

Another critic makes use of the following among other ornamental expressions:<sup>1</sup> "Critical *bosh*," "he finds a genuine mare's nest." Furthermore, in the case of epithets which, from difference in ideas of propriety, or in national idiom, misunderstanding, if there were any, would not be at all strange, Mr. Müller is said to have had the "hardihood" to regard them as personalities, and three of the instances are called each a "*sham*." Again, "odious forgery" is applied to a case where Mr. Müller's quotation marks are perhaps wrong, and perhaps not, but where certainly no injustice is done to his antagonist. It is even affirmed, in a certain case, that the "*onus*" comes on Professor Müller of proving "that he has not *sought to deceive*" his readers "by false statements," or to "coerce them by artful insinuation . . . . into false inferences." It is the case of Professor Müller's reference to an exchange of favors between the two scholars, explained towards the close of this Article. Finally the

<sup>1</sup> Italics in this section are from the critic's own armory.

concluding paragraph is said "to lack no essential of a falsehood."—a charge appropriate only before an open court.

Still another critic, in one of our most high-toned journals, has spoken of Professor Müller's "*falsification* of the facts of the controversy," and charged him with having interpolated a passage in an important quotation, from his own writings, for the "*obvious design* of disguising" its original meaning. It will be seen on the slightest reflection that this was a charge of no small gravity, and should not have been made unless the writer had first traversed the whole ground, and carefully canvassed all the reasonable hypotheses of innocent error, on one side or the other. The passage which we now quote with the preface and comments of the critic in question, was given as a "characteristic specimen" "of the manner in which Professor Müller quotes from his own writings." "To show that as long ago as 1854 he [Professor Müller] was no stranger to the correct distinction between vowels and consonants, he quotes from his *Proposals for a Missionary Alphabet*, published in that year as follows: 'If we regard the human voice as a continuous stream of air emitted as breath from the lungs, and changed [by the vibration of the *chordae vocales*] into vocal sound as it leaves the larynx, this stream itself as modified by certain positions of the mouth would represent the vowels' . . . . In quoting this passage, Professor Müller has interpolated the words which we enclose in brackets . . . . with the obvious design of disguising its real sense, which would be anything but suitable for his purpose."

A correspondent pointed out to the above-mentioned accuser that there were two editions of the *Proposals for a Missionary Alphabet*, one for the use of the Alphabetical Conferences, to which it was submitted for criticism in 1854; the second printed early in 1855; and that the corrected edition contains the passage exactly as Professor Müller had quoted it. Whereupon the reviewer, frankly confessing his ignorance of the second, and authorized, edition, made the correction; with, however, the somewhat contradictory statements that it was done "cheerfully," and, at the same time, "with reluctance"; and, because his "correspondent was somewhat urgent." He then, however, ventured upon an accusation against Mr. Müller of another kind, but scarcely less grave, viz. of "uncommonly sharp practice" in proceeding to "solve his puzzle," not by "the rule of *interpolation*, but by that of *double position*"; gratuitously charging him, moreover, with having "professed to quote from the edition" of 1854. Professor Müller was replying to a charge of ignorance upon a point made against him in 1866, and had remarked in passing, "This was in 1866, whereas in 1854, I had said," etc.

A little application of inductive reasoning on the part of the writer who makes these statements should have suggested to him a more charitable solution of the puzzle; a solution which we, though laying no great claim to ingenuity, venture to presume is the correct one. Professor Müller's

proposals were printed at first for the use of the members of the Conference, and were much modified in the course of their discussions. They were published by him early in 1855, as an Appendix to his Survey of Languages. In publishing them he had added, simply for the sake of completeness 'by the vibration of the *chordae vocales*' ; for what else is there to change breath into vocal sound as it leaves the larynx, but the *chordae vocales*? They had, we believe, Kempeler's experiments performed for them during the conferences, and were not likely, therefore, to be in the dark on the office of the *chordae vocales*. Unfortunately the writer of the review in question consulted a copy of the Proposals which was for use during the progress of the Conference, and with him the riddle admitted of one solution only — Professor Müller had falsified his own book. The reviewer admitting his carelessness, accuses Mr. Müller of uncommonly "sharp practice," "double position," etc. And why? Because Professor Müller thought he had a right to revise his "Proposals" in 1854, before he published them in 1855. Even if Professor Müller had foisted in the passage in 1855, the critic's charge would collapse all the same. And why all the whirlwind raised from first to last about the use of the terms "surd" and "sonant"? Why do not these critics try Professor Czermak's experiments to which Professor Müller has referred them? They would very likely find that the old technical terms, "hard" and "soft," are by no means so inadequate as they imagine. More recent phonetic researches have established this still more clearly. As to Professor Müller he was neither ignorant of the terms "surd" and "sonant" in 1854, nor did he repent of them, as he is now said to have done, early in 1855. He simply used them promiscuously with "hard" and "soft," "tenuis" and "media," — all the terms expressing different aspects of the same letter.

By others still, Professor Müller is represented as having treated American scholars in general with disrespect. He has, indeed, spoken in mild rebuke of the license allowed in this country in the use of offensive words in the expression of dissent; and in that we think he is sustained in the epithets from our current literature which we have transferred to this Article. Of such freedom in criticism we would speak in more pointed terms of rebuke. We have failed to find, however, any contempt, on Professor Müller's part, for American scholars in general.

When we look at the facts, we find them not only different, but the very opposite of what is represented. We confess to hearing, too often, in America, such expressions concerning the philosophy, and theology, and erudition of other nations, as appeal to the latent national prejudices always too prevalent in society. Professor Whitney even (and we are disposed to judge him charitably) has repeatedly attacked German scholarship in an unbecoming manner. Having in part received his education in a German university, he too has joined in the vulgar outcry against "German nebulosity," etc. He speaks of "that profundity, not quite un-

known in Germany, in which a minimum of valuable truth is wrapped up in a maximum of sounding phraseology.”<sup>1</sup> “Even or especially in Germany. . . .,” he writes, “many an able and acute scholar seems minded to indemnify himself for dry and tedious grubblings among the roots and forms of comparative philology by the most airy ventures in the way of constructing Spanish castles of linguistic science.”<sup>2</sup> Finally, Mr Whitney’s tone is throughout too much that of one who has rescued the science of language from the incongruities and absurdities of European scholars. Is it possible, to be more offensive to German scholars, — to say nothing of European scholars in general, — as distinguished from American scholars? What has nationality to do with science? And how unfortunate to appeal to national susceptibilities in purely scientific questions! But let us now quote what Professor Müller really said of American scholarship. So far from speaking disrespectfully of American scholars in general, he, on the contrary, expressed his surprise that Mr. Whitney, being an American, should write in a style so un-American. In this we fear he was too charitable towards us. He was ready to make allowance for Professor Whitney’s use of expressions which in England sound more offensive than in America, and said: ‘I believe there is far more license allowed in America, in the expression of dissent, than in England; and it is both interesting and instructive, in the study of dialectic growth, to see how words which would be offensive in England have ceased to be so on the other side of the Atlantic, and are admitted into the most respectable American Reviews.’<sup>3</sup>

But, after making full allowance for this in judging of Mr. Whitney’s style, he added: “America has possessed, and still possesses, some excellent scholars, whom every one of these German and French savants would be proud to acknowledge as his peers. Mr. Marsh’s Lectures on the English Language are a recognized standard work in England. Professor March’s Anglo-Saxon Grammar has been praised by every one. Why is there no trace of self-assertion or of personal abuse in any of their works?”<sup>4</sup> This certainly is not what would be called abuse of American scholars in general. And surely the scholar should be the very last man to make capital out of national susceptibilities. The true man of science claims and receives citizenship in the whole world; and should feel equally ashamed to flatter nations as to flatter kings.

We should mention that a German translation of the fourth volume of the “Chips from a German Workshop” has appeared. In this the letter of Professor Whitney to the Academy (London), written December 9th, 1875, together with Professor Müller’s reply of the 8th of January, 1876, are both republished in full.<sup>5</sup> With the comments and proposition which follow,

<sup>1</sup> Oriental Linguistic Studies (1st Series), p. 292.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 315.

<sup>3</sup> Chips from a German Workshop (Am. ed.), Vol. iv. p. 422. <sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 431.

<sup>5</sup> Translation by Dr. Fritzsche, Leipsig. 1876. See pp. 321–352.

Mr. Müller, regretting much the waste of strength which has already been occasioned by it, proposes to end the personal controversy. He reiterates his desire to submit nineteen of the twenty points before made, to the arbitration of three of Mr. Whitney's best friends, enumerating Professors Stenzler, Kern, and Kuhn, contributors to the Petersburg Lexicon. The fifth point, viz. "Whether Professor Whitney thought that the words *light*, *alight*, and *delight*, could be traced to the same source," is withdrawn on the strength of Mr. Whitney's assurance that he did know the diversity of their etymology. Mr. Müller, however, comforts himself by showing that he had company in his error, since the person who indexed Mr. Whitney's volume had construed the matter in the same manner, referring to this passage to show that "use and not etymology determines the significance of words"; while in the German translation the corresponding examples chosen are all connected etymologically.

Professor Müller recalls attention to the fact that he has written in self-defence, and has not made an unprovoked attack; and that he restrained himself from retaliation during a long period, until his silence was called scornful; and that he was drawn into the controversy at first, in defence of a friend, and not of himself. Notwithstanding Mr. Whitney's strictures in regard to the smallness and date of the favors he (Whitney) has received from Mr. Müller, the latter still fortifies his claim to great forbearance by the fact, that he did Mr. Whitney favors after he had been the subject of uncalled for, and what he regards as abusive criticism. A part of the favor was, however, that he kept silence for ten years, from 1865 to 1875. Mr. Whitney is shown to have been forgetful in his statement that when Mr. Müller first received him in 1856 neither of them had written a word on the "Science of language." Mr. Müller had long before that time published an edition of the Rig-Veda with Sâyana's Commentary, which Mr. Whitney had treated slightly, ignoring Mr. Müller's name entirely in referring to it. Professor Müller had, also, previously published his Proposals for a Missionary Alphabet; and his Survey of the Languages at the Seat of [the Crimean] War, whilst his treatise concerning the Turanian Languages, which Professor Pott himself, while sharply assailing, at the same time styled one of the most significant contributions to the science of language, was written in the year 1853. In an open letter<sup>1</sup> to Signor de Gubernatis, Professor of Sanscrit in Florence, Professor Müller entreats him to arrange a peace conference at St. Petersburg, or anywhere else, and promises afterward, in the former custom of duellists, to offer his hand to his enemies as friends. He proposes and desires that de Gubernatis, Dr. Stanley, and M. Regnier be the umpires, but would be willing, if Mr. Whitney so prefers, to make umpires of Stenzler, Kern, and Kuhn, though not self-confident enough to accept as umpires their colleagues, Boehlingk, Weber, and Roth.

In conclusion, let us explain the point of view from which we have

<sup>1</sup> See, as above, p. 333 ff.

penned these lines. We were going over the writings of the two authors mentioned, to see what help they could give us on the subject of Darwinism, when to the great detriment of our study, and to the disturbance of that mental satisfaction with which we were contemplating the Centennial festivities of the year, the tempest of this personal controversy came down upon us, and overwhelmed us with dismay; for we were compelled to acknowledge that, though in this matter the foreign press might not be guiltless, the American press was certainly guilty; and "if they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" If our literary critics so abound in libellous accusations, what can we hope from those who are less influenced by the amenities of Christian life. We hope what we have written will not be interpreted wholly with relation to this personal controversy, but that it will be regarded as a patriotic and Christian effort made from within the nation to correct an evil tendency, which we had hoped was on the decline. It seemed to us better that some one should utter this protest who could not be suspected of national prejudice, rather than leave the matter to be treated by those outside. On this view of the case we beg our friends in other lands to remember these outbursts no more against us; or, at least till the calmer and more benignant elements of our character have opportunity to reassert themselves, that they regard these things as among the privacies of our national life.

G. F. W.

---

## ARTICLE XII.

### NOTICES OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS.

#### A. GERMAN WORKS.

THE following are some of the more important theological works which have recently appeared:

*Pastor Th. Diestelmann: Luther's Last Conversation with Melancthon on the Eucharist Controversy, the Historical Testimony, and the various Opinions thereabout re-examined, with reference to Luther's whole Relation to the Controversy. Die letzte Unterredung Luther's mit Melancthon über den Abendmahlsstreit, nach den geschichtl. Zeugnissen u. den darüber ergangenen Urtheilen, sowie mit Rücksicht auf Luther's ganze Stellung zum Abendmahlsstreit neu untersucht.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht. 1874. pp. 368. 1. 8vo. 7 Mark. The author seems to be certain of a result which will not please the high Lutherans, viz. that Luther did say that after his death something must happen in this affair, for he himself had said too much in it.

*Dr. Fr. Kirchner, Lic. Theol.: Leibnitz's Position regarding the Roman*