

Silence is better than unmeaning words.—*Pythagoras*.

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Providence, Feb. 24, 1838.

To Wm. S. Balch,

Sir—The undersigned, in behalf of the Young People's Institute, hasten to present to you the following *Resolutions*, together with their personal thanks, for the Lectures you have delivered before them, on the Philosophy of Language. The uncommon degree of interest, pleasure and profit, with which you have been listened to, is conclusive evidence, that whoever possesses taste and talents to comprehend and appreciate the philosophy of language, which you have so successfully cultivated, cannot fail to attain a powerful influence over the minds of his audience. The Committee respectfully request you to favor them with a copy of your Lectures for the Press.

Very respectfully,
Your most obedient servants,
C. T. JAMES,
E. F. MILLER,
H. L. WEBSTER.

Resolved, That we have been highly entertained and greatly instructed by the Lectures of our President, on the subject of Language; that we consider the principles he has advocated, immutably true, exceedingly important, and capable of an easy adoption in the study of that important branch of human knowledge.

Resolved, That we have long regretted the want of a system to explain the grammar of our vernacular tongue, on plain, rational, and consistent principles, in accordance with philosophy and truth, and in a way to be understood and practised by children and adults.

Resolved, That in our opinion, the manifold attempts which have been made, though doubtless undertaken with the purest intentions, to simplify and make easy existing systems, have failed entirely of their object, and tended only to perplex, rather than enlighten learners.

[iv] *Resolved*, That in our belief, the publication of these Lectures would meet the wants of the community, and throw a flood of light upon this hitherto dark, and intricate, and yet exceedingly interesting department of a common education, and thus prove of immense service to the present and future generations.

Resolved, That Messrs. Charles T. James, Edward F. Miller, and Henry L. Webster, be a Committee to wait on Rev. William S. Balch, and request the publication of his very interesting Course of Lectures before this Institute.

Providence, Feb. 25, 1838.

Messrs. C. T. James, E. F. Miller, and H. L. Webster:

Gentlemen—Your letter, together with the Resolutions accompanying it, was duly and gratefully received. It gives me no ordinary degree of pleasure to know that so deep an interest has been, and still is, felt by the members of our Institute, as well as the public generally, on this important subject; for it is one which concerns the happiness and welfare of our whole community; but especially the rising generation.

The only recommendation of these Lectures is the subject of which they treat. They were written in the space of a few weeks, and in the midst of an accumulation of engagements which almost

forbade the attempt. But presuming you will make all due allowances for whatever errors you may discover in the style of composition, and regard the *matter* more than the *manner*, I consent to their publication, hoping they will be of some service in the great cause of human improvement.

I am, gentlemen,
Very respectfully yours,
WM. S. BALCH.

PREFACE.

There is no subject so deeply interesting and important to rational beings as the knowledge of language, or one which presents a more direct and powerful claim upon all classes in the community; for there is no other so closely interwoven with all the affairs of human life, social, moral, political and religious. It forms a basis on which depends a vast portion of the happiness of mankind, and deserves the first attention of every philanthropist.

Great difficulty has been experienced in the common method of explaining language, and grammar has long been considered a dry, uninteresting, and tedious study, by nearly all the teachers and scholars in the land. But it is to be presumed that the fault in this case, if there is any, is to be sought for in the manner of teaching, rather than in the science itself; for it would be unreasonable to suppose that a subject which occupies the earliest attention of the parent, which is acquired at great expense of money, time, and thought, and is employed from the cradle to the grave, in all our waking hours, can possibly be dull or unimportant, if rightly explained.

[vi] Children have been required to learn verbal forms and changes, to look at the mere signs of ideas, instead of the things represented by them. The consequence has been that the whole subject has become uninteresting to all who do not possess a retentive verbal memory. The philosophy of language, the sublime principles on which it depends for its existence and use, have not been sufficiently regarded to render it delightful and profitable.

The humble attempt here made is designed to open the way for an exposition of language on truly philosophical principles, which, when correctly explained, are abundantly simple and extensively useful. With what success this point has been labored the reader will determine.

The author claims not the honor of entire originality. The principles here advanced have been advocated, believed, and successfully practised. William S. Cardell, Esq., a bright star in the firmament of American literature, reduced these principles to a system, which

was taught with triumphant success by Daniel H. Barnes, formerly of the New-York High School, one of the most distinguished teachers who ever officiated in that high and responsible capacity in our country. Both of these gentlemen, so eminently calculated to elevate the standard of education, were summoned from the career of the most active usefulness, from the scenes they had labored to brighten and beautify by the aid of their transcendent intellects, to unseen realities in the world of spirits; where mind communes with mind, and soul [vii] mingles with soul, disenthralled from error, and embosomed in the light and love of the Great Parent Intellect.

The author does not pretend to give a system of exposition in this work suited to the capacities of small children. It is designed for advanced scholars, and is introductory to a system of grammar which he has in preparation, which it is humbly hoped will be of some service in rendering easy and correct the study of our vernacular language. But this book, it is thought, may be successfully employed in the instruction of the higher classes in our schools, and will be found an efficient aid to teachers in inculcating the sublime principles of which it treats.

These Lectures, as now presented to the public, it is believed, will be found to contain some important information by which all may profit. The reader will bear in mind that they were written for, and delivered before a popular audience, and published with very little time for modification. This will be a sufficient apology for the mistakes which may occur, and for whatever may have the appearance of severity, irony, or pleasantry, in the composition.

On the subject of Contractions much more might be said. But verbal criticisms are rather uninteresting to a common audience; and hence the consideration of that matter was made more brief than was at first intended. It will however be resumed and carried out at length in another work. The hints given will enable the student to form a tolerable correct opinion of the use of most of those words and phrases, [viii] which have long been passed over with little knowledge of their meaning or importance.

The author is aware that the principles he has advocated are new and opposed to established systems and the common method of inculcation. But the difficulties acknowledged on all hands to exist,

is a sufficient justification of this humble attempt. He will not be condemned for his good intentions. All he asks is a patient and candid examination, a frank and honest approval of what is true, and as honest a rejection of what is false. But he hopes the reader will avoid a rash and precipitate conclusion, either for or against, lest he is compelled to do as the author himself once did, approve what he had previously condemned.

With these remarks he enters the arena, and bares himself to receive the sentence of the public voice.

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