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An Essay towards a real character, and a philosophical Language

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who have been for several years engaged in this Work, I cannot conjecture. 'Tis related of *Chilperick* King of *France*, that he did, for the compendiousness of writing, add to the *French* Alphabet these five Letters, *ſ. x. p. ξ. ↓.* injoyning by a strict and solemn Edict the reception and use of them through his Dominions; and that in all Schools Youths should be instituted in the use of them. And yet, notwithstanding his Authority in imposing of them, they were presently after his death laid aside and disused.

As to *our own* Language, several persons have taken much pains about the *Orthography* of it. That Learned Knight *Sir Thomas Smith*, Secretary to Queen *Elizabeth*, and sometime her Embassador into *France*, hath published an elegant Discourse in *Latin*, *De recta & emendata Lingua Anglicanae scriptione*. After him, this Subject was in another Discourse prosecuted by one of the *Heralds*, who calls himself *Chester*; who was followed by one *Wade*, that writ to the same purpose. After these, *Bul-laker* endeavoured to add to, and alter divers things in those others that preceded him; who was succeeded in the same attempt by *Alexander Gill*, in his *English Grammar*. And yet so invincible is Custom, that still we retain the same errors and incongruities in writing which our Forefathers taught us.

CHAP. V.

- I. *That neither Letters nor Languages have been regularly established by the rules of Art.* II. *The natural Ground or Principle of the several ways of Communication amongst men.* III. *The first thing to be provided for in the establishing of a Philosophical Character or Language, is a just enumeration of all such things and notions to which names are to be assigned.*

FROM what hath been already said it may appear, that there are no Letters or Languages that have been at once invented and established according to the Rules of Art; but that all, except the first, (of which we know nothing so certain as, that it was not made by human Art upon Experience) have been either taken up from that first, and derived by way of *Imitation*; or else, in a long tract of time, have, upon several emergencies, admitted various and casual alterations; by which means they must needs be liable to manifold defects and imperfections, that in a Language at once invented and according to the rules of Art might be easily avoided. Nor could this otherwise be, because that very Art by which Language should be regulated, viz. *Grammar*, is of much later invention than Languages themselves, being adapted to what was already in being, rather than the Rule of making it so.

Though the *Hebrew* Tongue be the most ancient, yet *Rabbi Judah Ching* of *Fez* in *Afric*, who lived *A. D. 1040.* was the first that reduced it to the Art of *Grammar*. And though there were both *Greek* and *Latin* Grammarians much more ancient; yet were there none in either, till a long time after those Languages flourished: which is the true reason of

*Gregorius Th-
ronensis.*

*Vossius de Ar-
te Grammat.
lib. 1. cap. 4.*

Vossius ibid.
cap. 3.
Polydor. Virgil.
lib. 1. cap. 7.

all those *Anomalisms* in *Grammar*; because the *Art* was suted to *Language*, and not *Language* to the *Art*. *Plato* is said to be the first that considered *Grammar*: *Aristotle* the first that by writing did reduce it into an *Art*: and *Epicurus* the first that publickly taught it amongst the *Grecians*.

And for the *Latin*, *Crates Mallotes*, Embassador to the *Roman* Senate from King *Attalus*, betwixt the second and third *Punic* War, presently after the death of *Ennius*, U. C. 583. was the first that brought in the *Art* of *Grammar* amongst the *Romans*, saith *Suetonius*.

These being some of the Defects or Imperfections in those Letters or Languages, which are already known, may afford direction, what is to be avoided by those who propose to themselves the Invention of a new *Character* or *Language*, which being the principal end of this Discourse, I shall in the next place proceed to lay down the first Foundations of it.

§. II.

As men do generally agree in the same Principle of Reason, so do they likewise agree in the same *Internal Notion* or *Apprehension* of things.

The *External Expression* of these Mental notions, whereby men communicate their thoughts to one another, is either to the *Ear*, or to the *Eye*.

To the *Ear* by *Sounds*, and more particularly by *Articulate Voice* and *Words*.

To the *Eye* by any thing that is *visible*, Motion, Light, Colour, Figure; and more particularly by *Writing*.

That *conceit* which men have in their minds concerning a Horse or Tree, is the *Notion* or *mental Image* of that Beast, or natural thing, of such a nature, shape and use. The *Names* given to these in several Languages, are such arbitrary *sounds* or *words*, as Nations of men have agreed upon, either casually or designedly, to express their Mental notions of them. The *Written word* is the figure or picture of that Sound.

So that if men should generally consent upon the same way or manner of *Expression*, as they do agree in the same *Notion*, we should then be freed from that Curse in the Confusion of Tongues, with all the unhappy consequences of it.

Now this can onely be done, either by *enjoyning* some one Language and Character to be universally learnt and practised, (which is not to be expected, till some person attain to the *Universal Monarchy*; and perhaps would not be done then:) or else by *proposing* some such way as, by its facility and usefulness, (without the imposition of Authority) might *invite* and ingage men to the learning of it; which is the thing here attempted.

§. III.

In order to this, The first thing to be considered and enquired into is, Concerning a just *Enumeration* and description of such things or notions as are to have *Marks* or *Names* assigned to them.

The chief Difficulty and Labour will be so to contrive the Enumeration of things and notions, as that they may be full and *adequate*, without any *Redundancy* or *Deficiency* as to the Number of them, and *regular* as to their Place and Order.

IF

If to every thing and notion there were assigned a distinct *Mark*, together with some *provision* to express Grammatical *Derivations* and *Inflexions*; this might suffice as to one great end of a *Real Character*, namely, the expression of our Conceptions by *Marks* which should signify *things*, and not *words*. And so likewise if several distinct *words* were assigned for the *names* of such things, with certain invariable *Rules* for all such Grammatical *Derivations* and *Inflexions*, and such onely, as are natural and necessary; this would make a much more easie and convenient Language then is yet in being.

But now if these *Marks* or *Notes* could be so contrived, as to have such a *dependance* upon, and relation to, one another, as might be sutable to the nature of the things and notions which they represented; and so likewise, if the *Names* of things could be so ordered, as to contain such a kind of *affinity* or *opposition* in their letters and sounds, as might be some way answerable to the nature of the things which they signified; This would yet be a farther advantage superadded: by which, besides the best way of helping the *Memory* by natural Method, the *Understanding* likewise would be highly improved; and we should, by learning the *Character* and the *Names* of things, be instructed likewise in their *Natures*, the knowledg of both which ought to be conjoyned.

For the accurate effecting of this, it would be necessary, that the *Theory* it self, upon which such a design were to be founded, should be exactly *suted to the nature of things*. But, upon supposal that this *Theory* is *defective*, either as to the *Fulness* or the *Order* of it, this must needs add much *perplexity* to any such Attempt, and render it *imperfect*. And that this is the case with that common *Theory* already received, need not much be doubted; which may afford some excuse as to several of those things which may seem to be less conveniently disposed of in the following Tables, or Schemes proposed in the next part.

The End of the First Part.

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