

THE GERMAN LANGUAGE.

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AN

ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

GOETHEAN LITERARY SOCIETY,

OF

MARSHALL COLLEGE,

AT ITS ANNIVERSARY,

AUGUST, 29 1842.

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PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY.

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Chambersburg, Pa.

PRINTED AT THE OFFICE OF PUBLICATION OF THE GER. REF. CHURCH.

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1842.

## A D D R E S S .

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I will not make it my business, on the present occasion, to eulogise the memory of Gæthe. In doing so, I would be likely only to repeat what you have already heard or read, perhaps under different forms. Besides, I could not be satisfied to present a portrait, in which only the shining attributes of the man should be suffered to come into view. Faithfulness to my own view of the subject, would require the dark shades of his character to be brought forward also with an unsparing hand ; and this would reach so far, as in the end probably to give the *eulogy* a most ambiguous questionable shape—not exactly suited to the celebration of his birth day, by a Literary Society that is proud to carry his name. Let Gæthe and his times then be allowed this morning to sleep—while I improve the opportunity to call your attention to the rich and noble *language* which Gæthe spoke, and of which his writings are considered generally to be the brightest mirror, and the brightest ornament at the same time. Its characteristic merits and its claims upon the regard of American students—more particularly its claims upon the students of this college—shall constitute the theme of my discourse.

To deal with the subject properly, we must attempt in the first place some account of the nature of language in general, with the view of showing on what grounds, and under what views, it deserves to be made in any case an object of study. Only in this way can we reasonably expect to come to any satisfactory result, in trying to estimate the comparative worth of the German, or any other particular language, to which our attention may be turned. Vast ignorance and error prevail very generally on this subject. To Germany in particular, above all other lands, is the world indebted, in modern times, for even a partial insight into the great and stupendous mystery which is here brought into view. No field of inquiry perhaps has yielded more beautiful or splendid results.

Language stands in the most intimate and vital connection with thought. There is no room for the supposition of the latter, in the case of the human mind, apart from the presence of the former. We cannot with any propriety speak of either, as older than the other. When the question is debated, whether language be of human or divine origin, a wrong view of the case, as it regards this point, is commonly taken on both sides. Those who suppose it to have been invented by man, and those who refer it to supernatural communication, have seemed generally to agree in thinking that the mind might be developed to some considerable extent, before the use of language was enjoyed. In the first case, reason has been regarded as designing and contriving an artificial scheme, for its own accommodation; while according to the other hypothesis, the convenience is supposed to have been provided for it by special inspiration, answerable to the demands of the case. Under both views, the relation between speech and thought is taken to be merely external. The use of language, it is assumed, is simply to serve as a medium for the communication of thought. In its whole nature, accordingly, it is made to appear comparatively mechanical and dead; as though the proper life of the mind were something different altogether, which has come only by arbitrary conventional usage among men to be represented in this way. But every such conception of the case is superficial and false. Language is no invention of man. Neither is it on the other hand an instrument, with which he has been furnished, ready made, from God. It is the natural, necessary product of his own spiritual nature. It is a constituent part of the life of the soul itself. This cannot be developed, without manifesting itself under this form. As the germ, in a lower sphere of existence, throws forth stem and leaves, in the mere process of growth, so the rational nature of man expands itself from the beginning in the form of thought *and* speech. Where the one has begun to appear, there the other must show itself at the same time. To talk of contrivance, calculation or conventional understanding, as concerned in the production of language, is just as absurd as it would be to talk of any thing of the sort as concerned in the production of thought itself. The body is not more strictly united in one life with the soul, than language is with the exercise of reason. The two forms of life are in their ground indeed identical. To think, is to speak. Language is necessary, not simply for the communication of thought, but for its existence also and development. Ideas must become concrete, in the form of words, to be distinctly discerned, and

permanently retained, by the mind, from whose depths they spring. The workings of the soul continue altogether chaotic, till language comes in to give shape to its creations; and order and light within it keep pace afterwards exactly with the power of using words. The internal and the external, in the case, go hand in hand together.

Under this view then, language, like all life, is organic. It is not made up of a great multitude of parts, brought mechanically together in an external way. It evolves itself, as a whole, from its own living ground in the soul, deriving both form and substance from the creative force which it carries in its own nature. Its principle is in itself, and not in any thing out of itself. Like the growth of the plant, like the development of the animal from the *punctum saliens* upwards and outwards, to mature life, it is strictly and altogether an organic production. It is indeed the evolution of the life of the mind itself, the form in which it becomes concrete. By means of language, thought makes its escape from the germ, in which it would otherwise continue to sleep as a mere possibility, and emerges into the sphere of reality. Language is thought itself corporealized and made external, and it must be penetrated of course with the same organic life in all its parts.

The different languages then that exist in the world, are the types of so many different conformations of mind, into which the general life of the human race has come to be cast. If it be asked, why there should be so many languages instead of one, if the growth of speech be thus organic and necessary; we have only to ask again in reply, why the mind itself, as it spreads itself out in countless ramifications, is found existing under so many phases, as various as the forms of speech which have come into use. The origin of language, and its meaning universally, must be sought in the *nisus* or effort of the soul to develop itself in a way suitable to its own nature. But this *nisus*, modified and controlled by the diversified educational influences which have wrought upon mind in different circumstances, has never yet accomplished more than an approximation, under various forms, towards the resolution of its own problem. As in the world of nature no individual form fully expresses the idea of the species to which it belongs, so here no language can be regarded as a full, perfectly symmetrical, and absolutely transparent, corporification of the true inward life of thought; although that is the ideal which it has been proposed in every case to realize. The several languages of the world are the results, we may say, of so many distinct efforts on the part of the soul, to evolve in an adequate way its own life, conditioned and deter-

mined by the circumstances in which it has been variously placed. Each one accordingly is the standing type of the mental conformation, out of which it originally took its rise; and in this form, it rules and controls also the life of thought itself. Language once established becomes the necessary channel of thinking for the people to whom it belongs. Vast differences may characterize the mental life of a nation, partly constitutional and partly the result of education. The range of thought in one case may be immensely more free and large, than it is in another. And so in different ages, the same nation may present widely different aspects of cultivation. The sphere of its thinking may be continually growing more wide, so that no comparison shall seem to hold between the poverty of its conceptions in one age and their overflowing fulness in another. Still under all these differences, we say, the life of the nation carries upon it its own distinctive form, represented and at the same time determined by the language, in which it is accustomed to think and speak. This is the mould in which thought is cast, from generation to generation. The identity of an organism does not depend on its external volume. The twig may grow to be a giant oak, & yet its life will be the same. So a language may admit indefinite expansion, and with its expansion mind may spread itself out with corresponding volume; but in the end the language carries the same type, and embraces the same conformation of thought. It is expansion in a certain kind, and according to a certain organic law. Thought continues free and creative, but not absolutely: it must act in the direction of the general life to which it belongs. Thus the language of every people is at once the creature and the creator of its specific intellectual and moral life.

Thus we are prepared to estimate, in a general way, the importance of the study of languages. The grounds on which this is made to rest frequently by its advocates, are such as may be considered reasonable to the cause they are adduced to support. Language is the life of the soul, externally considered. To study a language then, is to study the soul itself, under one of the manifold forms in which it is found struggling to bring its secret nature into light. No subject, rightly apprehended, can be less mechanical and dead; no study better adapted to form and improve the mind, in an educational way. Such study is not a mere work of memory, employed in treasuring up words and rules; it is a constant exercise in thinking, and in no other way can the same discipline, under this view, be as well secured. To master the language of a people, is at the same time to en-

ter their spirit, and to become acquainted with their character, as it never can be understood without this by any other form of observation. The history of a nation, its customs and institutions, become fairly intelligible, only when we are enabled to approach them through the medium of its own tongue. In making ourselves familiar with the language of a nation, we penetrate as it were into the inmost recesses of its life. Whatever knowledge we may seem to have of it without this, must be considered superficial and more or less visionary. We cannot understand the mind which a language embodies, simply by report. It is not enough to be told, in our own tongue, what men of a different speech have thought, and spoken and done. All that can give us only dead representations of their life, which to become animated again for us at all, are made to borrow a new spirit from ourselves, and so to appear under a complexion and expression foreign altogether from their original nature. By being forced simply to pass over to our sphere of thinking, the life of a foreign people is in fact cast into a new mould and clothed with a new form. To understand it fairly, we must forsake our own sphere and pass over ourselves into the foreign world, in which it has its true and proper home. We must commune with it, in its own language. There it meets us in its actual concrete shape. There it has its own complexion and expression. There it becomes intelligible. And now its literature, history, legislation, science and social life, begin to appear in their true light also. The key by which their secret significance is finally brought into view, is the spirit of the nation corporealized in its language.

Every new language then which the student masters, widens the region of his soul, and renders his inward life, intellectually considered, more large and free. The man who has never been from home, is apt to make his own particular existence the measure of the absolute and the universal. Restricted to one single stand point of observation, and pent up in the narrow sphere of his individual history, he is accustomed to think of all that lies beyond as barbarous and wrong, exactly in the proportion in which it may vary from its own experience. Travelling is well suited to overcome the force of this narrow habit. Reading generally, where it is wisely conducted, may be made happily to serve the same purpose. By quitting his own position, and entering into contact with other forms of life, remote either in space or in time, the man who thus goes abroad finds the sphere of his existence made more wide and free. So in the case be.

fore us. To enter a new language, is to burst the barriers which have previously circumscribed the life of the soul. It is indeed the same life which animates the human nature, wherever it is to be found. But it is the same life under various aspects, and turning different sides of its manifold generality to the view of the beholder. Every language presents it under a phase, which is peculiarly its own. As we enter other languages, we make ourselves at home to the same extent in foreign systems of thought. The idea of mind in its generality is brought home to our consciousness. The particular is no longer mistaken for the universal. Our existence is, as it were, multiplied, and made to have more than a single side. Without this, we are not prepared to estimate properly foreign modes of being, intellectual or moral. There is always indeed a measure of presumption involved in our conduct, where we undertake to pronounce an absolute judgment on the character of a people, or upon their mental constitution, without having first entered the sphere of their actual life, in some measure at least, by making ourselves acquainted with their language.

We may see finally, from the view now presented of the general nature of language, on what ground we are authorised to attribute to some languages an intrinsic superiority over others. The end contemplated in speech, is in all cases one and the same. It springs universally from the nîsus of the soul, to evolve itself in a concrete form. Under the action of this deep mysterious force, thought and language burst forth simultaneously, like the vegetable sprout breaking from its germ, and form thence forward an inseparable life. The problem to be solved in the case, when languages had their origin, was the production of a living form that should fully reveal, with adequate and exactly commensurate expression, the organic idea of the mind itself. The various languages that appear, are the result of so many different efforts made to realize this end. All of course cannot be equally perfect. They are different, as being more or less successful approaches to the ideal, which it has been the object of all to reach. They excel in the degree, in which they are internally fitted to forward a free, full, symmetrical growth of the spirit, in its most general form. A perfect language would be like a garment of light, unfolding with clear transparency the life it was formed to invest and represent. Among existing languages, some approximate to this perfection much more nearly than others, and are entitled to respect and admiration accordingly. It is not the amount of its literature then simply—although this may reasonably be taken as a separate con-

sideration to recommend the study of it—that forms the distinctive worth of a particular language. Nor is this determined by the mere cultivation, with which it may have been refined and enriched in its own nature, under any view. A language may be comparatively poor in words at a given time, and yet vastly superior in its constitution to another, whose words are like the leaves of the forest. The perfection of an organic production, must never be measured by its volume. Cultivation in the case of a language cannot change its organic nature, cannot transfund it into a new and different type. It may grow and become continually more rich in words; but as a garment for the soul, it must remain always substantially the same. Thus a rude barbarous people may have a language, which shall intrinsically surpass that of the most polished; and all that may be wanted to make the superiority clear to all, would be in such a case that it should be organically extended to such volume, as to make it parallel with the other in point of cultivation. The main difference between languages lies in their intrinsic character, without regard to culture, and forms a part of their original inalienable constitution.

I PROCEED now to consider directly as proposed in the beginning, the grounds on which I conceive the German language in particular to be entitled to respect as an object of study, especially in our circumstances. The views which have been given of the nature of language in general, will not be without their use, it is trusted, in assisting us to come to an intelligent judgment on this subject. It will not be expected, however, that I should attempt to determine the precise value of the German language, intrinsically considered, as compared with other languages ancient or modern, according to the theoretic principles which have now been stated. I entertain no such presumptuous thought; and will not consider it necessary, therefore, to confine myself to views, carrying in any measure the form of a regular practical application of the theory. My object is simply to recommend the German language to your respect, by any considerations that may seem to be pertinent to the purpose—satisfied if the remarks thus far made on the subject of language in general, may only assist, under any point of view, directly or indirectly, in leading to a correct estimate of the case.

The physician, *Goropius*, maintained that the German language was spoken by our first parents, in the garden of Eden. Without challenging for it this high and venerable antiquity, we may be allowed to refer to its origin and history, under a different view, as a primary ground of distinction in its favor. It differs from all the other

cultivated languages of modern Europe, in being, to borrow a term from itself, "eine Ursprache," a primitive language, & not one of mixed origin and constitution. It is not meant by this, that it has had its source strictly in itself, as it now exists. Recent investigations have shown quite clearly that it sprang originally, as did also the Latin, Greek and Persian, from the oriental Sanskrit. But however it may have started, it carries in its nature all the distinctive properties of a primitive tongue. It is the original Teutonic language, as it was brought with the race who spoke it, from Asia to Europe. The general language was not thus preserved, by all the tribes of Teutonic origin. It maintained its ground only among the Germans, strictly so called. They kept themselves permanently to the same soil, and held fast to the language of their fathers. In other cases, the stock assumed a new complexion by mingling with other races, and fell at the same time into new forms of language. The languages of modern Europe generally, are mixed in their composition. The Italian, Spanish and French, are made up to a great extent of material supplied from the Latin. The English is the old Saxon, filled out with forms from the Latin, Greek and French. These languages do not indeed cease to be organic, by being thus mixed. Each of them has still its own soul, throwing forth its distinctive life in all the parts of which it is composed. The mixture by which it grows is not in the way of outward accretion simply. The foreign material is taken up into the system, so as to form with it one life. But the growth of a language, in such circumstances, must be more or less stunted and cramped; like the growth of a tree, planted in some uncongenial soil, or excluded from the open light of heaven. The development cannot be free, full and harmonious; but will be characterized by some want of symmetry and compact strength, answerable to the extent in which the union of heterogeneous elements may prevail. From this defect the German is entirely clear. Its life is all its own. Like the free and hardy race, whose spirit it is made to mirror, it has in all ages refused to bend its neck to a foreign yoke. In this respect it is as primitive and original as the Greek, which it resembles in all points more than any other modern tongue.

It might however be thus primitive in its constitution, and yet have no great claims upon our respect. It might be in point of development rude and circumscribed, like the language of one of our own Indian tribes, which nobody but a missionary or a trader is concerned to study. But this is not the case. The German language

did not indeed perfect itself so rapidly, as the mixed tongues with which it has just been compared. Their form in this respect was perhaps favorable, within certain limits, to their progress. Their life appeared more on the surface, and was on this account more easily matured. In due time however the German came up with them, in the career of cultivation. As a language it may be said now to have reached a ripe and full development. It has flung its branches far and wide, and covered itself with innumerable leaves and blossoms. It has, through various fortunes, fairly reached at last its Augustan age; and, whether the breadth, or depth or intrinsic wealth, of its literature be regarded, may justly challenge comparison, to say the least, with any of the tongues in which the civilization of modern Europe is accustomed to speak.

As a primitive language, the German is remarkably *full* and *rich* in point of matter. It has been sometimes indeed stigmatized as poor under this view, by the admirers of the French tongue. But no judgment could well be more wide of the mark. While the French is said to contain about 28000 words, it has been reckoned that there are in the German not less than 80,000. One writer carries the computation six times as high, and places it at half a million; which may be allowed to be sufficiently extravagant. The truth is however, it is not easy to say where a computation of this kind should stop, in the case of the German tongue. The modifications of meaning which words are made to assume by inflection, position, combination, and production, cannot easily be specified. The language may be said to be, in this respect indeed, capable of an indefinite extension. No limits can be placed upon its growth. It can never be said of it that it has become perfect; for that would imply fixed boundaries and borders, beyond which its life could not pass. We can only say of it that it is *perfectible*. Its life is formed for constant expansion and refuses to be circumscribed by any bounds.

As it regards radical or stem words, the German falls far behind the French. This might seem at first view, to conflict with the general representation now given of its fullness and wealth. It is however in fact in full correspondence with it. The German language has few roots, because it is original and self-produced. Its ground is wholly within itself. The French, on the other hand, has appropriated a large amount of foreign material. This has no root or ground in the language itself, and being separated from its original foundation, is made to bear of course an independent form. Hence

a multitude of words stand as roots, simply because they do not spring from the life of the language itself. They are of foreign growth, and become stem words only by having been torn away from their natural connections, and forced into a system to which genealogically they do not belong. The multitude of its radical or primary forms, in the case of the French, as compared with the sum total of the language, is a striking argument of its poverty.

And here it may be remarked, at the same time by the way, that the French must ever be for the reason now presented also a difficult language to learn, for those who have not been accustomed to speak it from childhood. A different opinion, I am aware, is generally entertained with regard to this point. Boarding school misses, and fashionable young gentlemen with the most common breadth of brain, can be taught to jabber something that sounds like it, in the course of a few months. But so can an active parrot master phrases too, with quite imposing success, and be only a parrot when all is done. Such mechanical exploits involve no knowledge. Where a large portion of the words of a language are primary, having no internal affinity, and no common ground, wide room is given for uncertain and fluctuating phases of sense. A great deal must be perfectly arbitrary, and liable to constant change. Only the most intimate familiarity with the actual *usus loquendi*, in those circumstances, can be sufficient to reduce the Protean system to a clear representation for the mind. The French language accordingly is seldom mastered by foreigners, so as to make them tolerable in the use of it to those who speak it as their native tongue. The German on the other hand with its boundless sea of words, is by no means so difficult to master. Its roots are not numerous. Its forms of derivation and composition are fixed. Words are kept in their place, by the force of the common life, which by innumerable ramifications binds them together as one great whole. Let only the life of the language be penetrated, & it becomes a comparatively easy thing to follow it afterwards in its organic development, no matter how far it may be extended.

The German owes its wealth of words to the capacity for *expansion*, which it carries in its own nature. This unfolds itself mainly in two forms, boundless composition and endless derivation. Words of all sorts can be joined together, with the most perfect ease, so as to give new terms, in which two different thoughts are made to meet in a third. Almost every word, by prefixes and suffixes of invariable force, can be made to shoot out into a whole tree of derivatives, by

which its meaning is modified in all conceivable ways. The Greek is uncommonly rich in this power of self-enlargement. No language of antiquity had the same expansibility, and no language accordingly was so free or so full. The only modern tongue that may be compared with it, under this view, is the German. This may well be considered a proud distinction. So far as derivation is concerned, the German is supposed to leave even the Greek behind. To estimate properly its whole advantage as it regards intrinsic fruitfulness, let it be compared again with the so called court language of Europe. The French has almost no expansibility. It may be said to press already at every point, on its established limits. It cannot compound with any sort of freedom. Many of its stemwords are perfectly barren, while the rest of them are productive only to a small extent. No fixed and universal analogies rule the process of derivation, as far as it is allowed to proceed. All is arbitrary, irregular, cold and stiff. The superiority of the German is like that of the giant forest oak, over some slim poplar, shooting upwards from a city pavement.

“Our language” says Franz Horn, “is one of free origin, springing directly out of our nature. It is firmly settled in its root, which is immoveable as necessity itself; but its blossoms and fruits are eternally manifold and eternally young. Our language is rich; not like a well stored cabinet of artificial curiosities, but rich as the spiritual nature of man himself, and like this susceptible of indefinite improvement. It cannot, in the way of languages of unfree constitution, be materially ended, and rounded in, as a finished system; but throws itself open still, with ever new life, to the service of true genius, wherever utterance is required for new thoughts and feelings.” The French on the contrary, he tells us, boasts of being shut up and completed, and it is made a great point, since the age of Louis XIV, to maintain its boundaries inviolate; so that writers of spirit have to complain that they cannot say what they would, by reason of the restraints of the language.

To make full account however of the wealth of the German language, we must consider the inward character of the materials in which this wealth consists. It has been already intimated, that it is emphatically a *living language*. All languages necessarily embody life; but some have a great deal more of it than others. The vitality of some is sickly and weak, while that of others is characterized by energy and strength. The French may be taken here again as a specimen of comparative imperfection. The materials of

which it is formed have been brought from various quarters, and for want of a full internal assimilation with the common ground on which they are made to rest, hang more or less loosely together, and are in the same proportion devoid of spirit. The language accordingly, while it admits the finest polish on the surface, is artificial and cold. In broad contrast with it, the German stands before us *full of life*. It is the direct primitive expression of the living mind it has been made to embody. From its ground upwards, through all successive stages of development, it has been one and the same organic force, materialising itself and clothing itself with form, with free spontaneous growth. Every foreign element has been steadily repelled. All is the result strictly and exclusively of self-evolution. The whole is pervaded with the force of a single life, equally active at every point. A large proportion of the primary words are clearly onomatopoeitic; all are true transcripts of the meaning they represent. From these the entire growth springs organically, by necessary and universal analogies, included in the general life. No part is separate and dead. The entire system teems with vitality. The breathing freshness of nature is felt throughout the whole.

In the French language, an unnatural divorce has been effected, between the upper and lower regions of thought. They are not bound together by the presence of a common life. The language of literature and polite society does not grow forth, from that which fills the mouths of the common people. It forms a caste within itself. A multitude of perfectly honest words, in free use among the people, it is not permitted to touch, for fear of defilement, simply because they are thus current. In return, to the people it is always itself more or less unintelligible, besides being made to suffer very seriously in point of ease and freedom. In the German no such separation holds. The language of the school and the court, only in a more cultivated form, is the language of the most common walks of life. No honest word is frowned out of good company, simply because it is in use among the rabble. Thus an active communion is continually maintained, between the literature and the general spirit of the nation. The first proceeds directly from the second, and draws fresh life from it perpetually, as the leaves and blossoms of the tree from the limbs, by which they communicate with the trunk. Hence the language of the educated class is intelligible to those who have no education. Even new words, for the most part, present no difficulty. The manner of their formation reveals their sense.

The constitution of the German gives it unusual *depth* and *force*. Only where a language is the living product of life, in all its parts, can it be possessed of these qualities. The French has no depth and no force. It plays perpetually, with light and graceful movement, on the surface of the soul. In mere mechanical precision, it may not be easily excelled, but for representing the deep forces of the spirit, it is to a great extent destitute of power. Not so the German. Here every word is instinct with the general life. It is felt, not as an abstraction or isolated sign, but as a living element in the midst of living relations. The processes by which mind has risen from lower to higher forms of thought, are still preserved in the language itself. Words represent the inward constitution of thoughts.

How much is gained by this for inwardness and strength may appear, if we consider to what extent a nervous style is promoted, in the English language, by the use of Saxon words in preference to such as are of foreign origin. Such words root themselves directly in the general life of the language, and are felt accordingly in their living force as commensurate with the inmost nature of the things they are made to represent. In proportion as these prevail in the style of a writer, it will be pure and full strong; while high sounding periods, made up of terms from the Latin, after the manner of Johnson, will be found in comparison watery and weak. Much of the force of our English translation of the Bible, lies in its predominant use of words of Saxon growth. To change its style in this respect, would be to despoil it in a great measure of its glory. Of this any one can be satisfied, who will take the trouble to substitute almost any where terms derived from the Latin for the Saxon forms of the text. The Latin may sound larger, but it will mean less, and can never have the same life.

It is a great advantage, in the case of the English, as compared for instance with the Italian or the French, that it includes in its composition so large a body of this home material. Here mainly we have the source of its freshness and strength. But the advantage which belongs to the German, in the same view, is vastly greater. Here *all* is homegrowth and home manufacture. Roots, combinations and derived forms, are all alike the product of the same soil. Words are transparent with the life they enshrine. Thoughts move and speak in the sounds, by which they are rendered concrete. They are felt from their innermost ground outwards and upwards. The whole language is as a stream of living water, perpetually springing,

free, vigorous and fresh, from the same deep birth-place in the bowels of the earth. No modern tongue can compare with it in this respect.

As the German is deep, so is it uncommonly *free* and *flexible*. The French, with all its flippancy of movement, can boast of no such freedom. Its liberty at best is like the aptness of a dancing master, in making bows and showing off postures. In the very nature of the language, it must always be spiritually stiff and starched. Full evidence of this is presented in the fact, that it is acknowledged to be so difficult to make translations into the French from other languages. This is the true test of freedom. French translations are generally loose paraphrastic versions, in which the spirit of the original is in a great measure sacrificed entirely. Voltaire went so far indeed as to say, that whatever could not be translated into French must be pronounced destitute of literary merit—making his own language the absolute measure of good taste for the whole world; and it has been quite fashionable in France accordingly to undervalue in particular the classic monuments of the Grecian mind, as refusing to suit themselves to the Procrustean judgment of the “Grand Nation.” All this is abundantly self-complacent. The world however is not likely soon to succumb to the maxim, that the capabilities of the French tongue form the *ne plus ultra* of spiritual progress for the human mind. On the contrary, that Homer and Plato should become so insipid when they are made to utter themselves in French, will be taken rather as good proof that the language itself is superficial and jejune. Tried by the same general test, the German will be found as free as its Gallic rival is mechanical and stiff. No tongue can well be more supple, more ready to yield to the plastic force of thought, under whatever form it may be required to give it body and living motion. It has all the spiritual flexibility of the ancient Greek. Hence it admits translations from all other languages, with extraordinary freedom. To translate French into German creates not the slightest difficulty; but to translate German into French is often utterly impossible; such want of commensurability is there between the two tongues, the one being so much more universal than the other. The ancient classics, Latin and Greek, are made to speak in German, as in no tongue besides but their own. Not only are their thoughts translated, but their form and coloring are retained with the most graphic fidelity. Voss, in his translations of Hesiod and Homer from the Greek, and of Horace and Virgil from the Latin, carries this fidelity so far, as to give his originals verse for verse, with full transcript of measure, move-

ment and complexion, from beginning to end. Whatever may be thought of the wisdom of such a method, we may well admire the resources of the language which could at all allow its use. It were a perfectly wild design, to attempt a similar work in any other modern tongue. No people have such translations as the Germans.

The flexibility of the language is strikingly illustrated again, in the freedom with which every original writer causes it to take the particular conformation of his own mind. In all languages, different writers make use to some extent of different styles. But in the German, this liberty has almost no limits. Every great genius creates it as it were, into a new world, for his own use. Whatever may be the form under which the spirit of the nation may individualize itself, the language at once shapes itself accordingly, and becomes a commensurate concrete image of its very life. The language of *Goethe* is wholly his own, the very transcript of his clear, transparent, many sided mind. And what language under heaven save the German, we may ask, could have allowed free scope to the inward life of *Jean Paul*, as it now sports with leviathan strength, free and untrammelled, in its native element. Such a spirit imprisoned in the meagre forms of the French, might have floundered in vain in trying to make itself room, till it should have worn itself out with the effort. It might have been worthy of notice, in such case, under some other form, but it could not have been *Jean Paul*.

We have been contemplating thus far simply the German language itself, as it holds in its natural constitution. As a primitive tongue having its life wholly within itself, we have found it to be distinguished for fulness, vitality, depth, inwardness, strength and freedom. But in all this, it is only the mirror of the German mind, with which we communicate by its means. This is too, characteristically free and strong. It is inward, full and deep—the very home of poetry and philosophy, in their most spiritual form. Acquaintance with it should be considered a privilege, and can hardly fail to be attended with important benefit, when wisely cultivated. Of all the different spheres of thought and feeling which make up the life of the modern world, there is surely not one more worthy of being penetrated and understood. France, Spain, Italy, may have brighter and softer skies; but the life of the soul belongs emphatically to Germany. Under no French, Spanish or Italian form, is it exhibited with the same deep, full, freshness and power. Independently altogether of its productions, in a literary point of view, such a life may be expected

to have a salutary educational influence, wherever the force of it is felt. Communion with it will be awakening and invigorating. But to commune with the German mind, we must make ourselves familiar with the German language. We cannot understand it simply by translation or report.

I might go on to speak of the broad fields of learning, to which access is had by a knowledge of the German tongue. Germany is the land emphatically of books. In no part of the world, are the sciences cultivated with greater diligence or success. No where is literature more entirely at home. Nowhere are the depths of philosophy more thoroughly explored. All this might be urged, in recommendation of the language, as the key by which those stores of knowledge are to be unlocked. But my limits will not permit me to dwell on this particularly now. Let it be sufficient to say, that a knowledge of the German, under the view now mentioned, has come to be regarded, both in England and in this country, as almost indispensable to thorough scholarship, in any profession.

It is true indeed that the literature of Germany includes a vast amount of impiety and nonsense. Its influence in many respects is to be deprecated, as dangerous to religion. Insidious forms of error, mysticism, transcendentalism, pantheism, and all sorts of rationalism, are wrought more or less into its very texture, and twine themselves around it in every direction. But all this cannot annihilate its worth, in other respects; nor is it a sufficient reason for cutting ourselves off absolutely from the vast body of vigorous living thought, which with all its errors it is found to embrace. It is however most certainly a good reason for great caution and jealousy, in the case of all who feel authorised to trust themselves on this enchanted ground. Much might be said on the whole subject; but it cannot be prosecuted farther, with propriety, at the present time.

The study of the German language may be recommended, as an important help for acquiring a full and thorough knowledge of the English. The two languages are intimately related, both in form and spirit. Both spring from the same Teutonic source—since it is to Saxon properly the English owes its constitution and life. The English, indeed, is not so entirely primitive as the German, in its structure. It has appropriated no small amount of material, of foreign growth. But still it is no such jumble of heterogeneous elements as the Italian or French. It bears a much closer resemblance, in its constitution, to the German. The original Saxon life still pervades

all its parts. It exhibits a Saxon body and a Saxon soul. Hence innumerable affinities hold between it and the German. The study of the one language sheds light perpetually on the other. In this view, the German has far greater claims upon our regard, than the French, Spanish or Italian. It carries us directly back to the fountains of our own life, as involved in the general life with which we are surrounded. It tends to give us a better knowledge and a more full possession, of our proper spiritual being. We cannot make ourselves at home in it, without being better prepared so far, to understand the true spirit of the English. To study the German, is in our case to study the English at the same time.

*SUCH* in a general way are the grounds, on which the language of Germany may be recommended to our attention and respect. It is a strange illustration of the blindness of fashion, in the case of the most important interests, that both in England and in this country, the French should so generally form an object of prominent concern in what is called a polite education, while the German is not only overlooked but treated it may be with absolute scorn. Fashionable families are willing to pay handsomely to have their children taught to snatter phrases in the first, but would scarce consider it an accomplishment at all to have them thoroughly at home in the second. And yet, for all educational ends, the German is vastly to be preferred to the French. In its very constitution and structure, it is fitted to unfold the powers of the youthful spirit, to widen the sphere of its life, to invigorate its perceptions, to spiritualize its feelings, and to fill it with the rich deep poetry of nature. The French, on the contrary, is constitutionally poor, and dry, and lean. Its structure is mechanical. No fresh vigorous life breathes through its artificial forms. To commune with it, is to turn the back on the world of poetry and song. Its poetry has been not unaptly denominated "circumcised prose." The spirit of the language is cold and barren. It has no soul, no *Gemueth*, as it is styled among the Germans. So entirely is this wanting, that no French word can be found to express the idea. And this is the language, which above all others, English taste has selected to be the instrument of cultivation for the youthful heart! For my own part, I consider the time bestowed upon French in this country, as almost entirely thrown away—about as much so as if it were expended in the study of the Cherokee. As a passport to French learning, in the case of literary men, it is all well enough. But as an educational discipline, or a polite accomplishment, it is worth al-

most nothing ; and to make the matter still worse, it is the name only for the most part—the mere shadow of a shade—that it is made to stand in our boarding schools and fashionable circles for the thing.

The German is generally counted a more rude language than the French. Its movement seems to be awkward and unwieldy. It is considered deficient in sound, rough and unmusical rather than polite. We may say however, that the smoothness and lightness of the French and Italian, are the result of a one-sided development of life in their case. A *full* free life can be brought out only by a full free use of the voice, on all sides and at all points. The German has its grace and harmony too, only there must be depth and earnestness in the soul in order that they may be felt. Nature often seems rude and awkward, in comparison with art. But let the observation become sufficiently deep, and how triumphantly is the comparison reversed. There is more harmony in the mountains, valleys and resplendent rivers, than there is in the measured walks and piles of architecture, that make up the idea of a city. The storm itself is full of a deep living music, which the smooth pageantry of courts can never reach.

It has been no uncommon thing however, for Germans to be ashamed of their own language, as contrasting awkwardly to their feelings with the more mercurial spirit of other tongues. Thus at one time, it seemed in danger, even in Germany itself, of succumbing completely to the arrogant pretensions of the French, such was the rage that prevailed for writing, talking and playing the fool, in this gay language. So it is quite common for the descendants of Germans in this country, in the midst of English manners and feelings, to have a low esteem for the language of their fathers. Some such seem to make a merit of having as little to do with it as possible. It puts them out of countenance, to have it supposed that they can speak or understand a word of German. Such persons are to be pitied for their narrow order of thinking. The German is not a language of which any one need be ashamed. True, it does not generally appear in its holiday dress in this country. It is for the most part barbarously spoken. But there is no good reason why it should be undervalued or slighted on this account. It is barbarously spoken in some sections of Germany too. Provincial distortions however, do not overthrow the language itself, nor destroy its title to respect. Let it be honoured for what it is in its true form, and studied accordingly. Those especial-

ly, who have German blood in their veins, should consider it an accomplishment under any circumstances, to be able to read and speak the German tongue. In such a college as ours, it should be an object of general regard and general study.

But if the language be worthy of this general attendance in the case of our students, it must be acknowledged to have *special* claims on those who are here as candidates for the sacred ministry, in the bosom of the German Reformed Church. The time will come, no doubt, when the German will not be needed at all, for pastoral purposes, in our pulpits or out of them. But that time most clearly has not come *yet*. For many years the German will be extensively required. What the Church needs mainly, at this moment, is men qualified to preach in the German language. Even where the English has come to be generally used, there is still room, to say no more, at most points, for doing good also by means of the German, if not in the pulpit, at least out of it in the work of pastoral visitation ; while over a wide territory, full of promise for the Church, the minister without it can have no free access at all publicly or privately to the body of the people. In these circumstances, it might seem to be a plain case that candidates for the ministry, as a general thing, in the German Reformed Church, should with their other preparation, take pains to make themselves in some degree familiar with the German language. There are points where it is not absolutely needed. A man may be useful in the Church without it. But still it may be said to enter into the general idea of a preparation for this field. Other things being equal, the candidate who has a knowledge of the German, is more fully fitted for service in the ministry of the Reformed Church, and has a better prospect of usefulness, than one who is destitute of this advantage. Now this should of itself in a general view, bind our candidates for the ministry, to cultivate an acquaintance with the language. Such are to be ambitious of being as fully fitted as possible for usefulness. Were they called to some foreign field, they would calculate, as a matter of course, on mastering a new language, or perhaps two or three of them, as necessary to success in their mission. And if a knowledge of the German be in itself an enlargement of a man's qualifications for usefulness in the ministry of the German Reformed Church, generally considered, why should they not be stimulated in like manner, under the prospect of entering this field, to make the accomplishment their own. The duty of every candidate for the sacred office is to covet earnestly all gifts, within

his reach, that may be made available for the success of his ministry ; to “seek that he may excel, to the edifying of the Church.” On this principle, in the case before us, students who have it in view to enter the ministry of the Reformed Church, should be exhorted to cultivate the gift of speaking German. Those who have had any knowledge of it previously, however small, should feel specially bound to improve the advantage, by making it the ground of a knowledge that may be more full and accurate. They should stir up the gift that is in them, and not allow it to perish for want of cultivation. And those who have had no such previous advantage at all, should not look upon it as a very formidable undertaking to learn the language out and out, in the course of their other preparation for the office they are seeking. Any student of tolerable capacity, penetrated with a sense of the importance of the German, and seriously bent on making himself as fully as possible “meet for the Master’s use,” in the seven or eight years which he ought to spend in preparing himself to be a preacher, might easily add this to his other accomplishments. And why should it not be expected at his hands. Even if the language has no other value whatever, it would be reason enough for *him* to study it, that it was called for, as a help to his usefulness, on his contemplated field of service in the Church. He might cheerfully address himself, under the influence of this consideration, to the study of the purest language that is spoken. With how much greater alacrity then should he respond to the challenge, when it calls him to study the *German*—one of the richest languages in the world, which he might well count it a privilege to make his own, apart from the particular consideration now in view altogether.