

MERCURY,
THE
Secret and Swift
MESSENGER.

CHAP. I.

The Dependance of this Knowledge in Nature. The Authors that have treated of it. Its Relation to the Art of Grammar.

Every rational Creature, being of an imperfect and dependant Happiness, is therefore naturally endowed with an Ability to communicate its own Thoughts and Intentions; that so by mutual Services, it might the better promote it self in the Prosecution of its own Well-being.

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for the *Receiving* and *Conveying* of Knowledge. Unto both which Functions, Nature hath designed several parts. Amongst the rest, the Ear is chiefly the Sense of Discipline or *Learning*, and the Tongue the Instrument of *Teaching*. The Communion betwixt both these, is by Speech or Language, which was but one at first, but hath since been confounded into several kinds. And Experience now shews, that a man is equally disposed, for the Learning of all, according as Education shall direct him. Which would not be, if (as some fondly conceive) any one of them were Natural unto us. For *Intus existens prohibet alienum.*

*Vallesius
Sacr. Philof.
cap. 3.*

Or suppose that a man could be brought up to the speaking of another Tongue, yet this would not hinder, but that he should still retain his Knowledge of that which was Natural. For if those which are gotten by Art do not hinder one another, much less would they be any

*Cal. Rhod.
Ant. leff.
lib. 2. 9.
c. 14.*

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The Secret and Swift

And because there is so vast a difference betwixt a Spirit and a Body, therefore hath the Wisdom of Providence contrived a distinct Way and Means, whereby they are each of them inabled to Discourse, according to the Variety of their several Natures.

*Aquinas,
part 1.
Quaest. 107.
Zanch. de
Operibus
Det, part 1.
lib. 3. c. 19.*

The Angels or Spiritual Substances, *Per insinuationem specierum*, (as the Schoolmen speak.) By insinuating of the Species, or an unveiling of their own Natures in the Knowledge of such Particulars as they would discover to another. And since they are of an *Homogeneous* and *immaterial* Essence, therefore do they hear, and know, and speak, not with several parts, but with their whole Substance. And though the Apostle mentions the *Tongue of Angels*, yet that is only *Per concessionem, & ex hypothesis*.

*1 Cor. 13.
1.*

But now, *Men* that have *Organical Bodies*, cannot communicate their Thoughts so easie and immediate a way. And therefore have need of some *Corporeal Instruments*, both for

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The Secret and Swift

impediment to that which is from Nature. And according to this it will follow, that most men should be of a double Language, which is evidently false. Whence likewise you may guess at the Absurdity of their Inquiries, who have sought to find out the Primitive Tongue, by bringing up Infants in such silent solitary places, where they might not hear the Speech of others.

Languages are so far Natural unto us, as other Arts and Sciences. A Man is born without any of them, but yet capable of all.

Now, because *Words* are only for those that are present both in *Time* and *Place*; therefore to these there hath been added, the Invention of *Letters* and *Writing*, which are such a Representation of our Words (though more permanent) as our Words are of our Thoughts. By these we may discourse with them that are remote from us, not only by the distance of many Miles, but also of many

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many Ages, *Hujus usu scimus maxime constare humanitatem vite, memoriam, ac hominum immortalitatem*, saith *Pliny*. Nat. Hist. l. 14. c. 11.
Quid hoc magnificentius? Quid aequum mirandum? in quod ne mortis quidem avida rapacitas jus ullum habeat, saith *Rhodiginus*. Antiq. lect. l. 4. c. 3.
 This being the chiefest means, both for the promoting of Humane Society, and the perpetuating our Names unto following Times.

How strange a thing this Art of Writing did seem at its first Invention, we may guess by the late discovered *Americans*, who were amazed to see men converse with Books, and could scarce make themselves believe that a Paper should speak; especially, when after all their Attention and listning to any Writing (as their Custom was) they could never perceive any Words or Sound to proceed from it.

There is a pretty Relation to this purpose concerning an Indian Slave, who being sent by his Master, with
 B 3 a Basket

Hermannus Hugo de Orig. Scribendi, Pref.

a Basket of Figs and a Letter, did by the way eat up a great part of his Carriage, conveying the remainder unto the Person to whom he was directed, who when he had read the Letter, and not finding the quantity of Figs answerable to what was there spoken of, he accuses the Slave of eating them, telling him what the Letter said against him. But the Indian (notwithstanding this proof) did confidently abjure the Fact, cursing the Paper, as being a false and lying Witness. After this, being sent again with the like Carriage, and a Letter expressing the just number of Figs that were to be delivered, he did again, according to his former Practice, devour a great part of them by the way; but before he medled with any, (to prevent all following Accusations) he first took the Letter, and hid that under a great Stone, assuring himself, that if it did not see him eat the Figs, it could never tell of him; but being now more strongly

strongly accused than before, he confesses the Fault, admiring the Divinity of the Paper, and for the future does promise his best Fidelity in every Employment.

Such strange Conceits did those wilder Nations entertain, concerning this excellent Invention. And doubtless it must needs argue a vast Ability both of Wit and Memory, in that man who did first confine all those different Sounds of Voice, (which seem to be almost of infinite Variety) within the bounds of those few Letters in the Alphabet.

The first Inventor of this was thought to be the Egyptian *Mercury*, who is therefore stiled the *Messenger* of the Gods. To which purpose the Poets have furnished him with Wings for *Swiftness* and dispatch in his Errands. And because the Planet of that name was thought to observe a more various and obscure Revolution than any of the rest, therefore likewise did they attribute unto him such

B 4 Secret

Cicero lib. 3. de Na. Deor. Polyd. Virg. de Inventor. lib. 1. cap. 6. Vossius de Grammatica, l. 1. c. 9. Natal. Comes Mythol. l. 5. c. 5.

Secret and subtle Motions, as might make him a trusty and private Messenger, and so the fitter for that Preference to which for this Invention they had advanced him.

There is yet another way of discouraging, by Signs and Gestures; and though it be not so common in *Prædise* as either of the other, yet in *Nature* perhaps it is before them both, since Infants are able this way to express themselves, before they have the benefit of Speech.

But now, because none of these ways in ordinary use, are either so *Secret* or *Swift* as some Exigencies would require; therefore many of the Ancients have busied themselves in a further Inquiry, how both these Deficiencies may be remedied; as conceiving that such a Discovery would be of excellent use, especially for some Occasions that are incident to *Statesmen* and *Soldiers*.

That the Ignorance of *Secret* and *Swift* Conveyances, hath often proved