

## WORDS.



NOTHING is more interesting and at the same time more instructive than tracing words to their origin and noting the various changes in meaning which time has wrought in them.

Language is not a mere invention of human skill. It is not something wholly accidental to human nature, otherwise we should not be surprised to find human beings devoid of this means of interchanging thought. If such a people exist, they are surely less than human, for language like reason, flows from God, and the former as a consequence of the latter. But man did not receive this divine gift, which alone renders social intercourse possible, in all its fulness and perfection, for from the words of Moses as recorded in the second chapter of Genesis, we learn, that what Adam named the living creatures placed by God in his presence, such was the name thereof. So that we are safe in concluding, and daily experience proves, that in addition to the gift of an imperfect language, man has moreover received the "power of naming things," which power, he has been using from the days of Adam to the present time as occasion or necessity demanded. It shall be the object of this brief essay to show, by examples drawn from various sources, how names once given by our ancestors, have entirely changed in meaning, and how words, whether given by the users or accepted as the legacy of others, are faithful histories of the past as well as the present. We seem to forget that our language is a composite one, containing in itself, thoughts, images, and feelings of different nations. The present alone absorbs our attention, otherwise we would not be content to skim the surface, knowing full well, that beneath lay volumes of history, concentrated powers, and numberless moral lessons, taught by other men of other times. So true is it that language is the

"pedigree of nations," that Archbishop Trench in his excellent work on the hidden meanings of words, proves beyond all doubt, that from a close examination of the English language, the early conquest of England by the Normans, might be shown were every line penned by historians on this subject lost to the present generation. He has very reasonably concluded, that the Normans were the ruling race, from the very evident fact, that all our words denoting dignity, state, honor, and pre-eminence, with the exception of the word king, which is Saxon, are of Norman French origin. Duke, prince, throne, royalty, sovereign, palace, castle, hall, etc., all bear the same stamp, and speak of authority and opulence. Contrast these with our Saxon words, house, man, son, plough, spade, wheat, hay, etc., and the facts narrated in history become more evident. But by carrying the comparison a little farther we shall see, that not only were the Saxons considered an inferior people by their Norman conquerors, but that they were actually oppressed by them. Thus while ox, steer, and cow are Saxon, *beef*, the dressed and prepared food from these animals becomes Norman. The same is true of calf and veal, sheep and mutton, swine and pork, deer and venison. These are not chance words which we have adopted for convenience sake; but silent records of England's past history. Not less significant is the simple and oft used word *frank*. It too carries us back many centuries and discloses a remarkable epoch in the history of Gaul, when the Franks, an association of German tribes established themselves by force of arms in that land. Despising the Gauls and the poor remnant of a degenerate Roman army, they boldly proclaimed themselves true lovers of freedom, honesty and independence. And so it came to pass that the word *frank* indicated not only a national, but also a moral distinction. *Franchise* comes to us in the same manner, and means nothing more than the exercise of civil liberties. Again *tribulation*, when traced to its origin displays a remarkable history. It comes to