

it would indicate that it was a quadruped; another that it was carnivorous; and a fourth, assigning to it a mane or beard, would characterise the lion. A sheep again would be described by a few significant strokes, as an animal of the herbivorous or grass eating sort, bearing wool. It is easy to conceive that these characters might be comprehended within less space than the letters by which we mark the sounds appropriated in the English language to denote these two objects. They would have the advantage of being significant, not of a mere arbitrary sound, but of the characteristics of the two animals. Accordingly, there have not been wanting many who have given the preference to picture or symbolic writing, over every other system of signs for the communication of ideas. The arguments by which they support their thesis, are at least plausible. They may be summed up under two heads. The superior precision of such a language, and its universal applicability.

Almost all disputes, it is said, arise from the misapprehension, or misapplication of terms, and may be traced to the looseness and inaccuracy of spoken language, which, answering sufficiently well for the purposes of common life, becomes, when transferred from them to abstract discussions and general reasonings, the source of a vast deal of ambiguity and error. This it is said might be got rid of entirely, and for ever banished from science, by the adoption of such a language. Every distinct primary idea that we have, might have a peculiar sign appropriated to it, and these united according to fixed rules would give precise and unambiguous expressions for the most complex ideas and their relations. The principle is one similar to that regulating the nomenclature of the modern science of

chemistry. Such a language would be universal and would become the means of the freest communication between individuals speaking every different tongue. Frenchman, Englishman, German, Prussian, Greek, would use it in the same manner that they now do the arabic numerals, or as the various branches of the Chinese race, speaking different dialects or languages, employ their picture writing. By arguments drawn from such a view of the subject, Dr. Wallis, more than a century ago, and Dr. Anderson, at the beginning of this century, and several ingenious men since, have maintained the superiority of such a language, and have seriously urged its adoption.

Since, then, picture writing is undoubtedly the earliest written language, since it may become, as in the hands of the Chinese, a very distinct mode of communicating thought, and since, in point of universality of application, and perhaps in some other respects, it is superior to any other character, it becomes rather a difficult matter to explain how it has not been universally adopted, and how, in place of it, we have come to use characters not significant of ideas, but the representatives of spoken language, of various arbitrary sounds, which the conventional usages of different nations have adopted as means of conveying thought.

In the conjectural explanation which I am about to give of this fact, I am obliged to take it for granted, as an admitted point, that Egypt was the great parent of European art and science. I cannot, within the bounds prescribed me, display the strength of the foundation on which this assumption is built. It is one however, which I believe will be granted as so very probable, as almost to amount to certainty.

It is to some circumstances peculiar