

APPENDIX.

INDIAN LANGUAGES OF AMERICA.* The aboriginal languages of the continent of America exhibit various phenomena, a knowledge of which will be found indispensable to a just theory of speech. It is true, that we have long had our systems of universal grammar, or, in other words, our theories of language, as deduced from the small number of European and Asiatic tongues, which have been hitherto studied by the learned; but from the rapid advances made, during our own age, in comparative philology, particularly by means of the unwritten dialects of barbarous nations, there is reason to believe that some important modifications are yet to be made in our theories. Of the various unwritten languages, those of the American continent present us with many new and striking facts. We are informed by that distinguished scholar of our country, Mr. Du Ponceau, from whose writings we derive nearly all that is known of the general characteristics of these dialects, that there appears to be "a wonderful organization, which distinguishes the languages of the aborigines of this country from all the other idioms of the known world."† That eminent philologist was the first to discover, and make known to the world, the remarkable character, which pervades, as far as yet known, the aboriginal languages of America, from Greenland to cape Horn. In the period which has elapsed since the publication of his Report, by the American Philosophical

Society at Philadelphia, in 1819, all the observations which have been made on Indian languages, at that time unknown, have confirmed his theory; or, as he expresses it, his general result of a multitude of facts collected with care. This result has shown, that the astonishing variety of forms of human speech, which exists in the Eastern hemisphere, is not to be found in the Western. Here we find no monosyllabic language, like the Chinese and its cognate idioms; no analytical language, like those of the North of Europe, with their numerous expletive and auxiliary monosyllables; no such contrast is exhibited as that which is so striking to the most superficial observer, between the complication of the forms of the Basque language and the comparative simplicity of its neighbors, the French and Spanish; but a uniform system, with such differences only as constitute varieties in natural objects, seems to pervade them all; and this genus of human languages has been called (by Mr. Du Ponceau) *polysynthetic*, from the numerous combinations of ideas which it presents in the form of words. It is also a fact, says the same learned writer, that the American languages are rich in words, and regular in their forms, and that they do not yield, in those respects, to any other idiom. These facts have attracted the attention of the learned in Europe as well as in this country; but they have not been able entirely to remove the prejudices that have been so long entertained against the languages of savage nations. The pride of civilization is reluctant to admit facts like these, because they show how little philosophy and science have to do with the formation of language. A vague idea still prevails, that the idioms of barbarous tribes must be greatly inferior to those of civilized na-

* The subject of this article is so interesting, in regard to general and comparative philology, and so little is generally known respecting it, that it has been thought proper to allow it a space more than proportionate to the usual length of philological articles in this work.

† Report of the historical and literary committee to the American Philosophical Society at Philadelphia, drawn up by Mr. Du Ponceau, 1819.