

CHAPTER I

THOUGHTS, WORDS AND THINGS

Let us get nearer to the fire, so that we can see what we are saying.
—*The Bubs of Fernando Po*

THE influence of Language upon Thought has attracted the attention of the wise and foolish alike, since Lao Tse came long ago to the conclusion—

“He who knows does not speak, he who speaks does not know”

Sometimes, in fact, the wise have in this field proved themselves the most foolish. Was it not the great Bentley, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, Archdeacon of Bristol, and holder of two other livings besides, who declared: “We are sure, from the names of persons and places mentioned in Scripture before the Deluge, not to insist upon other arguments, that Hebrew was the primitive language of mankind”? On the opposite page are collected other remarks on the subject of language and its Meaning, and whether wise or foolish, they at least raise questions to which, sooner or later, an answer is desirable. In recent years, indeed, the existence and importance of this problem of Meaning have been generally admitted, but by some sad chance those who have attempted a solution have too often been forced to relinquish their ambition—whether through old age, like Leibnitz, or penury, like C. S. Peirce, or both. Even the methods by which it is to be attacked have remained in doubt. Each science has tended to delegate the unpleasant task to

another. With the errors and omissions of metaphysicians we shall be much concerned in the sequel, and philologists must bear their share of the guilt. Yet it is a philologist who, of recent years, has, perhaps, realized most clearly the necessity of a broader treatment.

“Throughout the whole history of the human race,” wrote the late Dr Postgate, “there have been no questions which have caused more heart-searchings, tumults, and devastation than questions of the correspondence of words to facts. The mere mention of such words as ‘religion,’ ‘patriotism,’ and ‘property’ is sufficient to demonstrate this truth. Now, it is the investigation of the nature of the correspondence between word and fact, to use these terms in the widest sense, which is the proper and the highest problem of the science of meaning. That every living word is rooted in facts of our mental consciousness and history it would be impossible to gainsay; but it is a very different matter to determine what these facts may be. The primitive conception is undoubtedly that the name is indicative, or descriptive, of the thing. From which it would follow at once that from the presence of the name you could argue to the existence of the thing. This is the simple conception of the savage.”

In thus stressing the need for a clear analysis of the relation between words and facts as the essential of a theory of Meaning, Dr Postgate himself was fully aware that at some point the philosophical and psychological aspects of that theory cannot be avoided. When he wrote (1896), the hope was not unreasonable that the science of Semantics would do something to bridge the gulf. But, although M. Bréal’s researches drew attention to a number of fascinating phenomena in the history of language, and awakened a fresh interest in the educational possibilities of etymology, the net result was disappointing. That such disappointment was inevitable may be seen, if we consider the attitude to

language implied by such a passage as the following. The use of words as though their meaning were fixed, the constant resort to loose metaphor, the hypostatization of leading terms, all indicate an unsuitable attitude in which to approach the question.

“Substantives are signs attached to things they contain exactly that amount of truth which can be contained by a name, an amount which is of necessity small in proportion to the reality of the object That which is most adequate to its object is the abstract noun, since it represents a simple operation of the mind When I use the two words *compressibility*, *immortality*, all that is to be found in the idea is to be found also in the word But if I take a real entity, an object existing in nature, it will be impossible for language to introduce into the word all the ideas which this entity or object awakens in the mind Language is therefore compelled to choose Out of all the ideas it can choose one only, it thus creates a name which is not long in becoming a mere sign

For this name to be accepted it must, no doubt, originally possess some true and striking characteristic on one side or another, it must satisfy the minds of those to whom it is first submitted But this condition is imperative only at the outset Once accepted, it rids itself rapidly of its etymological signification, otherwise this signification might become an embarrassment Many objects are inaccurately named, whether through the ignorance of the original authors, or by some intervening change which disturbs the harmony between the sign and the thing signified Nevertheless, words answer the same purpose as though they were of faultless accuracy No one dreams of revising them They are accepted by a tacit consent of which we are not even conscious” (Bréal's *Semantics*, pp 171-2)

What exactly is to be made of substantives which “contain” truth, “that amount of truth which can be contained by a name”? How can “all that is found in the idea be also found in the word”? The conception of language as “compelled to choose an idea,” and thereby creating “a name, which is not long in becoming a sign,” is an odd one; while ‘accuracy’ and ‘harmony’ are sadly in need of elucidation when applied to naming and to the relation between sign and thing signified respectively. This is not mere captious criticism. The locutions objected to

conceal the very facts which the science of language is concerned to elucidate. The real task before that science cannot be successfully attempted without a far more critical consciousness of the dangers of such loose verbiage. It is impossible to handle a scientific matter in such metaphorical terms, and the training of philologists has not, as a rule, been such as to increase their command of analytic and abstract language. The logician would be far better equipped in this respect were it not that his command of language tends to conceal from him what he is talking about and renders him prone to accept purely linguistic constructions, which serve well enough for his special purposes, as ultimates.

How great is the tyranny of language over those who propose to inquire into its workings is well shown in the speculations of the late F. de Saussure, a writer regarded by perhaps a majority of French and Swiss students as having for the first time placed linguistic upon a scientific basis. This author begins by inquiring, "What is the object at once integral and concrete of linguistic?" He does not ask whether it has one, he obeys blindly the primitive impulse to infer from a word some object for which it stands, and sets out determined to find it. But, he continues, speech (*le langage*), though concrete enough, as a set of events is not integral. Its sounds imply movements of speech, and both, as instruments of thought, imply ideas. Ideas, he adds, have a social as well as an individual side, and at each instant language implies both an established system and an evolution. "Thus, from whatever side we approach the question, we nowhere find the integral object of linguistic." De Saussure does not pause at this point to ask himself what he is looking for, or whether there is any reason why there should be such a thing. He proceeds instead in a fashion familiar in the beginnings of all sciences, and concocts a suitable object—'*la langue*,' the language, as opposed to speech.

"What is *la langue*? For us, it is not to be confounded with speech (*le langage*); it is only a determinate part of this, an essential part, it is true. It is at once a social product of the faculty of speech, and a collection of necessary conventions adopted by the social body to allow the exercise of this faculty by individuals. . . . It is a whole in itself and a principle of classification. As soon as we give it the first place among the facts of speech we introduce a natural order in a whole which does not lend itself to any other classification." *La langue* is further "the sum of the verbal images stored up in all the individuals, a treasure deposited by the practice of speaking in the members of a given community; a grammatical system, virtually existing in each brain, or more exactly in the brains of a body of individuals; for *la langue* is not complete in any one of them, it exists in perfection only in the mass."¹

Such an elaborate construction as *la langue* might, no doubt, be arrived at by some Method of Intensive Distraction analogous to that with which Dr Whitehead's name is associated, but as a guiding principle for a young science it is fantastic. Moreover, the same device of inventing verbal entities outside the range of possible investigation proved fatal to the theory of signs which followed.²

¹ *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, pp 23 31

² A sign for de Saussure is twofold, made up of a concept (signifié) and an acoustic image (signifiant), both psychical entities. Without the concept, he says, the acoustic image would not be a sign (p 100). The disadvantage of this account is as we shall see, that the process of interpretation is included by definition in the sign!

De Saussure actually prided himself upon having "defined things and not words." The definitions thus established "have nothing to fear," he writes, "from certain ambiguous terms which do not coincide in one language and another. Thus in German *Sprache* means 'langue' and 'langage'. In Latin *sermo* rather signifies *langage et parole* while *lingua* designates '*la langue*,' and so on. No word corresponds exactly to any of the notions made precise above, this is why every definition made apropos of a word is idle, it is a bad method, to start from words to define things" (*ibid*, p 32). The view of definition here adopted implies, as will be shown later, remarkable ignorance of the normal procedure—the substitution, namely, of better understood for obscure symbols. Another specimen of this naivety is found in the rejection of the term 'symbol' to designate the linguistic sign (p 103). "The symbol has the character of never being quite arbitrary. It

As a philologist with an inordinate respect for linguistic convention, de Saussure could not bear to tamper with what he imagined to be a fixed meaning, a part of *la langue*. This scrupulous regard for fictitious 'accepted' uses of words is a frequent trait in philologists. Its roots go down very deep into human nature, as we shall see in the two chapters which follow. It is especially regrettable that a technical equipment, otherwise excellent, should have been so weak at this point, for the initial recognition of a general science of signs, 'semiology,' of which linguistic would be a branch, and the most important branch, was a very notable attempt in the right direction. Unfortunately this theory of signs, by neglecting entirely the things for which signs stand, was from the beginning cut off from any contact with scientific methods of verification. De Saussure, however, does not appear to have pursued the matter far enough for this defect to become obvious. The same neglect also renders the more recent treatise of Professor Delacroix, *Le Langage et la Pensée*, ineffective as a study of the influence of language upon thought.

Philosophers and philologists alike have failed in their attempts. There remains a third group of inquirers with an interest in linguistic theory, the ethnologists, many of whom have come to their subject after a preliminary training in psychology. An adequate account of primitive peoples is impossible without an insight into the essentials of their languages, which cannot be gained through a mere transfer of current Indo-European grammatical distinctions, a procedure only too often positively misleading. In the circumstances, each field investigator might be supposed to reconstruct the grammar of a primitive tongue from his own observations of the behaviour of a speaker in a given situation. Unfortunately this is rarely done,

is not empty, there is the rudiment of a natural tie between the signifying and the signified. The symbol for justice, the scales, could not be replaced by something else at random, a carriage for instance "

since the difficulties are very great; and perhaps owing to accidents of psychological terminology, the worker tends to neglect the concrete environment of the speaker and to consider only the 'ideas' which are regarded as 'expressed.' Thus Dr Boas, the most suggestive and influential of the group of ethnologists which is dealing with the vast subject-matter provided by the American-Indian languages, formulates as the three points to be considered in the objective discussion of languages—

First, the constituent phonetic elements of the language;

Second, the groups of ideas expressed by phonetic groups;

Third, the method of combining and modifying phonetic groups.

"All speech," says Dr Boas explicitly, "is intended to serve for the communication of ideas." Ideas, however, are only remotely accessible to outside inquirers, and we need a theory which connects words with things through the ideas, if any, which they symbolize. We require, that is to say, separate analyses of the relations of words to ideas and of ideas to things. Further, much language, especially primitive language, is not primarily concerned with ideas at all, unless under 'ideas' are included emotions and attitudes—a procedure which would involve terminological inconveniences. The omission of all separate treatment of the ways in which speech, besides conveying ideas, also expresses attitudes, desires and intentions,¹ is another point at which the work of this active school is at present defective.

¹ Not that definitions are lacking which include more than ideas. Thus in one of the ablest and most interesting of modern linguistic studies, that of E. Sapir, Chief of the Anthropological Section, Geological Survey of Canada, an ethnologist closely connected with the American school, language is defined as "a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols" (*Language*, 1922, p. 7). But so little is the emotive element considered that in a discussion of grammatical form, as shown by the great variation of word order in Latin, we find it stated that the change from 'hominem femina videt'

In yet another respect all these specialists fail to realize the deficiencies of current linguistic theory. Pre-occupied as they are—ethnologists with recording the details of fast vanishing languages; philologists with an elaborate technique of phonetic laws and principles of derivation; philosophers with ‘philosophy’—all have overlooked the pressing need for a better understanding of what actually occurs in discussion. The analysis of the process of communication is partly psychological, and psychology has now reached a stage at which this part may be successfully undertaken. Until this had happened the science of Symbolism necessarily remained in abeyance, but there is no longer any excuse for vague talk about Meaning, and ignorance of the ways in which words deceive us.

Throughout the Western world it is agreed that people must meet frequently, and that it is not only agreeable to talk, but that it is a matter of common courtesy to say something even when there is hardly anything to say. “Every civilized man,” continues the late Professor Mahaffy, to whose *Principles of the Art of Conversation* we owe this observation, “feels, or ought to feel, this duty; it is the universal accomplishment which all must practise”; those who fail are punished by the dislike or neglect of society.

There is no doubt an Art in saying something when to ‘videt femina hominem’ makes “little or no difference beyond, possibly, a rhetorical or a *stylistic* one” (p 65). The italics are ours, and the same writer sums up his discussion of the complex symbol ‘The farmer kills the duckling,’ with the remark “In this short sentence of five words there are expressed thirteen distinct concepts” (p 93). As will be noted at a later stage, the use of the term ‘concept’ is particularly unfortunate in such an analysis, and a vocabulary so infested with current metaphysical confusions leads unavoidably to incompleteness of treatment.

By being forced to include under ‘concepts’ both ‘concrete concepts’—material objects, and ‘Pure relational concepts’ (abstract ways of referring), Sapir is unable in this work—which was unfortunately never followed by his projected volume on Linguistics—to make even the distinctions which are essential inside symbolic language (cf Chapter V, p 101 *infra*), and when we come to deal with translation (Chapter X, p 228) we shall find that this vocabulary has proved equally unserviceable to him.

there is nothing to be said, but it is equally certain that there is an Art no less important of saying clearly what one wishes to say when there is an abundance of material; and conversation will seldom attain even the level of an intellectual pastime if adequate methods of Interpretation are not also available.

Symbolism is the study of the part played in human affairs by language and symbols of all kinds, and especially of their influence on Thought. It singles out for special inquiry the ways in which symbols help us and hinder us in reflecting on things.

Symbols direct and organize, record and communicate. In stating what they direct and organize, record and communicate we have to distinguish as always between Thoughts and Things.¹ It is Thought (or, as we shall usually say, *reference*) which is directed and organized, and it is also Thought which is recorded and communicated. But just as we say that the gardener mows the lawn when we know that it is the lawn-mower which actually does the cutting, so, though we know that the direct relation of symbols is with thought, we also say that symbols record events and communicate facts.

By leaving out essential elements in the language situation we easily raise problems and difficulties which vanish when the whole transaction is considered in greater detail. Words, as every one now knows, 'mean' nothing by themselves, although the belief

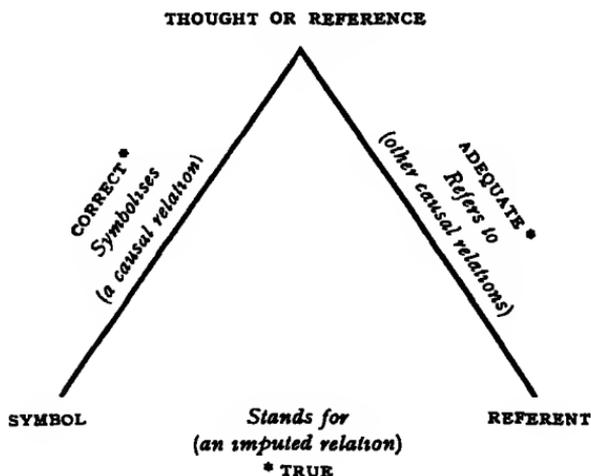
¹ The word 'thing' is unsuitable for the analysis here undertaken, because in popular usage it is restricted to material substances—a fact which has led philosophers to favour the terms 'entity,' 'ens' or 'object' as the general name for whatever is. It has seemed desirable, therefore, to introduce a technical term to stand for whatever we may be thinking of or referring to 'Object,' though this is its original use, has had an unfortunate history. The word 'referent,' therefore, has been adopted, though its etymological form is open to question when considered in relation to other participial derivatives, such as agent or reagent. But even in Latin the present participle occasionally (e.g. *vehens* in equo) admitted of variation in use, and in English an analogy with substantives, such as 'reagent,' 'extent,' and 'incident' may be urged. Thus the fact that 'referent' in what follows stands for a thing and not an active person, should cause no confusion.

that they did, as we shall see in the next chapter, was once equally universal. It is only when a thinker makes use of them that they stand for anything, or, in one sense, have 'meaning.' They are instruments. But besides this referential use which for all reflective, intellectual use of language should be paramount, words have other functions which may be grouped together as emotive. These can best be examined when the framework of the problem of strict statement and intellectual communication has been set up. The importance of the emotive aspects of language is not thereby minimized, and anyone chiefly concerned with popular or primitive speech might well be led to reverse this order of approach. Many difficulties, indeed, arising through the behaviour of words in discussion, even amongst scientists, force us at an early stage to take into account these 'non-symbolic' influences. But for the analysis of the senses of 'meaning' with which we are here chiefly concerned, it is desirable to begin with the relations of thoughts, words and things as they are found in cases of reflective speech uncomplicated by emotional, diplomatic, or other disturbances; and with regard to these, the indirectness of the relations between words and things is the feature which first deserves attention.

This may be simply illustrated by a diagram, in which the three factors involved whenever any statement is made, or understood, are placed at the corners of the triangle, the relations which hold between them being represented by the sides. The point just made can be restated by saying that in this respect the base of the triangle is quite different in composition from either of the other sides.

Between a thought and a symbol causal relations hold. When we speak, the symbolism we employ is caused partly by the reference we are making and partly by social and psychological factors—the purpose for which we are making the reference, the proposed

effect of our symbols on other persons, and our own attitude. When we hear what is said, the symbols both cause us to perform an act of reference and to assume an attitude which will, according to circumstances, be more or less similar to the act and the attitude of the speaker.



Between the Thought and the Referent there is also a relation ; more or less direct (as when we think about or attend to a coloured surface we see), or indirect (as when we 'think of' or 'refer to' Napoleon), in which case there may be a very long chain of sign-situations intervening between the act and its referent: word—historian—contemporary record—eye-witness—referent (Napoleon).

Between the symbol and the referent there is no relevant relation other than the indirect one, which consists in its being used by someone to stand for a referent. Symbol and Referent, that is to say, are not connected directly (and when, for grammatical reasons, we imply such a relation, it will merely be an imputed,¹

* Cf Chapter V, pp 101-2
¹ See Chapter VI, p. 116

as opposed to a real, relation) but only indirectly round the two sides of the triangle.¹

It may appear unnecessary to insist that there is no direct connection between say 'dog,' the word, and certain common objects in our streets, and that the only connection which holds is that which consists in our using the word when we refer to the animal. We shall find, however, that the kind of simplification typified by this once universal theory of direct meaning relations between words and things is the source of almost all the difficulties which thought encounters. As will appear at a later stage, the power to confuse and obstruct, which such simplifications possess, is largely due to the conditions of communication. Language if it is to be used must be a *ready* instrument. The handiness and ease of a phrase is always more important in deciding whether it will be extensively used than its accuracy. Thus such shorthand as the word 'means' is constantly used so as to imply a direct simple relation between words and things, phrases and situations. If such relations could be admitted then there would of course be no problem as to the nature

¹ An exceptional case occurs when the symbol used is more or less directly like the referent for which it is used, as for instance, it may be when it is an onomatopœic word, or an image, or a gesture, or a drawing. In this case the triangle is completed, its base is supplied, and a great simplification of the problem involved appears to result. For this reason many attempts have been made to reduce the normal language situation to this possibly more primitive form. Its greater completeness does no doubt account for the immense superiority in efficiency of gesture languages, within their appropriate field, to other languages not supportable by gesture within *their* fields. Hence we know far more perfectly what has occurred if a scene is well re-enacted than if it be merely described. But in the normal situation we have to recognize that our triangle is without its base, that between Symbol and Referent no direct relation holds, and, further, that it is through this lack that most of the problems of language arise. Simulative and non-simulative languages are entirely distinct in principle. Standing for and representing are different relations. It is, however, convenient to speak at times as though there were some direct relation holding between Symbol and Referent. We then say, on the analogy of the lawn-mower, that a Symbol refers to a Referent. Provided that the telescopic nature of the phrase is not forgotten, confusion need not arise. In Supplement I, Part V *infra*, Dr Malinowski gives a valuable account of the development of the speech situation in relation to the above diagram.

of Meaning, and the vast majority of those who have been concerned with it would have been right in their refusal to discuss it. But too many interesting developments have been occurring in the sciences, through the rejection of everyday symbolizations and the endeavour to replace them by more accurate accounts, for any naive theory that 'meaning' is just 'meaning' to be popular at the moment. As a rule new facts in startling disagreement with accepted explanations of other facts are required before such critical analyses of what are generally regarded as simple satisfactory notions are undertaken. This has been the case with the recent revolutions in physics. But in addition great reluctance to postulate anything *sui generis* and of necessity undetectable¹ was needed before the simple natural notion of simultaneity, for instance, as a two-termed relation came to be questioned. Yet to such questionings the theory of Relativity was due. The same two motives, new discrepant facts, and distaste for the use of obscure kinds of entities in eking out explanations, have led to disturbances in psychology, though here the required restatements have not yet been provided. No Copernican revolution has yet occurred, although several are due if psychology is to be brought into line with its fellow sciences.

It is noteworthy, however, that recent stirrings in psychology have been mainly if not altogether concerned with feeling and volition. The popular success of Psycho-analysis has tended to divert attention from the older problem of thinking. Yet in so far as progress here has consequences for all the other sciences and for the whole technique of investigation in psychology itself, this central problem of knowing or of 'meaning' is perhaps better worth scrutiny and more likely to promote fresh orientations than any other that can be suggested. As the Behaviorists have also very

¹ Places and instants are very typical entities of verbal origin.

properly pointed out, this question is closely connected with the use of words.

But the approach to Meaning, far more than the approach to such problems as those of physics, requires a thorough-going investigation of language. Every great advance in physics has been at the expense of some generally accepted piece of metaphysical explanation which had enshrined itself in a convenient, universally practised, symbolic shorthand. But the confusion and obstruction due to such shorthand expressions and to the naive theories they protect and keep alive, is greater in psychology, and especially in the theory of knowledge, than elsewhere; because no problem is so infected with so-called metaphysical difficulties—due here, as always, to an approach to a question through symbols without an initial investigation of their functions.

We have now to consider more closely what the causes and effects of symbols are.¹ Whatever may be the services, other than conservative and retentive, of symbolization, all experience shows that there are also disservices. The grosser forms of verbal confusion have long been recognized; but less attention has been paid to those that are more subtle and more frequent. In the following chapters many examples of these will be given, chosen in great part from philosophical fields, for it is here that such confusions become, with the passage of time, most apparent. The root of the trouble will be traced to the superstition that words are in some way parts of things or always imply things corresponding to them, historical instances of this still potent

¹ Whether symbols in some form or other are necessary to thought itself is a difficult problem, and is discussed in *The Meaning of Psychology* (Chapter XIII) as well as in Chapter X of the present work. But certainly the recording and the communication of thought (telepathy apart) require symbols. It seems that thought, so far as it is transitive and not in the form of an internal dialogue, can dispense with symbols, and that they only appear when thought takes on this monologue form. In the normal case the actual development of thought is very closely bound up with the symbolization which accompanies it.

instinctive belief being given from many sources. The fundamental and most prolific fallacy is, in other words, that the base of the triangle given above is filled in.

The completeness of any reference varies; it is more or less close and clear, it 'grasps' its object in greater or less degree. Such symbolization as accompanies it—images of all sorts, words, sentences whole and in pieces—is in no very close observable connection with the variation in the perfection of the reference. Since, then, in any discussion we cannot immediately settle from the nature of a person's remarks what his opinion is, we need some technique to keep the parties to an argument in contact and to clear up misunderstandings—or, in other words, a Theory of Definition. Such a technique can only be provided by a theory of knowing, or of reference, which will avoid, as current theories do not, the attribution to the knower of powers which it may be pleasant for him to suppose himself to possess, but which are not open to the only kind of investigation hitherto profitably pursued, the kind generally known as scientific investigation.

Normally, whenever we hear anything said we spring spontaneously to an immediate conclusion, namely, that the speaker is referring to what we should be referring to were we speaking the words ourselves. In some cases this interpretation may be correct; this will prove to be what he has referred to. But in most discussions which attempt greater subtleties than could be handled in a gesture language this will not be so. To suppose otherwise is to neglect our subsidiary gesture languages, whose accuracy within their own limited provinces is far higher than that yet reached by any system of spoken or written symbols, with the exception of the quite special and peculiar case of mathematical, scientific and musical notations. Words, whenever they cannot directly ally themselves with and support themselves upon gestures, are at present a very imperfect means of communication. Even for private

thinking thought is often ready to advance, and only held back by the treachery of its natural symbolism ; and for conversational purposes the latitude acquired constantly shows itself to all those who make any serious attempts to compare opinions.

We have not here in view the more familiar ways in which words may be used to deceive. In a later chapter, when the function of language as an instrument for the *promotion of purposes* rather than as a means of *symbolizing references* is fully discussed, we shall see how the intention of the speaker may complicate the situation. But the *honnête homme* may be unprepared for the lengths to which verbal ingenuity can be carried. At all times these possibilities have been exploited to the full by interpreters of Holy Writ who desire to enjoy the best of both worlds. Here, for example, is a specimen of the exegetic of the late Dr Lyman Abbott, pastor, publicist, and editor, which, through the efforts of Mr Upton Sinclair, has now become classic. Does Christianity condemn the methods of twentieth-century finance? Doubtless there are some awkward words in the Gospels, but a little 'interpretation' is all that is necessary.

" Jesus did not say 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth' He said 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth *where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal*' And no sensible American does. Moth and rust do not get at Mr Rockefeller's oil wells, and thieves do not often break through and steal a railway. What Jesus condemned was hoarding wealth "

Each investment, therefore, every worldly acquisition, according to one of the leading divines of the New World, may be judged on its merits. There is no hard and fast rule. When moth and rust have been eliminated by science the Christian investor will presumably have no problem, but in the meantime it would seem that Camphorated Oil fulfils most nearly the synoptic requirements. Burglars are not partial

to it; it is anathema to moth; and the risk of rust is completely obviated.

Another variety of verbal ingenuity closely allied to this, is the deliberate use of symbols to misdirect the listener. Apologies for such a practice in the case of the madman from whom we desire to conceal the whereabouts of his razor are well known, but a wider justification has also been attempted. In the Christian era we hear of "falsifications of documents, inventions of legends, and forgeries of every description which made the Catholic Church a veritable seat of lying."¹ A play upon words in which one sense is taken by the speaker and another sense intended by him for the hearer was permitted.² Indeed, three sorts of equivocations were distinguished by Alfonso de Liguori, who was beatified in the nineteenth century, which might be used with good reason; ³ a good reason being "any honest object, such as keeping our goods, spiritual or temporal."⁴ In the twentieth century the intensification of militant nationalism has added further 'good reason'; for the military code includes all transactions with hostile nations or individuals as part of the process of keeping spiritual and temporal goods. In war-time words become a normal part of the mechanism of deceit, and the ethics of the situation have been aptly summed up by Lord Wolseley "We will keep hammering along with the conviction that 'honesty is the best policy,' and that truth always wins in the long run. These pretty sentences do well for a child's copy-book, but the man who acts upon them in war had better sheathe his sword for

¹ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of Moral Ideas*, Vol II, p 100

² Alagona, *Compendium Manuals D Navarr* XII, 88 p 94

³ Alfonso di Liguori, *Theologia Morals*, III, 151, Vol I, p 249

⁴ Meyrick, *Moral and Devotional Theology of the Church of Rome*, Vol I, p 3 Cf further Westermarck, *loc cit*

⁵ *Soldier's Pocket Book for Field Service*, p 69

The Greeks, as we shall see, were in many ways not far from the attitude of primitive man towards words. And it is not surprising to read that after the Peloponnesian war the verbal machinery of peace had got completely out of gear, and, says Thucydides, could not be brought back into use—"The meaning of words had no longer the same relation to things, but was changed by men as they thought proper." The Greeks were powerless to cope with such a situation. We in our wisdom seem to have created institutions which render us more powerless still.¹

On a less gigantic scale the technique of deliberate misdirection can profitably be studied with a view to corrective measures. In accounting for Newman's *Grammar of Assent* Dr E. A. Abbott had occasion to describe the process of 'lubrication,' the art of greasing the descent from the premises to the conclusion, which his namesake cited above so aptly employs. In order to lubricate well, various qualifications are necessary :

"First a nice discrimination of words, enabling you to form, easily and naturally, a great number of finely graduated propositions, shading away, as it were, from the assertion 'x is white' to the assertion 'x is black' Secondly an inward and absolute contempt for logic and for words. . . . And what are words but toys and sweetmeats for grown-up babies who call themselves men?"²

But even where the actual referents are not in doubt, it is perhaps hardly realized how widespread is the

¹ As the late C E Montague (*Disenchantment*, p 101) well put it, "the only new thing about deception in war is modern man's more perfect means for its practice. The thing has become, in his hand, a trumpet more efficacious than Gideon's own. To match the Lewis gun with which he now fires his solids, he has to his hand the newspaper Press, to let fly at the enemy's head the thing which is not." But this was a temporary use of the modern technique of misdirection, and with the return of peace the habit is lost? Not so, says Mr Montague. "Any weapon you use in a war leaves some bill to be settled in peace, and the Propaganda arm has its cost like another." The return of the exploiters of the verbal machine to their civil posts is a return in triumph, and its effects will be felt for many years in all countries where the power of the word amongst the masses remains paramount.

² *Philomythos*, p 214

habit of using the power of words not only for *bona fide* communications, but also as a method of misdirection ; and in the world as it is to-day the naive interpreter is likely on many occasions to be seriously misled if the existence of this unpleasing trait—equally prevalent amongst the classes and the masses without distinction of race, creed, sex, or colour—is overlooked.

Throughout this work, however, we are treating of *bona fide* communication only, except in so far as we shall find it necessary in Chapter IX. to discuss that derivate use of Meaning to which misdirection gives rise. For the rest, the verbal treachery with which we are concerned is only that involved by the use of symbols as such. As we proceed to examine the conditions of communication we shall see why any symbolic apparatus which is in general use is liable to incompleteness and defect.

But if our linguistic outfit is treacherous, it nevertheless is indispensable, nor would another complete outfit necessarily improve matters, even if it were ten times as complete. It is not always new words that are needed, but a means of controlling them as symbols, a means of readily discovering to what in the world on any occasion they are used to refer, and this is what an adequate theory of definition should provide.

But a theory of Definition must follow, not precede, a theory of Signs, and it is little realized how large a place is taken both in abstract thought and in practical affairs by sign-situations. But if an account of sign-situations is to be scientific it must take its observations from the most suitable instances, and must not derive its general principles from an exceptional case. The person actually interpreting a sign is not well placed for observing what is happening. We should develop our theory of signs from observations of other people, and only admit evidence drawn from introspection when we know how to appraise it. The adoption of the other method, on the ground that all our knowledge of

others is inferred from knowledge of our own states, can only lead to the *impasse* of solipsism from which modern speculation has yet to recoil. Those who allow beyond question that there are people like themselves also interpreting signs and open to study should not find it difficult to admit that their observation of the behaviour of others may provide at least a framework within which their own introspection, that special and deceptive case, may be fitted. That this is the practice of all the sciences need hardly be pointed out. Any sensible doctor when stricken by disease distrusts his own introspective diagnosis and calls in a colleague.

There are, indeed, good reasons why what is happening in ourselves should be partially hidden from us, and we are generally better judges of what other people are doing than of what we are doing ourselves. Before we looked carefully into other people's heads it was commonly believed that an entity called the soul resided therein, just as children commonly believe that there is a little man inside the skull who looks out at the eyes, the windows of the soul, and listens at the ears. The child has the strongest introspective evidence for this belief, which, but for scalpels and microscopes, it would be difficult to disturb. The tacitly solipsistic presumption that this naive approach is in some way a necessity of method disqualifies the majority of philosophical and psychological discussions of Interpretation. If we restrict the subject-matter of the inquiry to 'ideas' and words, *i.e.*, to the left side of our triangle, and omit all frank recognition of the world outside us, we inevitably introduce confusion on such subjects as knowledge in perception, verification and Meaning itself.¹

¹ This tendency is particularly noticeable in such works as Baldwin's elaborate treatise on *Thoughts and Things*, where a psychological apparatus of 'controls' and 'contents' is hard to reconcile with the subsequent claim to discuss communication. The twist given to grammatical analysis by Aristotle's similar neglect of Reference is dealt with in Appendix A.

If we stand in the neighbourhood of a cross road and observe a pedestrian confronted by a notice *To Grantchester* displayed on a post, we commonly distinguish three important factors in the situation. There is, we are sure, (1) a Sign which (2) refers to a Place and (3) is being interpreted by a person. All situations in which Signs are considered are similar to this. A doctor noting that his patient has a temperature and so forth is said to diagnose his disease as influenza. If we talk like this we do not make it clear that signs are here also involved. Even when we speak of symptoms we often do not think of these as closely related to other groups of signs. But if we say that the doctor interprets the temperature, etc., as a Sign of influenza, we are at any rate on the way to an inquiry as to whether there is anything in common between the manner in which the pedestrian treated the object at the cross road and that in which the doctor treated his thermometer and the flushed countenance.

On close examination it will be found that very many situations which we do not ordinarily regard as Sign-situations are essentially of the same nature. The chemist dips litmus paper in his test-tube, and interprets the sign red or the sign blue as meaning acid or base. A Hebrew prophet notes a small black cloud, and remarks "We shall have rain." Lessing scrutinizes the Laocoon, and concludes that the features of Laocoon *père* are in repose. A New Zealand school-girl looks at certain letters on a page in her *Historical Manual for the use of Lower Grades* and knows that Queen Anne is dead.

The method which recognizes the common feature of sign-interpretation¹ has its dangers, but opens the

¹ In all these cases a sign has been interpreted rightly or wrongly, *i.e.*, something has been not only experienced or enjoyed, but understood as referring to something else. Anything which can be experienced can also be thus understood, *i.e.*, can also be a sign, and it is important to remember that interpretation, or what happens to (or in the mind of) an Interpreter is quite distinct both from the sign and from that for which the sign stands or to which it refers. If then

way to a fresh treatment of many widely different topics.

As an instance of an occasion in which the theory of signs is of special use, the subject dealt with in our fourth chapter may be cited. If we realize that in *all* perception, as distinguished from mere awareness, sign-situations are involved, we shall have a new method of approaching problems where a verbal deadlock seems to have arisen. Whenever, we 'perceive' what we name 'a chair,' we are interpreting a certain group of data (modifications of the sense-organs), and treating them as signs of a referent. Similarly, even before the interpretation of a word, there is the almost automatic interpretation of a group of successive noises or letters as a word. And in addition to the external world we can also explore with a new technique the sign-situations involved by mental events, the 'goings on' or processes of interpretation themselves. We need neither confine ourselves to arbitrary generalizations from introspection after the manner of classical psychology, nor deny the existence of images and other 'mental' occurrences to their signs with the extreme Behaviorists.¹ The Double language hypothesis, which is suggested by the theory of signs and supported by linguistic analysis, would absolve Dr Watson and his followers

we speak of the meaning of a sign we must not, as philosophers, psychologists and logicians are wont to do, confuse the (imputed) relation between a sign and that to which it refers, either with the referent (what is referred to) or with the process of interpretation (the 'goings on' in the mind of the interpreter). It is this sort of confusion which has made so much previous work on the subject of signs and their meaning unfruitful. In particular, by using the same term 'meaning' both for the 'Goings on' inside their heads (the images, associations, etc., which enabled them to interpret signs) and for the Referents (the things to which the signs refer) philosophers have been forced to locate Grantchester, Influenza, Queen Anne, and indeed the whole Universe equally inside their heads—or, if alarmed by the prospect of cerebral congestion, at least 'in their minds' in such wise that all these objects become conveniently 'mental'. Great care, therefore, is required in the use of the term 'meaning,' since its associations are dangerous.

¹ That the mind-body problem is due to a duplication of symbolic machinery is maintained in Chapter IV, p 81. Cf also *The Meaning of Psychology*, by C K Ogden (1926), Chapter II, where this view is supported with reference to contemporary authorities who hold it

from the logical necessity of affecting general anæsthesia. Images, etc., are often most useful signs of our present and future behaviour—notably in the modern interpretation of dreams.¹ An improved Behaviorism will have much to say concerning the chaotic attempts at symbolic interpretation and construction by which Psycho-analysts discredit their valuable labours.

The problems which arise in connection with any 'sign-situation' are of the same general form. The relations between the elements concerned are no doubt different, but they are of the same sort. A thorough classification of these problems in one field, such as the field of symbols, may be expected, therefore, to throw light upon analogous problems in fields at first sight of a very different order.

When we consider the various kinds of Sign-situations instanced above, we find that those signs which men use to communicate one with another and as instruments of thought, occupy a peculiar place. It is convenient to group these under a distinctive name; and for words, arrangements of words, images, gestures, and such representations as drawings or mimetic sounds we use the term *symbols*. The influence of Symbols upon human life and thought in numberless unexpected ways has never been fully recognized, and to this chapter of history we now proceed.

¹ In the terminology of the present work, many of the analyst's 'symbols' are, of course, signs only, they are not used for purposes of communication. But in the literature of psycho-analysis there is much valuable insistence on the need of wider forms of interpretation, especially in relation to emotional overcharge. Cf., e.g. the late Dr Jelliffe's "The Symbol as an Energy Condenser" (*Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases*, December 1919), though the metaphor, like many other psycho-analytic locutions, must not be stretched too far in view of what has been said above and of what is to follow (cf. pages 102-3 and 200 *infra*).