XXVI. *An Examination of Dr PARR'S Observations on the Etymology of the word Sublimis.* By GEORGE DUNBAR, A. M. F. R. S. E. Professor of Greek in the University of Edinburgh.

(Read January 9. 1826.)

IN the course of some inquiries into the affinity and structure of the Greek and Latin languages, I was led to analyse the superlative degree of both*, and to trace, as I thought, some connection between it and the word *Sublimis*. While engaged in the investigation, I was naturally led to examine the common theories respecting the etymology of this remarkable word, and, in particular, the origin assigned to it by the late Dr PARR, and to weigh, with more attention than I had previously done, the arguments and proofs he had advanced in support of his opinions. All that I knew of them, till lately, was by verbal report, as I had not seen the abridged statement of them in an Appendix to the Notes of the 2d edition of Mr STEWART'S Essays.

Of the immense erudition of the late Dr PARR no one can have a more profound admiration than myself. If I might, however, be allowed to express my opinion of his merits as a scholar, I would say that the extent of his memory was prodigious ; that his knowledge of classical literature was, perhaps, beyond that of any man of his day ; but that his judgment was sometimes warped by prejudices and opinions, which he adopted with enthusiasm ; and upon which he brought the boundless stores of his

* On this subject I shall probably, in a short time, submit to the Society a few observations.

knowledge to bear in so many shapes, and in such a variety of ways, as to confound and appal his opponents.

To Dr PARR's notions respecting the origin of the word *Sublimis*, Mr STEWART has given his assent more hastily, and in more unqualified terms, than might have been expected from his habitual caution, and the low estimate he had previously formed of the common derivation of the word. "As for the etymology of *Sublime*" (*Sublimis*), says he, "I leave it willingly to the conjectures of lexicographers. The common one, which we meet with in our Latin dictionaries (q. *Supra limum*) is altogether unworthy of notice." This note, in the 1st edition of the *Essays*, called forth, it is understood, a long and learned dissertation from Dr PARR, the substance only of which Mr STEWART has given in the Appendix above alluded to. In the 2d edition, he says, "I have allowed the foregoing sentence to remain as it stood in the former edition of this book, although I have since been satisfied, by some observations kindly sent me by my very learned, philosophical, and reverend friend Dr PARR, that the opinion which I have here pronounced with so much confidence is unsound. The mortification I feel in making this acknowledgment is to me more than compensated, by the opportunity afforded me of gratifying my readers with a short extract from his animadversions," &c. When two men of such celebrity, the one generally reckoned the greatest classical scholar of his age, the other the most distinguished metaphysician of this or any other country, concur in the same opinion respecting the etymology of a word, which has been so long and so often disputed, it may seem to be presumption of no ordinary kind, to attempt to call in question their decisions. I derive, however, no small degree of encouragement, from finding that I am supported in my opinions by one of the most acute scholars of the present day, Dr HUNTER, the Professor of Humanity in the University of St Andrew's, who, in some notes, lately put into my hands by a common friend, to

whom I communicated my objections to Dr PARR's theory, has pointed out a few of its fundamental defects. With some of his statements, however, I find I cannot agree ; but this is not the place or the time to discuss them ; my present business is with Dr PARR's theory. The general remarks of that profound scholar (contained in Article I. of the Appendix to the 2d edition of STEWART'S Essays) on the power of custom and habit to communicate grandeur and dignity to expressions, which, in their primary acceptance, suggest low, and sometimes disagreeable ideas, but which, when compounded with other words, and applied metaphorically, convey more elevated notions, I shall pass over, as, however true they may be in particular instances, they will not hold in every other. His arguments and examples in support of the derivation of *Sublimis* from *Supra-limum*, I shall examine with as much care and attention as I can.

“ In the formation (says the Doctor) of *Sublimis*, the process of the mind seems to me to be this : *Limus* has the property of “ obstructing.” That to which the word *Sublimis* is applied, is “ raised above the obstructing cause.” It can soar,—it does soar,—and thus the notion of “ soaring indefinitely” is familiarised to the mind. The origin of the word, and its literal signification, did not present themselves to the speaker or hearer.”—It has too often happened in etymological speculations, that persons particularly conversant with them, are very apt to be led astray by a similarity in the sound of words, and to task their ingenuity to the utmost to discover some kind of association between them.

If we inquire into the meaning of the word *limus* in the best Latin authors, we shall, I believe, scarcely find an instance where the property of “ obstructing” is attributed to it. It sometimes denotes “ tenacity,” as in the following passage from VIRGIL — *Georg.* IV. v. 45.

“ Tu tamen e *levi* rimosa cubilia *limo*
Ungue fovens circum”——

IN HORACE, *Sat.* I. v. 59. it conveys the idea of "*muddiness*."

" At qui tantulo eget, quanto est opus, is neque *limo*
Turbatam haurit aquam."——

But suppose it even did convey the idea of "obstructing," should we thence infer that *sublimis* was employed to denote "raised" above the "obstructing cause;" and hence, as a consequence, the notion of "soaring indefinitely?" In tracing the gradual and successive transitions in the meaning of words, every link in the chain of the different relations should be distinctly traced, otherwise, if we supply them by the mere effort of imagination, we may rest assured there is something wrong in the process. For every effect there must be an adequate cause; and the mind must have some object in its view to carry it from the "obstructing clay" to the regions above. Has Dr PARR mentioned a single instance of any object, remarkable by its figure, magnitude, or any extraordinary property, emerging from *tenacious clay*, soaring to the regions of infinity, and drawing the astonished gaze of the world to witness its *sublime* ascent? or, have any of the writers, who have attempted to explain the nature of the sublime, produced an example that could in any shape lend the least colour to his theory? Not one. Nature exhibits nothing of the kind; and as the application of the terms of language is chiefly borrowed from the appearance of natural objects, we may thence conclude, that the Doctor's theory is fanciful and unsatisfactory.

Dr PARR's main argument, however, rests upon the meaning he supposes the preposition *sub* conveys of *elevation*, when compounded with another word; for, "when standing alone," he allows, it never has the sense of "*up*." "An objector," he remarks, might start up and say, How is it that, in the Latin language, *sub* means "under," and "above" or "*up*?" I admit the fact (says he), but contend that the same letters, with the same

sound, are of different extraction, and so different as to be adapted even to contrary significations. Let it be remarked that I am going to speak of *sub*, when compounded with a verb, to express "elevation."

Before entering upon an examination of the examples Dr PARR has produced in support of his theory, I shall inquire whether the derivation he has given of the preposition *sub*, when compounded with verbs denoting "elevation," be correct. The Latin preposition *sub* has always been considered as formed immediately from the Greek preposition ὑπὸ, and *super* from ὑπὲρ; the Latin, as it is well known, substituting in several instances an *s* for the Greek spiritus asper. Dr PARR, however, says, that when *sub* signifies "elevation," it came from ὑπὲρ, and that ὑπὲρ, like ὑπὸ, lost the closing letters, and that *p* was changed into *b*. He adds, "I never saw this stated in any book, directly or indirectly, but no conjecture was ever more clear, or more satisfactory to my mind; and it solves all difficulties." Notwithstanding the high authority of the Reverend Doctor, I suspect few Latin scholars would be inclined either to derive the preposition *sub* from ὑπὲρ, or to allow that *sub*, in composition with any verb, was ever used by any Latin author, with the force and meaning of *super*. To me it appears, that he has entirely mistaken the precise meaning of *sub* in composition with some particular verbs: for in its general acceptation it cannot, by any shew of reasoning, be confounded with *super*. I state it as my decided opinion, and I am sure to be supported by every scholar who knows any thing of the subject, that, whenever *sub* occurs in composition, even when it may appear to denote "elevation," it is derived from ὑπὸ, and not from ὑπὲρ. The Greek preposition ὑπὲρ stands in the relation to ὑπὸ as *comparative* to *positive*, as it is unquestionably the fragment of the comparative ὑπερ-ώτερος, by a syncope for ὑπερ-ώτερος; as ὑπατος, the superlative, is for ὑπερ-ώτατος. Let it be observed, that ὑπὸ denotes *under*, but always in relation to a *higher* object; and hence, where-

ever it is applied in the Greek language, either in a compound or simple state, or its derivative *sub* in Latin, it expresses the *relations* of a *lower* and a *higher* object. This I shall endeavour to prove by examples. In HOMER'S description of the dove, struck in mid-air by MERIONES, the preposition ὑπὸ occurs in two forms. *Il. Ψ. 874.*

Ὑψι δ' ὑπαὶ νεφέων εἶδε τρήρωνα πέλειαν,

Τὴν ῥ' ὄγε δινεύουσαν ὑπὸ πτέρυγος ἑάλει μέσσην.

In the first place, the adverb ὑψι has no reference to a higher object, but only denotes the *elevation* of something *above* the position of another. It is evidently the dative by abbreviation of ὑψος. In the second place, ὑπαὶ, which I take to be the old dative feminine of the adjective ὑπός, is synonymous with ὑπὸ, and both point out the relative situation of an object to another *above* it. The dove was seen circling in air. Its situation might have been pointed out in relation to MERIONES, who was standing on the ground; and, if the Poet had resolved so to describe it, he would have employed the preposition ὑπὲρ, not ὑπὸ. He could not, however, by such a limited relation, convey an adequate idea of the *height* of the dove *above* the spot where MERIONES was standing; he, therefore, employed a preposition which expressed a kind of double relation, that of a *lower* to a *higher* object, and, by inference, the relation of space between MERIONES and the dove, ascertained by its height *under* the clouds. These remarks will also apply to the expression ὑπὸ πτέρυγος ἑάλει μέσσην. The wound was inflicted *under* the wing; *i. e.* the wing was *higher* than the wound; or, *vice versa*, the wound was in a part *low* in comparison to the situation of the wing. As far as my experience goes, I know of no example in the Greek language where ὑπὸ, either in its simple or compound state, has any other signification than *under*, relatively to a *higher* object; and even this idea may be traced in some words

whose general acceptation is very remote from the literal meaning of their component parts.

But Dr PARR, aware that *sub*, derived from $\upsilon\pi\delta$, would not bend to his theory, by one of those stretches of imagination to which etymologists usually have recourse when they are grievously puzzled, derives it immediately from $\upsilon\pi\epsilon\gamma$. I apprehend, however, that, in no instance, is the Greek preposition $\upsilon\pi\epsilon\gamma$ expressed by any other Latin preposition than *super* in compound words; and the Roman writers never confounded *super* and *sub* together. The learned Doctor, as I shall immediately shew, has not attended to the relations which the preposition *sub* in composition frequently denotes. Let us examine some of his examples, and try whether the explanation given above of the Greek preposition $\upsilon\pi\delta$, will not also apply to its Latin representative *sub*:

“ Quantum vere novo viridis se subjicit alnus.”—VIRG. *Ecl.* x. v. 74.

SERVIVS, “ Subjicit, vel *sursum jacet*, vel *subter jacet*.” Suppose we were to substitute *superjacet* for *subjicit*, what would be the meaning of the term? It would be asked, “ throws itself *over* or *above*” what? Could this be the meaning of the poet when he employed the compound verb *subjicit*? Assuredly not. Is it not evident, that he meant to express “ the progress in growth which the alder makes at the commencement of spring, compared with its former *low* state?” *It shoots up, i. e. from a low to a higher state.*

“ Infraenant alii currus, aut corpora saltu
Subjiciunt in equos.”—VIRG. *Æn.* xii. v. 288.

SERVIVS, “ *Subjiciunt in equos*, super equos jaciunt; sed proprie non est locutus, magisque contrarie, nam *subjicere* est aliquid *subter jacere*.” Dr PARR thinks, that although the scholiast was puzzled with the word *subjiciunt*, “ he is confident in his ability

to solve the difficulty, even to the satisfaction of Mr STEWART ;" and this he does by taking *sub* for *super*, or deriving it from the Greek preposition ὑπὲρ. I also am confident, that VIRGIL would not have employed in this clause of the sentence *superjaciunt* as synonymous with *subjiciunt* ; because the former would have signified, not that *they threw themselves on horseback*, but that *they threw themselves over the horses* ; and, besides, the preposition *in*, which, with *subjiciunt*, signifies *upon*, could not have been employed with *superjaciunt* without a gross violation of the idiom of the language * ; and no one knew this better than Dr PARR, if he had not been blinded by his theory. The construction would have been the same as the following :

“ pontus
Nunc ruit ad tellus, scopulosque superjacet undam
Spumeus.” VIRG. *Æn.* xi. 625.

Ille astu subit, at tremebunda supervolat hasta.
VIRG. *Æn.* x. 522.

The quivering spear flies over him. The same relation is to be observed in the expression, *Corpora subjiciunt in equos*, as in the former example. The preposition *sub* denotes the *lower* situation of the men relative to the *higher* position of the horses' backs when they were going to throw themselves upon them :

Ter flamma ad summum tecti subjecta reluxit.”
VIRG. *Georg.* iv. v. 385.

* I am quite aware that the preposition *in* was sometimes used in compound verbs with *super* ; as, *superinjacere*, *superimpono*, &c. But when these two prepositions are combined together, they imply a very different relation. Would VIRGIL, or any other Latin author, have used the expression — *aut corpora saltu superinjacunt equos* ? I believe neither he nor any other. When he says, *Georg.* iv. v. 46. “ *et raras superinjacit frondes*,” he shews that the relative situation of the person to the hives is just the reverse of the men to the horses' backs, in the preceding example. Thus, “ *and throw (from a higher situation) a few branches down upon them.*”

The *flamma subjecta* has a reference primarily to the *low* situation of the altar on which the fire was burning, compared with the *height* of the roof to which the flame ascended. *Sub*, in this example, in the sense of *ὑπὲρ*, would have conveyed an extraordinary idea. It would have denoted, *flamed above the roof*, not *up to it*; and with the words *ad summum* would have violated the construction of the language. The same compound frequently denotes *motion under*: and, in such examples, *sub* must evidently be derived from *ὑπὸ*. Thus, OVID, *Trist. Eleg. I. 73*.

“ *Canitiem galeæ subjicioque meam.*”

In the two following instances, quoted by Dr PARR, the same explanation must be given of the preposition.

“ ————Tibi suaves dædala tellus,
Summittit flores.” LUCRET. I. v. 9.

Tellus summittit flores, the earth *sends up* flowers; *sub*, *from her bosom*, which, relatively, is *low* compared with the flowers when they have sprung up.

“ Sic et averna loca alitibus summittere debent
Mortiferam vim, de terra quæ surgit in auras.”
LUCRET. vi. v. 818.

“ *De terra quæ surgit in auras*” explains the whole relation of *summittere* in the preceding line.

Having pointed out the relation indicated by *sub* in composition, in several examples from the poets, I shall now proceed to examine some of the Doctor's examples from prose writers. “ In prose writers,” says he, “ we have *sub* for *up*. “ *Sublevare mentum sinistra*,” CICERO, “ *Sublevare miseros*,” CICERO. The same relation may be observed in both these examples. The chin is raised *from* the breast to a *higher* situation by the left hand. It is *raised up*, and prevented from sinking by the left hand placed *under* it.

The wretched are raised from a *low* to a *higher* (better) condition : *i. e.* a condition *higher* in the scale of existence. Nobody, I suppose, ever heard of *superlevare*. The following quotations will shew the relation which this verb points out. CICERO, *Att.* l. x. c. 17. "Qui nos sibi quondam ad pedes stratos, ne *sublevabat* quidem." PLINY, l. xi. c. 17. "Apes regem fessum humeris *sublevant*." LIVY, l. xlv. c. 7. "Consul, introeunti regi dextram porrexit, *submittentemque* se ad pedes *sustulit*."

"Upon *sub*, when standing alone," he says, "I speak doubtfully. "There is a passage in LIVY where *subire* may have the sense of "ascending, but I am not positive, and shall offer a different explanation." In the following passage, from the same author, where a description is given of HANNIBAL'S passage over the Alps, the verb *subire* can have no other signification than *to ascend*. "Luce prima subiit tumulos, ut ex aperto et interdiu vim per angustias factururus," l. xxi. c. 32. So also, l. xxvii. c. 18. "Ceterum, quamquam ascensus difficilis erat, et prope obruebantur telis saxisque, assuetudine tamen succedendi muros, et pertinacia animi, subierunt primi."

"Sub," says Dr PARR, "occurs under another form *sus*, which hereafter will be explained. *Sustineo*, "I hold up. *Suspicio*, "I look up." Mr STEWART will have the goodness particularly to mark the form *sus*." After some other observations, which it is not necessary to quote here, he proceeds: "Sub, then, signifying "elevation," comes not from $\upsilon\pi\omicron$, but from $\upsilon\pi\grave{\epsilon}\rho$, and *sus* does not immediately come from *sub* only, but by another process, as we shall soon see." What immediately follows I shall omit, as of little importance to the argument. He then goes on to say: "Against SCALIGER'S third position I contend, that *susum* did not come from *sus*, but *versa vice*, (as we ought to say instead of *vice versa*), *sus* comes from *susum*, as *retrovorsum* was contracted into *rursum*, so *supervorsum* was contracted into *sursum*, and *sursum* was softened into *susum*, and *susum* when compounded,

shortened into *sus*.”—Now, I contend that *retrovorsum* was never contracted into *rursum*, but into *retrorsum*, *backwards*; as being compounded of *retro*, and the perfect participle of *verto* or *vorto*, which was originally *versus*, *a, um*; and as for *supervorsum*, it is a word of the Doctor’s own manufacturing, as it never appears to have been used by any author; at least I can find no traces of it in the best Latin dictionaries. But, even though it had existed, it would have given, by abbreviation, *superorsum* (according to the analogy of *retrorsum*) and not *sursum* *.

The examples which Dr PARR gives of *sus* in composition are, “*suscipio*,” which, he says, is, *Capio susum*, “I take up;” “*suspendo*,” is *susum pendo*, “I hang up;” “*sustineo*” is *susum teneo*, “I hold up.” *Suscito* is, by SCALIGER’S own confession, *susum cito*, “I stir up;” and as *specio* begins with an *s*, the final letter of *sus* contracted, (abbreviated, the Doctor should have said, for it is not contracted,) from *susum*, is omitted upon the above mentioned principle of avoiding, as the old Romans avoided, the gemination of the same letter.”—It is surprising that Dr PARR did not advert to the practice of the Greeks, in changing the final *ν* of the prepositions *ἐν* and *σὺν* into *μ* and *γ* before certain mutes; and also of converting it into whatever liquid the word with which it was joined commenced with. They even omitted the *ν* of the preposition *σὺν* before *σ* and a mute; as *συ-στρατεύομαι*; *συ-σπάω*, &c. In like manner, I imagine, the *β* of the preposition

* The venerable Dr HUNTER of St Andrew’s has also shewn, in some notes upon VIRGIL, that Dr PARR’S derivation of *sub* from *ὑπὲρ* is incorrect. After giving several examples similar to those already quoted, he observes, “It may be further remarked, that *SURSUM*, *upward*, is not, as Dr PARR supposes, *supervorsum*, but *subvorsum*. *Supervorsum* would express, not in a direction FROM below or UPWARD, but in a direction OVER.” The coincidence of opinion between Dr HUNTER and myself, on several points in the present discussion, is to me the more gratifying, as his notes were wholly unknown to me, till communicated by our common friend the Rector of the High School of Edinburgh, after I had sent for his perusal the present examination.

sub was changed into other letters, and sometimes omitted in compound words, euphoniæ causâ.—*Suscipio* is *sub* and *cipio*, and so written as being more agreeable to the ear than *subcipio*, or *succipio*, which SCALIGER says it originally was. *Sustineo* is for *sub* and *teneo*. In this verb the preposition *sub* expresses more nearly the force of the Greek preposition ἀνὰ than ὑπὸ, as *sustineo* is equivalent to ἀνέχω, “I hold up.” Yet, in every example where it occurs, the idea of *supporting under* may be traced, sometimes very plainly, at other times more obscurely. Hence it is often synonymous with *tolero*, *patior*. Thus OVID. *Metamorph.* VIII. v. 500. “Et quos *sustinui* his mensium quinque labores.” CICERO, *Verr.* 8. “Non tibi venit in mentem quid negotii sit, causam publicam *sustinere*,” which FACCIOLATI explains by *portar il peso*. *Suspicio* is from *sub* and *specio*, the *b* being dropped as in the Greek verb σν-σπάω. Its literal meaning is, I look *from under*. Taken in a literal sense, it implies an *higher* object. Thus CICERO, *de Nat. Deor.* II. c. 2. “Cum cœlum *suspeximus* cœlestiaque contemplati sumus.” Metaphorically, the sense of *inferiority*. “Translate *est admirare*,” says FACCIOLATI, “ammirare, quasi supra nos aspiciamus illum esse collocatum, quem admiramur.” CICERO, *Off.* II. c. 10. “Itaque eos viros *suspiciunt*, maximisque efferunt laudibus.”

From these, and many other examples which could be produced, it may be observed, that the genuine power of the preposition *sub* in composition, is always to mark the relation of *inferiority* to a *higher* object, and that it never can, consistently with the usage of the language, be derived from ὑπὲρ. Had grammarians and philologists been sufficiently attentive to observe the *relations* which prepositions in particular denote, they would not have committed such glaring mistakes as are frequently observable in their account of them. So far as my observation extends, I do not know a single work in which the Greek and La-

tin prepositions are treated of with any thing like philosophical accuracy ; and hence the vague and uncertain ideas that are generally entertained of their origin, nature and relations. The classical literature of the day holds a very different course. It contents itself with amassing authorities, investigating different readings, quoting parallel passages, and retailing opinions, without once venturing from the beaten track, to take a view of the principles of language.—The theory of language is no despicable study ; for, if well and wisely conducted, it shews the progress of the human mind from a rude state, when it was chiefly conversant with external objects, and ignorant in a great measure of those associations which spring from the view of the living world, and the comparison of its ideas, till it reach, through the medium of relations, more and more refined and abstract in their nature, the highest point of intellectual improvement. From the failure of men of the deepest knowledge, and the greatest powers in the science of philology, I consider it still in its infancy, and likely to remain so, unless, with a thorough knowledge of the primitive languages of Europe and Asia, there be combined more of the study of nature, a better acquaintance with severe inductive reasoning, and the philosophy of the human mind, than has hitherto appeared in the speculations of the learned.