

Special Papers.

A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE.

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No thought is more firmly fixed in the minds of students of language than that language grows, and that particular laws of language are laws of growth. They do not believe in the power of individuals, however great, to modify the laws of language, and they are apt to despair of effecting even slight changes. They often deplore particular defects; they write papers which point out illogical idioms or blundering and absurd spelling; but usually they close with the reflection that language is a growth, and that we must let it grow.

In this the linguists fall in with other scientists. Evolution, development, is the atmosphere of the science of to-day. In this atmosphere it is absurd to talk of one man making a language; it is doubtful whether one person can make a book of national importance. The "Iliad," the "Odyssey," "Beowulf," "Kalevala," are believed to be growths from old ballads; the Shakespeare folio is too great to have been written by Shakespeare.

A universal language must be a growth. Some national language must expand until it covers the whole world. Of late years the English language alone has been much spoken of as likely to grow so great. Hardly any philosophic linguist attempts to forecast the future without some discussion of the destiny of English; and De Candolle calculates that within a hundred years English will be spoken by 860,000,000 men, German by 124,000,000, and French by 96,000,000. At present the populations either speaking the English language or under the domination of English-speaking peoples number more than 318,298,000, or one-fourth of the population of the globe. The English-speaking races occupy one-fourth of the dry land of the earth, and own nearly two-thirds of the tonnage of the ships. They live in all regions; they handle all articles of trade; they preach to all nations; they command one-half of the world's gold and silver, and distribute more than two-thirds of the Bibles and Testaments. More than one-half of the letters mailed and carried by the postal service of the world are written, mailed, and read by the English-speaking populations. The expectation that English will come into universal use is not based upon anything in the nature of the language, but rather on the character and circumstances of the people. The English people have been the great colonizers of modern times. They have taken possession of America, of Australia, of South Africa, the regions which are to be the seats of new empires, and they control and assimilate the populations which flow into them and which grow up in them.

All the modern languages of civilized nations have grown up under influences which have led to differentiation of the meaning of words, to extension of vocabulary, and to compression and simplicity in the forms of words. The older inflected languages express an object and its relations in a single word. One or two of the syllables describe the object, the prefixes and suffixes suggest various relations in an indefinite fashion. *Mōna*, *mōnan*, *mōnum*, *mōnena*, are Anglo Saxon forms of the same word. The first syllable, *mōn*, means measurer, and described the moon. The other syllables mean, in a vague and indefinite way, all sorts of relations in space, time, power, and thought which the moon can be imagined to have. But the discriminating intellect, working from the vague to the definite, analyzing, scrutinizing, is continually adopting separate words to express more clearly and emphatically each common relation, adopting prepositions to express each kind of relation between actions and objects, auxiliary verbs to express relations of tense and mode, and pronouns for personal relations.

But after the prepositions are established the case endings become superfluous; when the pronouns are used pronominal endings are tautological. These endings are, therefore, dropped; the languages thus change from what are called synthetic languages to analytic languages. Collisions and mixture of races promote this process. The English language is the most perfect illustration of it. It begins its historic career as

the literary language of the Teutonic tribes of Britain, a mixed nation of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. We find, by comparing with Gothic and Old High German, that it had already lost a large part of its inflection endings. A collision and mixture with the Danes followed, and then the Norman Conquest. This was the most important event in linguistic history. It brought together picked men of the two great modern stocks, the Germanic and Romanic, under the most favorable circumstances for the development of language. They lived together for a century without much mixture of speech. The Normans did not try to learn English with care; they picked up a little of it for practical needs. They knew nothing and cared nothing about being correct. It was condescension to try to make themselves understand. They never learned the case endings. Why should they take pains to get *mōna*, *mōnum*, *mōnan*, *mōnena*, all right? *Mōne*, moon, was enough for them. The Anglo-Saxons fell into the same neglectful habits. There had been five declensions of the noun, with from three to five cases distinguished in each number, and hosts of irregular forms. Of all these forms only one was like the Normans, the plural in *s*. That they understood, and that has survived. The genitive in *s* has also survived. So far as prepositions have come into use to express the relations of the case endings, the substitution is a differentiation, a more exact expression of the thought.

The greatest gain to the language in this dropping of inflections is the simplification. There were five ways of expressing the genitive case in regular declension, besides irregular ways. The verb was worse than the noun. In the French verb there are now 2,265 terminations which must be learned by heart, 310 regular, 1,755 irregular, 200 for the auxiliaries; and all these must be connected in memory with their proper verbs. To simplify all this, to have but one set of terminations for all verbs, is an inestimable gain. A large approach to it was made in English by the collision of Saxons and Normans. The same want of attention in the Normans led to the dropping of the signs for gender, which had accompanied every noun and adjective in Anglo-Saxon. This distinction of gender is not really helpful to thought in any way once in a thousand times, and is a grievous burden to the memory. It takes more time to learn the grammatical gender of the words than it does to learn their meaning.

The same general reason led to a great abbreviation of words. Just as children catch at first the accented sounds in words, so these careless strangers were content with English sound enough to be understood. The Anglo-Saxons called the heads of the family and of the table *hlofordas*, loaf keepers, but the Normans called them "lords," neither knowing nor caring what the word meant; so they called *heafod* "hed," head, and *hafoc* "hawk." This compression, this monosyllabic habit, suited the Anglo-Saxons well. They had used it freely upon the words from Latin and Greek which they caught-up from the priests. *Presbyter* is *preost*, the first time it appears in Anglo-Saxon; *episcopus* is *bissep*; *kyriake* is *circe*, church; *eleemosyna* is *almes*, alms. Now they began to take up Norman words freely in the same way. They took up pretty much all that are worth having, doubling the number of their descriptive words; and our language has ever since been gathering freely from Latin, Greek, and the languages of all nations with whom our people come in contact. There are perhaps 20,000 words of Anglo-Saxon origin in our present English; we have 250,000 words in all. There is also a condensation of idiom. Direct and compact phrases and sentences are gathered and remembered and make part of the wealth of the language.

Such is the process of growth which the students of language look for in the universal language. Our present English is a type of it. Jacob Grimm, one of the most profound historians of language, and an enthusiastic lover of his native German, says:

"The English speech may with full right be called a world-language. It will go on with the people who speak it, prevailing more and more to all the ends of the earth. In richness, reason, and compression no living speech can be put beside it; not even our own German, which is torn, even as

we are torn, and must first rid itself of many defects before it can enter boldly into the lists as a competitor with English."

Carrying out these laws of change, the English of the future will be completely simplified in its inflections. The relics of Anglo-Saxon declension will be made regular, the plurals "oxen," "mice," "men," and so forth, will pass away. Generations of children will be allowed to grow up saying "foots" and "mouses" and "mans." The irregular verbs will all fall into line, as they have been doing one after another since a time beyond which memory runs not back. The newspapers try in vain to force new irregularities upon the language, like "proven" for "proved." The condensation of the old words will be carried out regularly in the written as well as the spoken words: we shall write "tho" (though), "tung" (tongue), "tizic" (phthisic), "catalog," "thru" (through), and the like. We shall accept more thousands of words from Japan, China, Africa, and elsewhere. We shall pick up and invent thousands more of compact phrases and idioms.

This process may go on gradually with the advice and consent of the cultured class. There may also be new collision and mixture of nations comparable to those of the Saxons and Normans, and producing new vulgar dialects which may afterwards rise to greatness. Such a dialect has in fact already arisen in eastern Asia—business English or Pigeon English. It is usually described as a grotesque or absurd jargon of English used in the cities of China in dealings of foreign merchants with the Chinese, "a ridiculous and silly expedient." It is not printed, but is taught in Chinese schools. Some students of language, however, have taken it more seriously, and claim for it the honors of the coming universal language. Mr. Simpson has done so in an article in "Macmillan's Magazine," November, 1873, and Professor Sayce seems to agree with him in his "Introduction to the Science of Language." In absence of inflections, and general condensation it answers well, but it has a very limited vocabulary, and in that respect belongs rather to shop or technical dialect than to folk-speech proper; for it should be noticed that the views of growth which have been before stated apply to language proper, to standard folk-speech, and not to technical scientific language, or the peculiar vocabularies of arts or shops. These last are made or modified freely by agreement among the specialists concerned. The botanists, for example, have a regular system for naming and describing plants. The system is the result of laborious study and wide discussion. The privilege is given to a finder of a plant who is able to name and describe it according to the system, that his namings shall be accepted. So he who discovers a planet may name it, if he will select a name according to the system adopted by the astronomers. The chemists not only have an elaborate scientific language, but a system of writing in it by single letters representing words, and by signs of relation, so that a train of reasoning in chemistry looks something like an algebraic demonstration. Algebra and other branches of mathematics have their special languages, spoken and written. In all these modern scientific languages the object aimed at is the expression of fact, of truth. Objects are named by their essential qualities, and sets of names are systematically framed to indicate by their forms the scientific relations. The great advances of modern thought are rendered possible by the advances in scientific terminology. No one could grasp and handle the facts and relations of mathematics or chemistry or other great modern sciences, if they were written out in popular language.

Language proper, which grows, is the means of communicating the whole man, his needs, his wishes, his joys and sorrows, loves and hates, hopes and fears, passions and thoughts. Objects are named from the way they affect us, not from their essential qualities. Then genius shapes the words to beauty; the poet, the orator, arouse to heroic acts or record heroic achievements in language in which sound and sense have been fused. They add the powers of music to those of sensible signs and of the natural language of the emotions, and produce idiomatic combinations reflecting and expressing with strange perfection the most complex and subtle states of mind and heart. It