

LANGUAGE IN TRADE.

"The influence of language on trade is well understood in America; nowhere else is it so powerfully exercised. Talking business is our national gift. Surely this gift should not forsake us at our southern border. Ignorance of Spanish bars the way to intercourse with nearly half the people of our continent. Knowledge of Spanish would take down that bar and leave clear to American methods the whole field of American trade. The Spanish is a beautiful language, musical and easy to learn. Its construction is simple, and, what is of no small moment to the student, it is pronounced precisely as written. An hour a day for six months should give a fair command of it to any young person of average intelligence."

Thus writes the consul-general of the United States of America at Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, who furnishes the State Department at Washington a communication on the importance and necessity of an acquaintance with the Spanish language as an important factor in securing trade with the Spanish-speaking countries. What Mr. J. G. Donnelly says on the subject is not very creditable to the enterprise of the United States foreign merchant.

The consul calls attention to the fact that, notwithstanding the advantages of geographical position, the trade of the United States with Mexico and other Spanish-American countries is surprisingly small. These countries are neighbors and natural allies of the Americans. Their ports are much nearer those of the States than those of Europe, "yet Europeans get there ahead of us and take from our very doors the trade that should be ours. The feeling of the people of those countries towards the people and Government of the United States is in the highest degree friendly, and they would prefer

to trade with us than to deal with Europe, if that could be done upon even the same terms and with the same advantages now derived from dealing with Europeans. There is, of course, good commercial reasons for this preference for European dealing, and one of the principal obstacles to the extension of American trade in that quarter is the ignorance of Americans of the Spanish language. European agents are familiar with that language, and Americans have paid no attention to the importance of this requisite to trade." The consul illustrates his argument by citing Canada. "We do more business with 5,000,000 of English-speaking people in Canada than with the 35,000,000 of Spanish-speaking people in Spanish America. The reason for this is plain—we can talk with the Canadians and they with us, a fact which justifies the conclusion that trade follows language."

Taking Mexico to illustrate his theory that trade follows language, the consul says: "Here, within a few hours ride by rail from our frontier, are 14,000,000 people—one-half of the population of England; a people advancing marvelously in all the arts of civilization, a people who will soon require as necessities what are now luxuries, who will be housed, fed and clad as well as any people of Europe. What a field this would be if worked with that skill, and industry, and tireless vigor which have made our domestic trade the wonder of the world. But it is not so worked. Ignorance of the language makes our usual business methods impossible. . . . Many of our merchants depend upon consuls for information, an effort which, to be of any avail, should have the full time and best energies of competent Spanish-speaking agents. Almost daily the mail brings to my office letters containing cir-

culars which I am requested to distribute among Mexican merchants. Some of these are in English and are utterly useless; the rest, in Spanish, have even less effect than circulars at home.

"Would any manufacturer of mining machinery send as agent to Cripple Creek, for instance, some Russian emigrant, whatever his fluency in his own tongue, who is ignorant of English? Yet American agents and principals, too, come into Mexico from the United States knowing as little Spanish as they know Sanscrit. Good talkers, these, around home, no doubt, but once across the Rio Grande, the alert, keen, quick-witted American is stricken dumb and tongue-tied. He readily turns his American dollars into Mexican pesos, but he cannot turn his English into Spanish. He goes through the land envying the graduate of an institute for the deaf. He may do some business—money and goods do talk, but money and goods, be their merit ever so great nowadays, need the advocacy of a ready tongue. Be it known that in the ever quickening competition in Mexican markets circulars won't do, nor letters, nor the friendly offices of consuls. Mexican trade must be talked for, and it must be talked for in Spanish." Our Canadian exporters will do well to heed this essay on the general subject, and apply the logic of Consul Donnelly to their own attempts at securing foreign trade.

—According to the Brooklyn *Eagle* there are published in the United States about 20,000 papers and periodicals. Of this number 14,000 are issued weekly and 2,000 daily. If each inhabitant took one paper, there would be a separate publication for every 3,100 of population in this country.

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