

The Finest Language in the World

A Short Story, by Charles D. Leslie, in M. A. P.



BENZON—my friend Benzon—is one of those invaluable men to whom one turns instinctively in times of tribulation. On that disastrous day, when I left the familiar house in West Kensington in the character of a rejected suitor, it was to him I repaired. "She's refused me," I said dolefully. Benzon offered me a cigarette, lit one himself, and then observed, in a casual tone, "I'd have betted on it."

"I feel—cheap."

"Cheer up. Statistics tell us there are 103,0786 unmarried women to a hundred unmarried men. Therefore—"

"Oh, hang your statistics! I want you to help me to get out of the country—to New Zealand."

"Why New Zealand?"

"I don't know, but I want you to help me to get out of this country as I can."

"I am afraid I can't manage that. But—do you know Calabar?"

"Yes. It's a dog biscuit."

"It may be, but it's also a district on the coast of West Africa. This falls rather opportunely. A firm of merchants I know have a trading station there. The manager, who has been out three years, is coming home in less than six months' time. I think I can get you the job, if between then and now you acquire a knowledge of the language."

"What language?"

"Calabar. The natives of the Calabar district speak a dialect unlike any other, and the manager of the station must be fully conversant with it."

"Is the post worth having?"

"Certainly. The pay's fairly good. And there's a commission on the sales, if they reach a certain point."

"And your funeral thrown in. I know. The climate's rotten, and white men die like flies out there."

"No; this particular district is pretty healthy, and, as I said, the present manager has been there three years. Your agreement would be for one, and I should think you could stand it for that time. Probably, then, you'll be heart-whole and home-sick, and want to return."

In the end, after an interview with the head of the firm in question, I accepted the post, the appointment being provisional on my being able to converse in Calabar with a native missionary, who was coming to England in four months' time to attend a gathering of African clergymen in London.

The question arose who was to teach me Calabar? There was no published book on the language, even Professor Paters' monumental work on native dialects in Africa not dealing with it. Apparently, no one in London knew it. Finally, I sought out Professor Paters, whom, after some trouble, I ran to earth, metaphorically speaking, in a little

room at the top of a house off Bloomsbury Square. The great authority on primitive languages proved to be a shabby little old man, addicted to snuff-taking.

"The Calabar dialect," said he, "aye, aye, I didn't know anything about it then, Beitstein hadn't discovered it. If ever a new edition of my book is called for, I'll write in an extra chapter on it. It's a very interesting language."

"Will you teach it me. I asked, and explained the situation.

"I'm too busy just now. I'm teaching three young men who are going to Mexico, Aztec. Then I have my Utu classes—the North American Indians speak that. Two missionaries, who are going to British Guiana, come here daily for lessons in Orico, spoken by the natives in the interior. And, finally, a baronet, who's going to Central Africa shortly, is learning the Pigmy bushmen's tongue. I give him three lessons a week. No, I can't find time."

"You must teach me," I cried in alarm.

"You're one of the very few men in London who know the language."

Still he demurred. I fancied it was chiefly a matter of terms, and, having set my heart on going to West Africa, begged him to name them. On a sudden, however, after an extra big pinch of snuff, he changed his mind, and promised me an hour three times a week, and to set me lessons, which, if I worked conscientiously, would make me proficient in Calabar in three months. The terms he named, too, were singularly reasonable.

Greatly delighted at the upshot of the interview, I hastened home, to find that my extremely musical landlady, Mrs. Tomkins, from whom I rented my rooms, was at her piano again. The incident crystallized a nebulous desire to get away from Kensington and the vicinity of Miss Austin. Again I went to see Benzon.

"I'm tired," I said, "of furnished apartments, and landladies who play the piano all the afternoon and evening; and, of course, it will be impossible for me to study, under the circumstances. I hate boarding-houses, and at present I'd find a bachelor flat too dull. Can't you get me in somewhere as a paying guest in a quiet house?"

Within a week, thanks to the invaluable Benzon, I was installed in Upper Hampstead, and devoting myself seriously to the study of Calabar. It was a peaceful house; the only jarring element, a melancholy ass named Shooter, the other paying guest, being out all day, and spending his evenings at the house of his innamorata, who lived in the vicinity. After I had once shut him up, when he began to rhapsodize about her, he didn't bore me again. My hostess, a Mrs. Vaughan, and her two daughters, Hope and Evelyn, completed the household. Evelyn was a schoolgirl, Hope a few years older, a somewhat clever artist, who illustrated children's Christmas books. Her days were spent drawing impossibly pretty

children—princesses, fairies, giants, ogres, and animals with conversational powers. We rapidly became friends. I wrote some appealingly bad verse to accompany some of her drawings which she couldn't sell, and a misguided publisher then bought them. To balance the obligation, she heard me say my lessons in Calabar.

My progress in that tongue was surprising myself, and earning me the commendation of the Professor. Hitherto, my linguistic knowledge had consisted of enough French to rub along with if I went to Paris for a week, and a few Latin sentences, the remnant of many wasted hours at school. Certainly, the time I had spent on French and Latin, and the result of it, had not suggested that I had any natural instinct for picking up a language; yet my Calabar tutor frequently assured me I had. But, then, he would go on, "It's an interesting language, aye, aye, it is that."

He was an admirable teacher. It was remarkable how he threw himself into the task of teaching me, how patiently he inculcated the main rules that governed the language. These were certainly simple, and, once grasped, I found the work of turning Calabar into English child's play. Every morning after breakfast I used to start translating the Standard's leader into Calabar, and then putting into English the exercise in Calabar set me by the Professor. At first I used to do this in my sitting-room. Presently I got in the habit of staying in the dining-room after breakfast. Miss Vaughan used that room for a studio, and we found we worked all the better in company. After luncheon, we used to walk on the Heath, when neither of us had any special engagement.

Quite early in our friendship, I had confided the story of my broken heart, and found Miss Vaughan intensely sympathetic. I talked at large on this theme for fully a fortnight; but, somehow, it dropped out as a topic after the week when we went twice to the Gaity. I felt that my diligent study of Calabar, the magnificent air of Hampstead, and last, but not least, the relief of telling somebody what a fool I had been, had effected—of course, not a cure—but a kind of atrophy of the heart, which enabled me to enjoy life and Gaity pieces, as usual. Indeed, I felt I hardly needed a year at Calabar as an anodyne, only I had made up my mind to go; besides, if I didn't, my study of the language would be wasted.

Three months after I had moved to Hampstead, a letter from Benzon informed me that the native preacher was sailing for England earlier than had been anticipated; in fact, he would be there in a week. Was I prepared to meet him to pass my viva voce, if so, I could sail for Calabar immediately, as the manager there was anxious to come home at once?

So rapid had been my progress, that I felt quite certain of passing. Already I could converse fluently in the tongue to the Professor. He was delighted at my proficiency.

"But," I said, "it's such an easy language; why, a young lady living in the same house has picked it up simply from hearing me say my exercises and conversing with me in the tongue. She knows it very nearly as well as I."

"Aye, aye, it's the finest language on earth," he cried, "and the simplest of any of them. And to think that Esperanto—but, there, the world's full of fools," and he took snuff vigorously.

"What's that? The black missionary from Calabar arrives next week. Oh, he does, does he? Well, Mr. Trent, stick to your exercises till then and, after you've met him, come and tell me how you've fared."

"I will," I promised, "and I'll settle up then," for hitherto I had not paid the Professor a farthing; he had put it off, saying he preferred payment at the end of the course.

The week passed rapidly; I worked hard, and, when not studying Calabar, read books about West Africa, and discussed my future there with Hope. I would certainly come back in a year, I said, and I found myself insisting on the healthiness of the district and vowing to take every precaution against catching fever. It was pleasant to feel that one person, at least, was really interested in me. We promised to exchange letters by every mail. I was also to fill up my leisure by writing a long fairy tale in verse suitable for a Christmas illustrated fair-book.

All too soon the Calabar native arrived, and an appointment was fixed at the office of the company. Benzon, at my special request, accompanied me, and punctually at the hour named we were ushered into the manager's private room, and found him engaged with a big black man dressed in European style. Introductions followed. The black man, with an expansive smile that stretched from ear to ear, grasped my hand. "Pleased to meet you, Sar," he said in very tolerable English.

"Now, Mr. Trent," said the manager, "just converse with our good friend here in his native tongue."

I immediately burst into Calabar speech, welcoming the nigger to the land of King Edward, and trusting he had had a pleasant voyage.

But the man only stared, and at last, when I ceased, he said, "Me no understand," and then began chattering in some gibberish utterly unintelligible to me.

"I retorted in Calabar, begging him to answer in his own tongue, but all to no purpose.

"You don't seem to get on very well," said the manager, seeing we appeared to be at cross purposes, for I was obviously failed to understand him as he to understand me.

"The fool doesn't understand his own language," I said, losing my temper.

"I beg your pardon, isn't it possible that you are at fault? Perhaps your inflection is wrong.

Write down a sentence or two. The man can read."

But he couldn't read Calabar as I wrote it. I was utterly bewildered. Not a sentence, not a word of his language, as I knew it, was intelligible to him. Finally, he wrote down the Calabar alphabet, and a few simple sentences under the English equivalents. Then I knew that Calabar was gibberish, utterly different to the language I had been laboriously learning for three months.

"Paters has been having a joke with you," suggested Benzon, when this fact was at last clear, "or else he's taught you Aztec or some other outlandish lingo by mistake."

"Mistake," I roared, "I'll go and kill him! Here have I wasted three months of my life—and I rushed out of the office in a state bordering on frenzy."

I do not suppose I would really have slain the eminent Professor had I caught him that afternoon; but he was out, and his servant gave me a letter addressed to me.

"My dear Mr. Trent," it ran, "I am leaving England tonight—it was dated the previous day—for North Borneo to study the hybrid Japanese, said to be spoken by the tribes in the interior. You have by this time, no doubt, discovered that the language I taught you was not Calabar, nor any West African dialect. Many years ago, when I was young and obscure, the dream of inventing a universal language came to me. With infinite care, I completed it, only to find, when I had completed it, that no one would learn it. No publisher even would publish a cheap handbook of it, except at my own expense, and I was too poor then to pay a printer's bill. So "Unifco," as I styled it, died still-born. I put it away and became in time famous as a professor of languages. I, who had invented the finest language in the world—a language no one knew but myself. Then you came to me, and the temptation to teach at least one pupil Unifco assailed me, and I succumbed to it. Any reasonable claim for damages you like to forward to my lawyers, will be met. Faithfully yours, Arthur Paters,"

That day, after dinner, Hope and I sat on a bench in a secluded corner of the Heath. We talked in Calabar—I mean "Unifco." I append a translation of my speeches.

"After all, I expect I shouldn't have liked West Africa. I'm not sorry I'm not going."

"What did you say?"

"That's awfully sweet of you. Hope, it was the thought of being away from you that made the idea of leaving England so unwelcome."

"Don't say 'Mr. Trent.' Say 'Walter.'"

"No, I know I shouldn't. I couldn't help it."

"No, I never kissed Miss Austin in my life."

"No, I never really loved before. How could I when I'd never met you?"

"I swear it."

"May I tell your mother we're engaged?"

Unifco is the finest language in the world.

fructed if there had been less government.

ected with the government is which cost the city instead of the railway. The three-hundred which it is proposed to spend could be more profitably spent if the money spent in introducing bookkeeping in the marine department were for such projects as at middlemen.

He said that the land grant as the construction proceeded. It did not guarantee the completion of the railway, mean a great gain as some quite so great a gain as some of the completion of the Grand of hauling from eastward will be a great advantage for the transport of stock, he had no doubt of the feasibility of the undertaking. Crawford should construct but not Nothing could be done without to the prosperity of the west of the Hudson Bay railway, he had intended to speak at the lateness of the hour on record as being in favor of, he said, be a great boon to the west. The present long "cream" on the cattle business.

klirk, told the house the story of the forty miles of the railroads. He wanted the opinion to get full benefit of the construction should run either between like Winnipeg or east of Lake route would open up a rich field shorter than any other, it would be to have the government every railway in the west route.

ive, of P. E. I., thought every east of Bala de Chabre construction of the Hudson Bay could be convinced that the to be open for navigation for five it would give manufacturers in the provinces a water route speech of a couple of minutes, in favor of the project, and in that its construction is necessary.

N. B., gave his support to the government for extending grants. Hon. Frank Oliver statement. In passing he mentioned McCarthy's arguments regarding the Canadian Northern. All on the question whether the shortest route to the Hudson eastern country.

recalled the premier's improbability of a statement being made. That statement had been the premier's absence. He was however, that the matter was sideration by the government. A decided was not due to any part of the government, or of the question. He could gain what would likely be made under the government on which all the matter seemed in there it had stood last session. suppose that that would interfere with the policy. The fact of their policy. In itself, it was one of intense interest. He presumed the government to be a reasonable service for a to was glad to see the minister, but he did not see that published after all. The resolution without division.

Some Political Orators

RUPERT

HE Belfast Whig, in a recent issue, had the following interesting article by "Quill":

The death of the Duke of Devonshire has put in my thoughts to write something about him and other political orators whom I have seen and heard. They are purely random reminiscences, and, as impressions which the lapse of a good many years has dulled, have no claim to consideration. I have not been uncommonly fortunate in opportunities of hearing great speakers. Many of my readers have been more so. For example, I never heard John Bright, and by general consent Bright was the greatest orator of our time. Gladstone I heard more than once. The first time I took a long journey, in order that I should have it to set down as one of my experiences that I had listened to the man who, as I believed then and believe still, is destined to make a larger figure in history than any of his contemporaries. He spoke at an afternoon meeting in the Edinburgh Corn Exchange. I think it was in 1891. Lord Rosebery presided. I recall this because at the time the Countess of Rosebery was lying on what proved to be her deathbed. It was not expected that Lord Rosebery would be able to fulfil his engagement. Nevertheless, loyalty to his old chief brought him out. At the close of the meeting a resolution of sympathy was passed with Lord Rosebery in respect to his wife's illness, and I remember how deeply he was moved by the manifest sincerity of that sympathy as tendered by an immense audience of fellow-Scotsmen. A few days later and Lady Rosebery was dead. Mr. Gladstone's speech was entirely devoted to the Irish question and to criticism of the Unionist government, which was then in power. It was not one of his memorable speeches, and I remember I was disappointed in the matter of it. What impressed me most was the extent to which he was engrossed in his subject. His mobile face, his extraordinarily expressive eyes, every gesture, every movement told how deeply he was moved—how whole-hearted was his belief in every word that he said.

My most vivid recollection of Gladstone, however, is not connected with any of his great oratorical achievements, but with the time that I saw him quite alone at the small station of Laurencekirk, in the North of Scotland. Al-

though William Ewart Gladstone forsook the political creed of his youth, his brother, Sir Thomas Gladstone, of Fasque, remained a staunch Conservative to the end. He was one of the Tory magnates of Kincardineshire, and at political meetings in the county he used to make vigorous attacks on the political policy of "my brother." Nevertheless, there was no interruption of their fraternal relations, and they often visited each other. In March, 1889, Sir Thomas died. Notwithstanding that it was most bitter weather, his famous brother went from Hawarden Castle North to the funeral. It was on the day after the funeral on which Mr. Gladstone returned to England that I saw him. The storm had subsided, yet the snow lay heavy upon the Grampians. The day before had taken place the death of John Bright, and as the small company of villagers which had assembled at Laurencekirk station looked at the venerable statesman standing on the little platform waiting for the train, it was impossible for them not to think of how he might be affected by the death of the colleague of many years, from whom there had been to some extent a sundering in later days. Presently Mr. Gladstone engaged in conversation with a farmer who was standing by. He spoke of Mr. Bright—just a few words, which I cannot recall, but they were informed by deep personal regard. Then the train came in, and Mr. Gladstone entered his carriage. The people would have cheered, but they felt that it would be out of place to do so. One or two stepped forward and silently grasped his hand. The train moved out, and when I think of Gladstone it is always of that white face, suffused by tender human feeling, which looked out from the railway carriage on that March day nineteen years ago.

It was while he was still Lord Hartington that I first heard the late Duke of Devonshire. It was at a great Unionist demonstration in Scotland. In his case also I was disappointed, but agreeably so. I had understood that he was not an effective speaker. That he was deficient in the graces of oratory must of course be admitted. Nevertheless, a speaker more impressive I have never heard. I can still recall the tones in which, apostrophizing Mr. Gladstone in respect of how his adoption of Home Rule had broken up the Liberal party, he exclaimed, "What have you done with our le-

gions?" The very bluntness of his manner brought into clearer relief the force of his observations. Every sentence was spoken out of the deepest conviction; every word was felt. It was not what would be called a brilliant speech; there were few epigrams in it; there was no affectation of the ore rotundo. A plain man, he stood before his hearers and told them in plain words of how the development of public events affected him. No one could listen to him without feeling that he was a statesman indeed—a man of large and luminous intellect, who combined with a singularly shrewd outlook the capacity for feeling very strongly, but who never allowed his feelings to evaporate in rhetoric. The studied restraint which he laid upon himself made his speech infinitely more telling. We were all conscious of his immense emotional and intellectual reserves. Here was a great man, but, better still, here was a pre-eminently honest man. The last time I saw the Duke of Devonshire he was presiding as chancellor of the University of Cambridge at a university ceremony—it was at the conferring of an honorary degree upon the late King Oscar of Sweden. What struck me most about the Duke was how he had aged. He was not aged beyond his years; yet somehow one always thought of him as he was in his prime, and it was distressing to see how white his hair had become and how bent his frame.

The only occasion upon which I heard Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman speak he occupied quite a subordinate position at a demonstration at which the principal speaker was Mr. John Morley. Nobody dreamed then that a day would come when Sir Henry would be leader of the party and Mr. Morley his lieutenant. Sir Henry was one of several speakers, among whom was Mr. Haldane, at the close of the meeting, which was held in Perth. A like position at a meeting in St. James' hall, London, at which Lord Rosebery was the principal speaker, did Mr. Asquith occupy the first time I heard him. Mr. Balfour I have heard more than once. To hear him is to realize in some degree the personal magnetism which Mr. Balfour exerts upon his followers. In point of oratorical power I have no hesitation in yielding the palm among the speakers I have heard to Lord Rosebery. There are now nearly twenty years since I heard him deliver his rectorial address in Aberdeen university, but to an extent which has happened with none of the others of whom I have written subsequent experiences have but confirmed the enthusiastic admiration of boyhood.

Campbell-Bannerman

HE resignation of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the first Liberal prime minister of England since Lord Rosebery gave up office in 1895, has its dramatic phase, for as he passes from the stage the mixed forces which he had together as a party appear also to be approaching the end of their political power. The Bannerman government, it has been stated, combined too many factions and too many fads; all the elements of the opposition to conservatism and of discontent united to make cause against the old government, and when joined together in an administration a working team of Home Rulers, Laborites, Socialists, Liberal Imperialists and Little Englanders was found night impossible. But it speaks much for Bannerman's leadership that this disintegration of his party has gone on so much more swiftly since the attack of heart trouble which occurred last fall in Bristol, where he had gone to make a political speech, removed him from the possibility of active leadership.

Sir Henry was not only the leader of the House of Commons but also its father, for he represented Stirling without interruption ever since he entered the House in 1868; at the age of 32. Throughout his political life he has been a consistent and staunch advocate of radicalism, and his political faith has never wavered. He did not derive his politics from his family, however, for his father, Sir Jas. Campbell, a prosperous Glasgow merchant, was one of the most devoted adherents of the Tory party in Scotland, while his brother sat for years in the House of Commons on the Conservative side. When he first stood as a Liberal candidate for Stirling young Campbell was twitted with his allegiance to the other side, but he retorted that loyalty to their political faith ran in the family, and that as his father was consistent in his Toryism he would be consistent to his Liberalism. He had a varied experience in government, holding the positions of financial secretary to the War Office, twice, secretary to the Admiralty, twice, secretary of state for war, and, for a brief time, in 1884-5, chief secretary for Ireland. At that trying period, the Irish members were devoting all their efforts to making that office almost untenable, but Mr. Bannerman (he assumed the name of his maternal uncle, Ban-

nerman, under a will, and acquired the title in 1895), met all their attacks with unflinching good will and ready wit. He came more prominently before the public eye when he took office as secretary for war in Gladstone's last government. His great administrative feat was to persuade the Duke of Cambridge to resign the position of commander-in-chief of the army. The Duke was extremely reluctant to retire, but he yielded to the War Minister's tactful pressure and resigned. Four hours after the formalities had been completed and the necessary documents signed, the Liberal government was defeated on the cordite vote, and resigned. The Duke then wished to retract his decision, but it was too late. A long period of depression for the Liberals followed, and when Sir Wm. Vernon Harcourt resigned the leadership of the party, by an unanimous vote of the party Bannerman was chosen in February, 1899, to be its leader.

Still more troublous times were in store for the Liberals with the beginning of the Boer War, which made the bitterness between the Imperialistic and Radical groups more acute than ever. A less resolute man would have thrown up the task in despair, but Bannerman stuck to his post, ever watching for an occasion to lead a temporarily-united party against the government. He was bitterly and savagely attacked, but he never lost his head under the greatest provocation, and, in the face of the biting criticism of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, he maintained his self-restraint.

It was not until two years later that a chance remark by Mr. Chamberlain in the House gave him an opportunity to refer in detail to a conversation which had passed between him and Mr. Chamberlain, before the war. From this conversation it was clear that Chamberlain had never anticipated a war, and had been "bluffing," and the fact that, with this damaging weapon in his armory, Bannerman had refrained from any breach of personal confidence while smarting under the most stinging attacks, greatly raised him in the estimation of the House.

Campbell-Bannerman became prime minister in December, 1905. Office gave "C. B." additional strength and firmness, and the way in which he controlled and swayed his huge majority impressed all parliamentarians, so that there was no longer any tendency to underrate his ability.

boon mineral claims. The land mission to erect cabins are not suitable for business locations. "Beaconville" is at a street leading from the live and to do business here. Frank W. Morse, of Montreal, G. T. P. It is understood, being granted. "Vickersville" is about 2000 feet northeast of to erect tent houses there are acorn. G. T. P. harbor engineer, ve to be approved by W. H. le of Skeena District, who is Rupert. "Vickersville" is suitable for business locations as.

ould pay—Under present conditions are likely to continue to be sold, there is no chance of business at Prince Rupert. Employment—There will be fine Rupert for skilled men, lots in the townsite are buildings are erected there for clerks, bookkeepers, stenographers and office help. The respecting help for hotels and dining is commenced on the G. T. P. pick and shovel, an axe, and the right-of-way of the first fine Rupert is to be cleared, ing will be rock work.

Rupert has about 200 people, be an increase until the jobs on that tent houses only will one locality—"Vickersville."

ch of England and the President; the one in a church. Building erected by the G. T. P. ch has not been opened.

for a public school has been hoj will be started with an to 20 children.

The G. T. P. has laid a main ling from the wharf for a dis- number of buildings are con- C. T. & Timber Company, ales from the G. T. P. wharf, electric light at \$1 a month

er—Prince Rupert is reached la and Seattle by steamships. use ports, that makes the rail- ways. The fare from Vancouver from Seattle \$20.

—A contract for grading 100 East from Prince Rupert has & Stewart, and is expected need by May 1st, 1908.

nts—in "Knoxville," there are high meals and beds can be turnants. The price of single beds. The price of beds is so the week is \$6 and \$7. There shed-room houses. The G. T. buildings completed, but they persons here seem to know wished and opened. Liquor is and liquor licenses have not as yone.