

THE EDUCATIONALIST

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THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

Language is the power which man possesses of communicating his thoughts, sentiments, and pledges. Its possession is one of the greatest blessings; because, without it, the richest treasures of the mind remain untold, and hence, *virtually*, have no influence. He who has a ready flow of speech, so as easily to express his ideas, has certainly obtained a boon well worth seeking. By its magic power the roughest breast may be made calm and joyous; the murderer turned from his bloody purposes; and the dormant energies of man aroused, stimulated and unfolded. It strews our pathway with all the accumulated treasures of past ages, and thus gives us so much intellectual wealth with which to begin our career; and hence each succeeding race, adding its wisdom and experience to that of the past, continues building upward that solid temple whose foundation is facts gathered by observation, and whose roof and pinnacle are matured and unerring reason.

But, as is evident from our every day's observation, language may also be employed for the worst of purposes; if it were otherwise, it would differ widely from every blessing bestowed by the kind Creator on

the human race. By its assistance no base passion of the human soul is left without expression, which tends to produce the same state of feeling in those within the reach of its influence, thus adding fuel to the already burning flame of man's animal and selfish appetites, feeding impure desires, and fostering the blighting influence of hatred, rage, and murder. Hence Language, though a great blessing, is potent for good or ill, according to the purposes to which it is applied.

Of all Languages our own is to be fraught with the most thrilling interest and specially deserves our attention. If we were to enter into details as to its formation, that is, its various sources, the mode of its derivation from each, its roots, prefixes and affixes, together with the nature and extent of its progress, it would be an almost Herculean task, and volumes of much interest might be written on each of these subjects.

The English Language is of quite recent origin, having been but a few centuries in existence. It was unknown when Greece and Rome held absolute sway over the earth, physically and intellectually.

The eloquence of Demosthenes and Cicero had long been known and enjoyed before it came into being; and even the nations to which they belonged had lost their importance, and their sun had set forever, and France, Germany, and Italy had passed through many a Revolution; yes, and England herself had gone from stage to stage in her onward career before the language began to assume the proportions of an intelligible existence, or even its name was known. But a few centuries have passed since its first rough, disjointed, and barbarous accents were heard, and nobody was then so sanguine as to expect that it would ever extend over even the British Isles. As to its derivation, suffice it to say that it is composed chiefly of Latin, Greek, French, and Saxon roots, prefixes, and terminations blended in the strangest and most beautiful manner.

Man is the great complex being that exists as an inhabitant of this globe; that is, the greatest number of separate and distinct elements, physically and mentally, enter into his composition; but by virtue of that very complexity he is rendered the greatest, and constituted the natural ruler of the rest. Those nations composed of the greatest number and variety of originally different tribes have the most extensive influence among others, politically, intellectually, and morally. As with man so with languages which are only the reflex of himself; those made up of the greatest number of distinct elements are best adapted to the expression of every variety of ideas and sentiments, and can be combined with the greatest effect and beauty. The painter confined to a few colors never can produce a finished and admirable picture, especially where great variety of hues are to be dis-

played. Language is a picture of the thoughts existing on the mind; and he who uses it is a painter of ideas on the canvases of others' feelings, intellect, and being.—Hence arises the necessity for numerous words of varied significations, and in this respect our language is particularly rich.

For the purposes of public speaking, and the expression of eloquent sentiment, no language can surpass our own. Already has it not only rivalled but far surpassed, by its inherent beauty and great variety, the loftiest and boldest flights of Grecian and Roman oratory. And also in this respect the other modern languages hold a place of decided inferiority. It can be distinctly heard at a great distance, and is very effective in swaying popular assemblies. Witness the peals of living eloquence bursting forth in rich, varied, majestic, and fascinating grace, beauty, and grandeur from the souls of immortal Curran, Grattan, Chatham, Webster, Burke, Henry, and an immense host of others; flashing the fire of their pure and generous sentiments far and wide from their own glorious centres. And after having witnessed these oratorical efforts, uninfluenced by the prejudices of an early education whose sympathies are entirely with others, tell us to whom must the palm of victory be awarded. But as our language is new and progressive it is destined to become far more powerful and as new Sciences raise their heads, and unknown Faculties of the human soul begin to appear and expand, it gathers fresh accessions of words to those already in use; while old and improper words and phrases fast disappear.

In prose and poetry we are equally successful. What can excel the natural ease and beauty of Goldsmith; the poetic fire and knowledge of Shakspeare; the splendid imagery of Milton; the thrilling sentiments of Campbell; the clearness and grace of Addison; and the accuracy and power of Johnson? Have classic Greece and Rome produced a Homer, a Hesiod, a Virgil, and a Horace, who have been held up as models for after ages? But have we not already had many by whom they have been surpassed in thoughts that shall live, and that after ages shall admire? If, in an age of darkness, when our language was only in process of formation, such splendid results have been exhibited, what may we not expect when greater refinement and a more general diffusion of the blessings of Education characterize the British people and their descendants in every nation on the globe. Our literature is already rich and extensive, and exerts a great influence in countries whose dialect differs from ours. The language, too, extends over a vast portion of the civilized world. Not only over the British Isles, with a population of about thirty millions of earth's most industrious and energetic sons, but over nearly all the continent of North America, which at this very day plays a most im-