

The suggestive programme of the Congress, in presenting the question „whether there are any grammatical affinities between the languages of the western coast of America and those of Polynesia“, proposes an inquiry of great interest. Authors who have written on the subject of the peopling of America have naturally had their attention drawn to the vast archipelago of small islands which seem to form stepping-stones across the Pacific between the two continents. Not a few writers, moved by certain superficial resemblances between the Polynesians and the Americans, and by well-authenticated accounts of long voyages which have been made by the islanders, have boldly assumed that at least one stream of emigration has reached the New World by this route. Some have even undertaken to point out the very course, or courses, which the voyagers pursued. On this particular point the opinions have varied widely. Some bring the Polynesian emigrants from the Hawaiian Islands to North America, while others trace them from the Tahitian group, through the Low Archipelago and the Gambier cluster, or by way of Easter Island, to the southern portion of the continent.

More cautious inquirers, however, have reserved their opinion in regard to this supposed Polynesian migration until it can be based on the only evidence which in such a question is decisive, — that of linguistic affinity. It was by this evidence that the connection between the Polynesians and the Malayans was determined. The like evidence has shown that the population of Madagascar was derived, not from Africa, as might naturally have been supposed, but from a Malayo-Polynesian source. If a genetic connection between the American aborigines and the Polynesians is to be established, it can only be by similar evidence. In this view the question proposed in the programme assumes a peculiar importance.

In attacking this problem, we are met at the threshold by what seems, at the first sight, an enormous and almost insurmountable difficulty. This obstacle is found in the aston-