

ESSAY,

Delivered by Mr. JAMES HUTCHISON, Classical Master in the St. John Grammar School, before the Saint John Teachers' Institute, on

THE HISTORY AND ETYMOLOGY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

Language is the utterance of articulate sounds, for the expression and communication of thought. It is one of the distinguishing marks between man and the inferior creation. Brutes, no doubt, are capable of expressing their wants by sounds; but these sounds are more *vocal*, not *articulate*. In Homer's Iliad, Book I, the distinction is drawn, as it were, with one dash of the pen. He speaks of "*metropou anthropon*"—articulate speaking, or *speech-dividing* men. But little doubt is now entertained as to the origin of language: it is generally understood to be one of those gifts that Providence has so bountifully bestowed on mankind. There are not wanting, however, some vain babblers, who, delighting to get up something original or clever, deny that such is the case; but these, as a whole, are men whose abilities and attainments do not entitle them to be depended on, when compared with other men who have given their views to the world on the same subject. Listen to the words of William Von Humboldt on this point:—

"According to my fullest conviction, speech must be regarded as naturally inherent in man; for it is altogether inexplicable as a work of his understanding in its simple consciousness. We are none the better for allowing thousands and thousands of years for its invention. There could be no invention of language unless its type already existed in the human understanding. Man is man only by means of speech; but in order to invent speech, he must be already man."

Language is the liberator of the human soul. The words passing from the mouth of the speaker to the listening ear of the auditor, are the links of that electric chain, over which thought flies from mind to mind, and feeling from heart to heart; stirring up the emotions of the mind, and kindling the feelings of the heart, to a greater or less degree. We are told in the Book of Genesis, that "the whole earth was of one language;" and the truth of this remark is borne out by the affinity yet existing among languages. But although we might derive both pleasure and advantage by tracing that affinity, let us rather for the present confine ourselves to the English language, the one to us the most interesting of all.

Our tongue is spreading fast over the world, by British colonization and American settlement; the Christian missionary is spreading it wherever British rule exists; the schoolmaster is abroad;