

LANGUAGE AND RELIGION.

Language is the handmaid of religion. As the outward expression of religion is dependent upon language, we may by the study of the words and forms of expression obtain some conception of the religious ideas and ceremonies of a tribe or nation. As ancient religion was dependent for its expression on language, we can best understand it by understanding the ancient tongue, and without this knowledge we are compelled to accept the interpretations of scholars who are conversant with the form of speech. Archaeology comes to our aid in understanding ancient religious beliefs and practices, but the chief place must be given to language. As there are various dialects of language, so there are dialects of religion of numerous kinds, whereby the learned and ignorant, the clergy and laity, men, women and children express their religious thoughts and feelings. As language changes from the period of childhood to that of manhood, so does religion. So closely are they related that language is influenced by religion, and deeply imbedded in the words spoken are the thoughts and forms of religion practised by the priests and people. Religion lies at the foundation of national unity and when a tribe or nation becomes definite, the language becomes definite, and we are able to see the relationship existing between language and religion. During the childhood of the human race the various tribes of men had no doubt religious rites as an expression of their thoughts about God and his relationship to his creatures, and some form of verbal communication had been used for handing down from father to son the creed which became a tie to bind them together. The study of language has enabled us to trace the objects of worship to their root-forms, thus revealing the meaning and thought that lay at the root of the worship, and the identity of the gods of different nations, though having apparently different names, has been proved by resolving them into the same root-word. Language expresses the inner life of a people, and by its help we may obtain with considerable accuracy a knowledge of their modes of life and thought, and religious beliefs and forms of worship.