

INTRODUCTION.

1. **What a Language is.**—A Language is a number of connected sounds which convey a meaning. These sounds, carried to other persons, enable them to know how the speaker is feeling, and what he is thinking. More than ninety per cent of all language used is **spoken** language; that which is written forms an extremely small proportion. But, as people grow more and more intelligent, the need of written language becomes more and more felt; and hence all civilised nations have, in course of time, slowly and with great difficulty made for themselves a set of **signs**, by the aid of which the **sounds** are, as it were, indicated upon paper. But it is the sounds that are the language, and not the signs. The signs are a more or less artificial, and more or less accurate, mode of representing the language to the eye. Hence the names **language, tongue,** and **speech** are of themselves sufficient to show that it is the **spoken**, and not the **written**, language that is **the** language,—that is the more important of the two, and that indeed gives life and vigour to the other.

2. **The Spoken and the Written Language.**—Every civilised language had existed for centuries before it was written or printed. Before it was written, then, it existed merely as a spoken language. Our own tongue existed as a spoken language for many centuries before any of it was committed to writing. Many languages—such as those in the south of Africa—are born, live, and die out without having ever been written down at all. The parts of a spoken language are called **sounds**; the smallest parts of a written language are