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MANY PEOPLE GET ON
WITH VERY FEW WORDS

DR. FRANK H. VIZETELLY, editor of the New Standard Dictionary, is said to possess the largest vocabulary in the world. Of course this is mere guess work, nobody being able to say who has the largest vocabulary and who the next largest, nor the precise number of words which Dr. Vizetelly could use if a crisis arose, but it is one of those statements which form useful texts for American—and perhaps Canadian—newspaper writers on occasion. At any rate, it is no guess to say that Dr. Vizetelly knows a whole lot of words and a lot about them. The dictionary of which he is the editor is reputed to contain the largest number of words ever collected, more than 455,000, and Dr. Vizetelly may reasonably be expected to have looked at them all. But he does not pretend that the New Standard Dictionary contains all the words in the English language. Indeed, he asserts that nobody can say how many words there are. They are like the sands of the sea.

Wilson and Shakespeare.

But if it is not possible to say who has the largest vocabulary, Dr. Vizetelly has no doubt as to what class of man possesses it. A competent newspaper editor, he says, knows 45,000 words, while the average uneducated person knows only 400. The intelligent artisan uses 5,000 words, a minister knows 14,296 and a physician 25,000. The average business man has a command of from 3,000 to 10,000, while the average college man or woman uses 5,000 words and knows 8,000 more. The average literary person uses 12,000 words and the scholar knows and uses 20,000. The late Woodrow Wilson was supposed to have one of the largest vocabularies in our time and Dr. Vizetelly says that in his seventy-five speeches addressed to the American people between the years 1913 and 1918, he made use of 6,221 different words. But if one reviews his writings, which one is not greatly tempted to do, he will probably come to the conclusion that the former President of the United States had a vocabulary of more than 62,000 words. This gives him a vast advantage over Shakespeare, who had to content himself with 24,000 different words even though one of them was "honorificabilitudinitas," which may be found in "Love's Labour's Lost" and is frequently cited as the longest word in the English language.

How One Acquires Words.

A man's vocabulary depends a great deal upon his occupation, and Dr. Vizetelly gives the following instances in support of this assertion: "A churchman, familiar with the terminology of the Bible, will know the meaning of 8,674 different Hebrew words in the Old Testament and of 5,624 Greek words in the New Testament, or 14,296 words in all, with some duplicates, of course. This is an exceptional case. The physician or surgeon knows more than this number. Take a rough summary of matters with which he must be familiar. There are in the body of man 707 arteries, 71 bones, 79 convolutions, 433 muscles, 233 nerves, 85 plexuses and 103 veins—total, 1,711. In addition to this there are 1,300 bacteria, 224 eponymic diseases, 500 pigments, 295 poisons, 88 eponymic signs and symptoms of diseases, 744 tests and 109 tumors, or a total of 4,968 matters relating to his profession alone. Then there are the names of some 10,000 chemicals and drugs of which he must have more than mere passing knowledge—total 14,968 in all, and we have not referred to the science of hygiene, or to allied professions, as dentistry, etc., or to his home life, his motor car or airplane, and the world at large, of which he is so important a figure. These can barely be covered by 10,000 more—approximately 25,000 words."

Business Men's Favorites.

Some time ago Dr. John C. French, of Johns Hopkins University, said that the average man in business knows about 50,000 words. But Dr. Vizetelly thinks this a ridiculous exaggeration and that if the average business man commands 10,000 words he will have a full vocabulary. As a matter of fact, the average man of business is prone to fall in love with a few words and keep on repeating them, rather than expand his vocabulary with more precise terms. We have such words as "service," "conference," "reaction," "worth while," "efficiency," being worked to death, and we suspect that it was the average American business man who took the word "hectic," meaning habitual, and insisted that it should mean "feverish." That is now what it seems to mean to everybody who uses it, and we have not the slightest doubt that Dr. Vizetelly, in his new dictionary will set the seal of his approval upon this impudent fraud.

A Remarkable Play.

A curious thing, according to Dr. Vizetelly, is that not long ago a play was a success in New York though only 318 different words were used. Of these 264 were spoken by the actors and actresses portraying North Carolina types, while the additional words were contributed by a man from the city who had lost his way in the mountains and at nightfall entered the cabin where the other characters were found. Dr. Vizetelly suggests that it is an interesting thing for a man to test his own vocabulary, and this he may do by keeping his eyes open as well as his ears. For example, the average citizen in the first hour after rising, if he were to express his thoughts, that is to say, if he were to name the objects which pass under his eye in bedroom, bathroom and at the breakfast table, would find that he would require 288 different words. He has still fourteen hours before bedtime, and in those fourteen hours he will meet acquaintances, discuss business matters, and perhaps go to a concert or a theatre. We believe a valuable monograph might be compiled to show how the use of profanity limits vocabulary. The idea that there are such things as eloquent and even magniloquent masters of profanity is, we believe, an illusion. Most people who swear use not more than a score of words, and each of them probably takes the place of a score or a hundred words with which a man, but for this habit, might enrich his vocabulary and define his feelings.