

tion of signs should be made according to a "mean" or average. There can be no philosophic consideration of signs according to a "mean" of observations. The final object is to ascertain the radical or essential part as distinct from any individual flourish or mannerism on the one hand, and from a conventional or accidental abbreviation on the other; but a mere average will not accomplish this object. If the hand, being in any position whatever, is, according to five observations, moved horizontally one foot to the right, and, according to five other observations, moved one foot horizontally to the left, the "mean" or resultant will be that it is stationary, which is not in any way corresponding with any of the ten observations. So if six observations give it a rapid motion of one foot to the right and five a rapid motion of the same distance to the left, the mean or resultant would be somewhat difficult to express, but perhaps would be a slow movement to the right for an inch or two, having certainly no resemblance either in essentials or accidents to any of the signs actually observed. In like manner the tail of the written letter "y" (which, regarding its mere formation, might be a graphic sign) may have, in the chirography of several persons, various degrees of slant, may be a straight line or looped, and may be curved on either side; but a "mean" taken from several manuscripts would leave the unfortunate letter without any tail whatever, or travestied as a "u" with an amorphous flourish. A definition of the radical form of the letter or sign by which it can be distinguished from any other letter or sign is a very different proceeding. Therefore, if a "mean" or resultant of any number of radically different signs to express the same object or idea, observed either among several individuals of the same tribe or among different tribes, is made to represent those signs, they are all mutilated or ignored as distinctive signs, though the result may possibly be made intelligible in practice, according to principles mentioned in the "Introduction to the Study of Sign Language" of the present writer; and still another view may be added, that because a sound of broken English may be understood by an intelligent Englishman it is no proof of that sound being an English word or a word of any language. The adoption of a "mean" may be practically useful in the formation of a mere interpreter's jargon, though no one can use it but himself or those who memorize it from him, but it elucidates no principle. It is also practically convenient for any one determined to argue for the uniformity and universality of sign-language as against the variety apparent in all the realms of nature. On the "mean" principle, he only needs to take his two-foot rule and arithmetical tables and make all signs his signs and his signs all signs. Of course they are uniform, because he has made them so after the brutal example of Procrustes.

In this connection it is proper to urge another warning, that a mere sign-talker is often a bad authority upon principles and theories. He may not be liable to the satirical compliment of Dickens's "brave courier," who "understood all languages indifferently ill"; but many men speak some one language fluently, and yet are wholly unable to explain or analyze its words and forms so as to teach any one else, or even to give an intelligent summary or classification of their own knowledge. What such a sign-talker has learned is by memorizing, as a child may learn English, and though both the sign-talker and the child may be able to give some separate items useful to a philologist or foreigner, such items are spoiled when colored by the attempt of ignorance to theorize. A German who has studied English to thorough mastery, except in the mere facility of speech, may in a discussion upon some of its principles be contradicted by any mere English speaker, who insists upon his superior knowledge because he actually speaks the language and his antagonist does not, but the student will probably