

brought with him to his new home, a written language, and a literature rich and varied in its attractions, but the intervening ocean has scarcely impeded his enjoyment of its latest triumphs. But the *habitant* has stood in very different relations to the language. It was to him from the first an unwritten local dialect; and now illustrates, in some singularly striking aspects, the beginning anew of a process of evolution akin to that to which we owe the whole Romance languages. This is a branch of comparative philology, of interest to all Canadians, and which has a special claim on the attention of Section I.

But a wider interest pertains to the native languages, and to the indigenous races of this continent. Their approximation in physical characteristics to the Asiatic Mongol renders all the more remarkable the wide diversity of speech between the two continents. On both, indeed, an agglutinate character predominates in large groups of languages; but beyond this, any affinities thus far traced out are remote and uncertain. Here, therefore, is a problem in comparative philology, of which a solution may not unreasonably be looked for from us. In this direction unquestionably lies the determination of questions relating to the origin of the American race; the ethnographic key to the earliest migrations; the prehistoric chronicle of this western hemisphere; the interpretation, it may be, of the venerable myth of the lost Atlantis, which vainly excited the interest of the disciples of Socrates, as even then a tradition from old times before that era to which they belonged, when the world was two thousand three hundred years younger than it is now.

Looking to the subject in its narrowest aspect, the native languages of this continent are deserving of careful study; and those of our own Dominion have a claim on our attention, as

a Society, which we cannot ignore without discredit to ourselves. We owe not a little of the knowledge of them, thus far secured, as one—and not the least valuable—of the results due to the devoted labours of French missionaries for upwards of two centuries among the Indians of Canada and the North-West. The Huron version of the Lord's Prayer, reproduced in the second volume of the Society's Transactions, was derived from a MS. of the seventeenth century, ascribed to the Rev. Father Chaumonot; and is of value as an example of the language of that race, when first brought into intimate intercourse with Europeans. The vocabulary of the language, prepared by the same zealous Jesuit missionary, is still in existence; but its present custodian, M. Paul Picard, son of the late Huron Chief, Tahourenche, has hitherto repelled all applications for its purchase, and even for permission to have it printed. Its genuineness is placed beyond dispute by the date of the water-mark on the paper, and its interest and value are unquestionable. Our earliest knowledge of the native vocabulary of the Province of Quebec is derived from the two brief lists furnished by Cartier as the result of his visit in 1535; and a comparison of them with the Huron vocabulary leaves no doubt of their affinity. We have also the dictionary of the Recollet Father, Gabriel Sagard, printed at Paris in 1632. But the recovery of the vocabulary of Father Chaumonot, and its printing by the Royal Society, will furnish an important addition for the study of the language of a people interestingly associated with the early history of Canada, and will be a creditable work for either of the Literary Sections. I regret that my own efforts to obtain access to the MS., with a view to laying it before the Section of English Literature and of History, have thus far failed.