

one is authorized to adopt a new one, must after all depend upon accurate judgment in each case, and still more upon the conscientious feeling in the use of words. The better the principles of language are comprehended, the greater will be the caution—the reserve—the modesty in the adoption of new words, and far greater in the attempt to create or introduce them. It is the wisest and the most learned that deal most reverentially with the language. “En général,” says De Maistre, “les grands écrivains craignent le néologisme; un sentiment secret les avertit qu’il n’est pas permis d’entreigner l’écriture de nos supérieurs.” At the same time, on the other hand, it will also be felt and understood how inadequate any dictionary is to the character and demands of a language—necessarily so to its natural and legitimate growth and progress. Especially as to a language like the English—composite and anomalous—is the attempt a vain one to confine it rigidly within the precincts of vocabulary or grammar. Grammatical rules have been devised, and they have their use, but the effort to cramp the language inexorably under them, produces that which Swift—a master of the English tongue in its simplicity and strength—expressed his indignant scorn of by the contemptuous term of ‘Schoolmaster’s English.’ There may be similar pedantic abuse of the language by an ill-judging use of the dictionary.

A few examples of words which may be considered as still in doubt, will perhaps illustrate some of the foregoing thoughts. The word ‘*talented*’ is given in this dictionary: Richardson refers to it as having the sanction of Noah Webster; but adds the comment, that it has been used too hastily in common speech in England: Coleridge (see his ‘*Table-Talk*’) vehemently objects to the introduction of it, as unnecessary, and as a violation of analogy, and attributes it, rightly I believe, to American origin. The best authority I find for it is the late Sir Egerton Brydges, in one of whose works I remember to have met with it: though well acquainted with the language in the various eras of its literature, he was however a voluminous and hasty writer—choosing his words rapidly and never correcting. The word ‘*talents*’ itself in its present sense belongs to quite a modern period of the language, while the epithet is one that dates only from a few years past. Those who desire to use the latter should at least remember the moral meaning of the former—a meaning taken from the parable in the New Testament and transferred to intellectual endowment. Again, the word ‘*statesmanly*’ is used by De Quincey, by Julius Hare, and, if I remember rightly, by Landor—each a good authority; the word is upheld as more precise than