

misguiding influence of words upon the thoughts of men may be found in a political term that has grown to be very familiar with us: as a title for a constitutional power we have naturalized a foreign and ancient word, singularly inappropriate when thus applied; the term "*veto*," neither having place in the constitution, nor sanction from the framers and contemporary expounders of our national system, is calculated to suggest, by its essential meaning, so much that is absolute and peremptory and autocratical, that the important power, which does indeed exist most wisely and cautiously prescribed, is apt to be misunderstood and perverted, in consequence of false impressions raised by the term that has inconsiderately been used to name it. There is thus action and re-action upon each other of language and opinion—it may be for good or for evil.

The moral relation of a language to the thoughts and feelings of the people using it, is strongly stated in a letter of Milton's, written at Florence in 1638, to one of his Italian friends. It tells him that it ought not to be thought a matter of small importance, whether the language of a people be pure or corrupt, and what is the character of their daily speech—that it is his belief that, whenever a language becomes inaccurate and vicious, the degeneracy of it will soon be followed by the downfall of the state, and a degraded and inglorious condition—for when there is a lazy or a licentious use of words, with ignorance or carelessness of their genuine meaning, is not this, he asks, one of the plain marks of a people unprincipled and sluggish, and full ready for some slavery or other. But, on the other hand, he adds, there never was empire or state, which did not flourish more or less, so long as the people dutifully cultivated their language and upheld its character. To this fine philosophy of an English poet may be added the reflection of a most thoughtful French author: "All degradation," observes De Maistre, "whether individual or national, is straightway announced by a degradation exactly proportional in the language. How could man lose an idea, or even the integrity and uprightness of an idea, without losing the word or the accuracy of the word that expresses it; and how, on the contrary, can he have either new or better thoughts without its becoming manifest immediately in his speech?" ("*Les Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*.")

If these truths need historical illustration, the student may be reminded of the joint degeneracy of manners and of speech in that worthless and wicked period of English history, the times of the second Charles, when the excesses in previous years were followed by re-action in various ways at the Restoration. Licentiousness of life and ribaldry of speech,