

of necessity, a cause of hasty, loose, and wrongful use of words—the neglect of good old ones, and the rash adoption of spurious new ones. Excellent words and excellent idioms are ever in danger of perishing; the tongues and the pens of men are often losing them, either by ignorance—perhaps ignorance in one of its most troublesome shapes—that of vanity, or it may be by licentiousness. There is this reason too for our using words with more reflection and less at random, that we may be able to discern whether or no there is error in the *Americanisms* we are sometimes charged with. It is justly a term of reproach, like the *Scotticism*, or *Gallicism*, or *British provincialism*, if we use a word which is an unauthorized and needless novelty; but the reproach is relieved when we can show that a good word of other and older days has been kept alive here, though it has passed away from the mouths of men on the other side of the sea. In the changes that a language undergoes, there is no more delicate process than that by which it is enriched and improved, and none more subtle than its corruption and degeneracy.

But let it not be thought that the dutiful safe-keeping and cultivation of one's language is merely matter of critical interest. There are higher considerations that enter into it. "Many years ago," says Coleridge, "in conversing with a friend, I expressed my belief, that in no instance had the false use of a word become current without some practical ill consequence, of far greater moment than would *primo aspectu* have been thought possible. That friend, very lately referring to this remark, assured me that not a month had passed since then, without some instance in proof of its truth having occurred in his own experience; and added, with a smile, that he had more than once amused himself with the thought of a verbarian attorney-general, authorized to bring information *ex officio* against the writer or editor of any work in extensive circulation, who, after due notice issued, should persevere in misusing a word." ("Church and State," ch. ii. note.) The history of language would supply not a few examples of this process by which words mislead our thoughts and give them a wrong practical direction. How much error, for instance, both in theory and practice, may be traced to the confusion of the terms *education* and *instruction*! Again, for the perception of the beautiful we have the term *taste*, a metaphor taken from that which is passive in the body, and transferred to that which is active in the mind; and it is reasonable to believe that the art of criticism has been lowered and narrowed by the utter inadequacy of the term to express the co-operating power which is demanded for the enjoyment of poetry and the fine-arts. A more popular example of this