

conception of language was erroneous. For instance, speaking of Indian speech, he says:

"L'organisation intérieure du mot est à la discrétion de l'inventeur. S'il a des règles à suivre, ce sont des règles de goût et non de grammaire. Presqu' entièrement, c'est l'oreille qui en décide; les changemens et transpositions de syllabes et de sons restent à sa disposition, comme les inversions des mots de la langue latine sont à celle de l'homme qui parle ou écrit dans cet idiome." \*

No critical linguistic student could consistently hold such views of language and its processes. This statement, besides, is scarcely in accord with what he had previously remarked in his Report, where he says:

"Nor can this class of languages be divested, even in imagination, of the admirable order, method and regularity, which pervade them; for it is evident that without these, such complicated forms of language could not subsist, and the confusion which would follow would render them unfit even for the communication of the most simple ideas. A simple language may be, perhaps, unmethodical; but one which is highly complicated, and in which the parts of speech are to a considerable degree interwoven with each other, I humbly conceive, never can." †

The former of these assertions, making the interior form of a word the plaything of the caprice of every speaker's whim and fancy, represents his opinion after more than ten years' study of the languages, and the latter after not more than three, showing that the longer he studied, the less clearly did he comprehend them. Many students have adopted the term *polysynthetic* as a designation of the Indian languages, but, apparently, without taking the precaution to learn the exact sense in which Duponceau himself employed it, or to ascertain whether such a scheme of classification was warranted by the grammatic facts of these languages. In explanation of his use of it he says that the Indian languages belong to "the class which I have denominated *polysynthetic* merely for the sake of designation and without meaning to affix any other importance to the name." ‡

It thus appears that he employed the term without direct reference to its etymologic meaning and merely as a tag or label for a theoretic scheme of classification, which he believed epitomized the

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\* Mémoire, p. 145.

† Op. cit., p. xxvii.

‡ Op. cit., p. xxxvi.