

Their literary faculty is further demonstrated in the copiousness of their vocabularies, their rare facility of expression, and their natural aptitude for the acquisition of other languages. Théophile Gautier used to say, that the most profitable book for a professional writer to read is the dictionary; that is, that a mastery of words is his most valuable acquirement. The extraordinarily rich synonymy of some American tongues, notably the Algonkin, the Aztec, and the Qquichua, attests how sedulously their resources have been cultivated. Father Olmos, in his grammar of the Aztec, gives many examples of twenty and thirty synonymous expressions, all in current use in his day. A dictionary, in my possession, of the Maya, one of the least plastic of American tongues, gives over thirty thousand words, and scarcely a hundred of them of foreign extraction.

This linguistic facility is shown also in the ease with which they acquire foreign languages. "It is not uncommon," says Dr. Washington Matthews, speaking of the Hidatsa, by no means a specially brilliant tribe, "to find persons among them, some even under twenty years of age, who can speak fluently four or five different languages."¹ Mr. Stephen Powers tells us that, in California, he found many Indians speaking three, four, five or more languages, generally including *el Cristianismo?*—Fr. Agustin de la Rosa, in the *Eco de la Fè*. (Merida, 1870.)

Alcide d'Orbigny argues forcibly to the same effect, of the South American languages:—"Les Quichuas et les Aymaras civilisés ont une langue étendue, pleine de figures élégantes, de comparaisons naïves, de poésie, surtout lorsqu'il s'agit d'amour; et il ne faut pas croire qu'isolés au sein des forêts sauvages ou jetés au milieu des plaines sans bornes, les peuples chasseurs, agriculteurs et guerriers, soient privés de formes élégantes, de figures riches et variées."—*L'Homme Américain*, Tome I, p. 154.

For other evidence see Brinton, *American Hero Myths*, p. 25. (Philadelphia, 1882.). Horatio Hale, *The Iroquois Book of Rites*, p. 107. (Philadelphia, 1883.)

¹ *Ethnography and Philology of the Hidatsa Indians*, p. 18.