

the First and Charles the Second, between that under Charles the Second and Queen Anne, that considerable changes had taken place between the beginning and the middle of the last century, and that Johnson and Fielding did not write altogether as we do now. For in the course of a nation's progress new ideas are evermore mounting above the horizon, while others are lost sight of and sink below it; others again change their form and aspect; others, which seemed united, split into parts. And as it is with ideas, so it is with their symbols—words. New ones are perpetually coined to meet the demand of an advancing understanding of new feelings that have sprung out of the decay of old ones, of ideas that have shot forth from the summit of the tree of our knowledge; old words, meanwhile, fall into disuse and become obsolete; others have their meaning narrowed and defined; synonyms diverge from each other, and their property is parted between them; nay, whole classes of words will now and then be thrown overboard, as new feelings or perceptions of analogy gain ground. A history of the language in which all these vicissitudes should be pointed out, in which the introduction of every new word should be noted, so far as it is possible—and much may be done in this way by laborious and vigilant and judicious research—in which such words as have become obsolete should be followed down to their final extinction, in which all the most remarkable words should be traced through their successive phases of meaning, and in which moreover the causes and occasions of these changes should be explained—such a work, executed by a man of strong and discreet understanding, well stored with sound principles of philosophy, and who would devote his life to the task, would not only abound in entertainment, but would throw more light on the development of the human mind than all the brainspun systems of metaphysics that ever were written.

“The greater part of these changes, I grant, are brought about gradually, and, at first sight it might often seem, by chance; there is hardly any thing like premeditation about them; least of all are they the result of any definite widely extending plan. In the construction of language man works for the most part, like nature, under the dominion of laws of which he is unconscious; and most fortunate is it that such is the case. For what would be the worth of a language framed by man according to any scheme he might choose to lay down of its general principles and laws? Nay, how could he even form any notion of such principles and laws, except by abstraction and generalization from one or more of the languages already in existence? How would such a language adapt itself to the exigencies of the different classes of society, to