

Common Heritage of Culture Words.

CHRONOLOGICAL INFERENCES.

Of special interest are such culture-historical words as are distributed over a number of tribes speaking related languages or dialects, this distribution not being due to secondary diffusion but to dialectic retention of an old word that formed part of the vocabulary of the common prototype of the languages or dialects concerned. Allowing for the caution imposed by a possible change of meaning,¹ a consideration of such words throws much light on many of the older elements of culture possessed by the tribes to whom the languages belong. As is well known, interesting and valuable results have been obtained in this way in the culture-history of the Indo-germanic, Semitic, and other old world groups of peoples, but in aboriginal America the application of the method is hardly in its infancy. Its value to cultural chronology lies chiefly in this, that the culture concepts associated with the more widely distributed words of a dialectic group (linguistic stock) reach back to a more distant past, other things being equal, than those of more local distribution. Further, as between a culture word distributed over a certain area by dialectic differentiation and a culture word distributed over an equivalent area by borrowing, the greater antiquity must be accorded the former, the splitting up of a language into a number of dialects being a much less rapid process than the diffusion of a word.

A good example of the former type of inference is presented by some of the Athabaskan words for "house." That both the quadrangular plank house of the Hupa and the earth lodge (hogan) of the Navaho are, from the standpoint of older Athabaskan culture, chronologically secondary to the round bark tent is neatly indicated by linguistic evidence, the common Athabaskan word for "house," *ye*, *yèx* (Kato *ye*; Anvik *yax*; Ten'a *yax*; Carrier *yax*; Chipewyan *ye*; Hare *yí*; Loucheux *jé*) being respectively replaced by *xonta* and *hoyan* in these languages. Many more such examples could be adduced, but, as already

¹ Such caution, however, is far less frequently applicable to a word of identical or like meaning in a number of related languages than when our view is limited to a single language. Independent parallel development of meaning in two or more languages is not unknown (cf. Athabaskan *tíd* "fire-drill" as developed to "matches" above), but its probability rapidly lessens with the number of the languages compared.