

ago before the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the fundamental proposition of which is that "the only satisfactory evidence of affiliation or direct relationship of two communities, apart from authentic historical records, is their speech."\*

Well might that multifariously-gifted philosopher Leibnitz deplore the carelessness of the explorers of his time, who did not think it worth their while to collect vocabularies of the languages spoken by the nations they pretended to make known to the civilized world. "C'est un grand défaut," he says, "que ceux qui font des descriptions de pays et des relations de voyages oublient d'ajouter des essais des langues des peuples, of car cela servirait pour en faire connaître les origines."† This reproach the German philosopher, though addressed to travellers in foreign lands, might be construed as applying with even a greater degree of force to those who, like the missionaries, are by the nature itself of their avocation bound to reside among the natives of the countries they evangelize. Not to deserve it, I, for one, shall attempt to unfold to the appreciation of the indulgent philologist the beauties of the languages spoken by a family of American aborigines who, if low in the social scale, still possess in their native dialects vehicles for thought more expressive, and, in their own way, richer than that of many civilized nations. I mean the languages of the Déné Indians, of whom I have given a sociological outline in a late fasciculus of the "Proceedings" of the Canadian Institute.‡

For the benefit of those who may not have read it, let me state that by Dénés I mean that large family of Indians more commonly known under the inappropriate§ names of Tinné, Tinneh, or Athabaskan. It extends west of the Rockies from the 51° latitude north and east of that range of mountains from the Southern Branch of the Saskatchewan to the territory of the Esquimaux. Apart from the Nabajoes of New Mexico, who are ethnologically connected therewith, it is divided into a dozen or more tribes speaking as many dialects.

For the sake of briefness, all the aboriginal terms unavoidably used in the course of this monograph shall be, unless otherwise noted, in the dialect of the Carriers, the most important of the Western tribes. I shall also, to facilitate the intelligence of some of my remarks, occasionally point out the relations of these idioms to the principal other linguistic groups, especially the classical tongues.

\*Am. Antiquarian, IV., Nos. 1 and 2.

†Leibnitz, *Monumenta varia inedita, ex Museo Feller*, tom. IX., p. 595, Jena 1717.

‡Proceedings of the Canadian Institute, Octob. 1889, p. 109 and seq.

§See "The Western Dénés"; Proc. Can. Inst. Oct. 1889, p. 109, note 2.