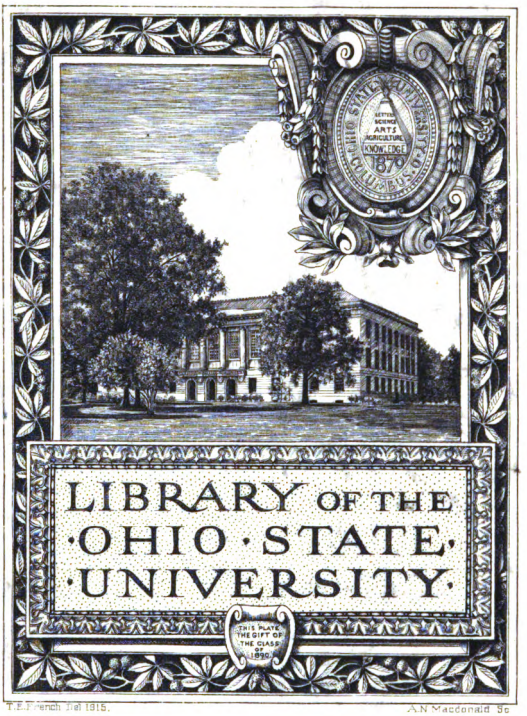
THE MYSTERY OF WORDS



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THE MYSTERY OF WORDS

BY

RALCY HUSTED BELL

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?

—*Romans.*

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TO

ARKELL ROGER McMICHAEL, A. M., M. D.

PREFACE

LANGUAGE first of all was a physical function. Even to-day, a man is known less by his looks than by his words. Language gradually became a mode of conduct, a symbol of emotion, a crude means of expression, and at the same time a social convention or the flowering of a gregarious instinct, as it were.

Then, as all things change under new angles of vision, language turned into a delicate, if not precise, instrument of reflection and expression. For as vision grew keener and broader, the ever-shifting points-of-view increased in number until language became so complex that man's greatest and rarest achievement is the simplicity of speech.

Finally, language long has been more than all that; if it remains the fine yet inadequate measure of individual thought, it also has

become in a sense the thought of the race and a law of the mind. We are born under its dominion. We can not escape its requirements and remain either social or thinking beings. And it is not improbable that if human beings have spirits capable of surviving bodily death, these spirits will be found only in the personality that each gives to his own combination of words. No two persons ever speak alike. No man ever hides himself under his words, though he pile them mountain-high. We all are bound by the fatalism of our words.

Language, as we are accustomed to regard it, was put forth by the *will;* but when it reaches a certain stage, the *will* becomes powerless to alter its course, or at least to shape its destiny. In everything but pure science, language runs away with us, and there it balks. No one ever mastered his mother-tongue—but his mother-tongue always masters him. The mystery of words is inextricably associated with the mystery of higher

consciousness; and greater than either is the mystery of the Faculty of Speech.

Language is of human origin—that should go without saying. Although its purposes are definite, it has remarkably indefinite aspects. Regarded as a law, we must accept the law as man-made. Subjected to the continual stress of subconscious habit, vivified by ceaseless activity, language has escaped the dominion of the *will* whilst deriving its powers from the mind. As a law, language parallels the laws of life—but on a different plane, in common with all other laws of art. It is organic in the sense of its parallelism; and thus only is language a "natural" law. Treated as an organism, its relations in the broad conception of them are threefold: *physical*, *physiological*, and *psychical*. Because these relations are threefold is one reason why even group tongues or individual languages are slow to change. The co-ordinate processes are too delicate for rude or hasty readjustment.

Again, the obstinacy of language-change is

one aspect of racial inertia. Thus it is easy to see why language is loath to respond to the help of learned coteries, and the reason why it is almost wholly deaf to the ablest pleadings of individuals in its behalf. When it yields quickly, it seems to react to spiritual inspiration or to succumb to spiritual slump.

Language submits to reason always grudgingly. It is such a large thing of so much complexity—it is so much a part of the race which it both serves and dominates—that it can be dealt with effectively only by the race itself. This obviously is true of language as a whole, and it is very largely true of separate tongues, as parts.

The English language is in continual use by many millions of people. We call it a "living" language, with good reason; and we know that living languages never remain static. English has undergone many changes, some of which have not seemed good. While it lives it must continue to change for better or worse. If we lengthen our time-scale, we

perceive that the change in its big aspect parallels the principles of true growth, including of course those of decay. This is the rational view. For we must be aware that the span of a few centuries is not long in the life of a language. If we adopt a large standard, we find that the rules of scholarly deduction are less important to a growing language than the broad and fluent facility of service is to those who use it,—since they show so little respect for these rules.

This view may be accepted perhaps without assuming that individuals, and scholars with their collective learning, owe no obligations to the mother-tongue. For the mother-tongue is the kindest of mothers, even if she is capable also of exactions that are cruel. Indeed language, like ethics, has individual as well as social bearings. There must be reciprocal relations between the unit and the group. The one excuse for moralizing in a dissertation on linguistics is this: Just as each member of society owes wholesome conduct

toward all others for the common good, so does every person owe judicious consideration to his tongue.

In morals this obligation is emphasized and made effective rather more through the spirit than by the enactment and the execution of statute laws. That is to say, enlightenment has done more for morals than force ever has done or ever could do. A sensitive regard for the feelings and the opinions of others is one very real source of ethical progress. The development of strength and purity in a language—its growth and efficiency—likewise must come very largely from the spirituality within us. For knowledge and spirit are the synchronous acquirements of mankind as it approaches a civilized state. A man's words are his viewpoints which have been localized by convention. As he sees, understands, and speaks, so he is. Moreover, a delicate taste for wholesome speech is in some subtle manner associated with the utilitarian fitness of a language. Carelessness in speech, as in other

conduct, leads to the callous indifference that precedes chaos by a step. A due regard for the sensibilities of others probably has done more for correct and decent speech than have all the books that lay bare the faults of language or those that extol its perfections.

Language is full of pitfalls, contradictions, and traps. Serious speech not always is the sign of serious character. Stinging devils use honeyed words, good men speak plainly, and wise men not always well. Only poets are the magicians, for they have mastered the mysteries of words. Only the poet understands the different characteristics of words: their tones, shades, colors, tears, and smiles. He sees that some words are as clear as dew, and that many are as smeared glass. He finds that some are harder than flint, colder than ice, hotter than fire. He knows that others are as gentle as the South breeze on the bosom of a flower; but better than all others, the poet knows that words are valued by the company they keep and that they are judged

by their relations. His words may nudge each other but they never are boisterous about it; rather they are like birds on the wing, or flying arrows,—never like snakes in the grass. He sees that self-conscious words flow like molasses from the mouths of hypocrites and fools; that spontaneous words, like eagles, fly fearlessly in the face of the sun.

The trouble is, there are very few poets scattered amongst the many millions using and abusing human speech. If the masses largely were poets, our own words would not be our worst enemies, nor would our best friends necessarily be the words of others. We should have some confidence in the parts of speech and more pride in their relationships; neither should ten follies escape the tongue to one the hand, as now. The attics of our language would be cleared of rubbish and all the good, useful objects restored to use.

Some of the best pieces of furniture often are discarded and stowed away in the attic

of an old house. Something like happens to many good English words. They are relegated to the accumulating dust of neglect in the attic of our dialectal or vernacular speech, called the Dictionary.

All such words (and phrases) are of historic value to linguistics; but certain of them also retain their original dynamics and beauty; and many of these no doubt could be rescued from approaching archaism to the enrichment of our tongue.

Public characters now and then give new life or fresh currency to semi-forgotten words. *Desuetude*, *strenuous*, and *normalcy* were galvanized into artificial vigor by Presidental patronage, as it were. The example is less felicitous than conspicuous; but the thought back of it is this: What fortuitously is possible to commonplace words in a mediocre way, clearly is possible to better words by more intelligent design.

Men and women whose utterances are scrutinized by the public, naturally have wide

facilities for rescue work of this kind; but any person of knowledge and taste, however modest of station, may help to recover worthy parts of speech from the rubbish piles of our vocabulary.

There are many such words. Each person would make his choice, and the public would adopt for rejuvenation those words that should make the best appeal for usefulness to the needs of the mass-instinct.

A large number of plain words of great strength and rugged beauty have been cast aside for less virile words of effeminate taint. It may be too late in the history of English to expect a return to the shorter stronger words of an earlier epoch: *the saber strokes of Saxon Speech;* but it never is too late to regret their loss. A very ordinary example of the telling use of words of one syllable is given by J. A. Alexander:

Think not that strength lies in the big, round word,
Or that the brief and plain must needs be weak.
To whom can this be true who once has heard
The cry for help, the tongue that all men speak,

When want or woe or fear is at the throat,
So that each word gasped out is like a shriek
Pressed from the sore heart, or strange wild note
Sung by some fay or fiend? There is a strength
Which dies if stretched too far or spun too fine,
Which has more height than breadth, more depth than length.
Let but this force of thought and speech be mine,
And he that will may take the sleek, fat phrase,
Which glows and burns not, though it gleam and shine;
Light but not heat—a flash but not a blaze.

Nor is it mere strength that the short word boasts;
It serves of more than fight or storm to tell—
The roar of waves that dash the rock-ribbed coasts,
The crash of tall trees when the wild winds swell,
The roar of guns, the groans of men that die
On blood-stained fields. It has a voice as well
For them that far off on their sick beds lie,
For them that weep, for them that mourn the dead,
For them that laugh and dance and clasp the hand.

To joy's quick step as well as grief's low tread,
The sweet plain words we learn at first, keep time
And though the theme be sad or gay or grand,
With each, with all these may be made to chime
In thought or speech or song or prose or rhyme.

Our language needs all its plain, short, strong words—all its clean words, for they

challenge attention and they court inspection; their nakedness is their shield. We can say all we have to say with the very best of words, and we can get along admirably without any of the worse. Outside a few technical subjects, we have no occasion to invent words. It is very dangerous business in polite society. We should be able to express ourselves without the help of tireless and tiresome intensives. We have no use for nine-tenths of our synonyms. And while a man may be known by his expletives and a woman by her giggles, we should be as well off, all round, if they were not.

Now the question arises, how may the desire to use good language be stimulated, and how may it be gratified? Partly at least in education and in emulation discreetly practiced. Some knowledge of linguistics of course would be suggested; but we should not make the mistake of overloading linguistics with dusty science. An interest in the mysteries and the meanings of words stimulates one to

study. Education enables one to discriminate between correct and incorrect forms of speech. Spiritual dignity leads one to a noble choice. Example is powerful. Faults exposed, often lead to their avoidance. Bad example by recognized authority leads thoughtless folk to evil ways in speech, as elsewhere. Also exemplars of virtue are sure to have their followers. This is true in linguistics. The rule is general, and it is broad and big enough perhaps to excuse an occasional book of this kind.

R. H. B.

THE MYSTERY OF WORDS

PART FIRST

THE MYSTERY OF WORDS

I

BEGINNINGS AND ENDS

BEGINNINGS and ends are provisional conceptions. They enable us to study the changes of growth and decay between the two hypothetical extremes. We follow an endless chain of events in one direction. Having gone as far as we can go, we think of the *just-beyond* as a *beginning*. We follow as far as we can in an opposite direction, and that we call the *end*. But the terms *beginning* and *end* properly apply only to *phases*. Thus we may think of events as an endless chain having neither beginning nor end, since the beginning of one phase (or festoon of phases) links up with the end of another.

Philosophy can not deal with the origin of language as a simple phase, since at this point in linguistics the science has many divergent roots leading to biology, physiology, comparative anatomy, the gregarious instincts, anthropology, and the basic principles of psychology. But philosophy may deal with the origin of the parts of speech, or other factors of a tongue, as a relatively simple phase of an equally complex phenomenon.

Mystery, nevertheless, veils the origin of words even from the philosopher. He may study the phenomenon of their origin; but thus far he has not succeeded in explaining it to the satisfaction of his own mind. The faculty of speech seems to be inexplicable. How words came about, and just what they were at first, no man knows. Yet all men know that countless earlier forms have perished utterly, leaving no appreciable trace behind them.

The development of speech must have been inconceivably slow. Man did not become

human at a bound, but by one of the slowest of processes. When the human stage was reached, progress in certain directions was far more rapid, relatively, than that along any similar line in the prehuman stage. Still, there is no reason to suppose that speech far outstripped the other evolutionary phenomena active in primitive mankind.

Somehow, capability follows need in all the organized complexes of life. Fulfillment and desire are twin links in the chain of higher development. As the more advanced stages are reached, the energy of growth and the facility of unfolding seem to be released more readily through conscious than through subconscious effort. Aspiration may be the spiritual aspect of this general law of life as it arises from subliminal depths to the heights of consciousness, so to speak.

The humanity within us appears to be a synthesis of nature and art. Therefore, in a sense and to a degree, the nobler nature of man is self-created. Through this synthesis

we catch the few glimpses of ourselves, just as we see something of our own earth in a ray of light from the sun. Art, of course, is natural but it is not *nature*. A poem is more than words, however skilfully combined: soil, air, moisture, and light are the least of a garden rose. Nature gives capability; art implies skill; science supplies knowledge; and the synthesis of nature and art implies a mysterious x. Consciousness is inherited; capability also is transmitted through generation; skill and knowledge must be acquired through the power of will; but x remains x.

The mystery of words lies in the faculty of speech; the secret of their origin is physiologic and psychic. That is to say, word-making is a mental process effected through physiological means not only, but a process inherent in physical function. Nevertheless, words are born of the mind as truly as children are born of the womb—with this difference: words never are separated from the mind, since they can not exist alone. The

finest word in the world if uttered by an idiot has no meaning and therefore no being; it conveys nothing from one idiot to another. It may be pronounced perfectly, clearly written or plainly printed, yet it can not exist as a *word* apart from *mind*. If the absolute exists, it may be found in the subjectivity of words.

One of the early stages of speech passed through man's desire to communicate with his fellows. It hardly had satisfied this purpose when it aspired, as it were, to a higher: that of aiding thought. In a parallel manner, writing arose above the level of the communicating of ideas to the function of better thinking. And here it is interesting to note that as writing (and printing) becomes more general the gestural element of language becomes more restricted.

Early in the history of language, signs and sounds co-operated to increase the effectiveness of both. The organs of speech aided by others, especially those of sight and hear-

ing, developed. Words were invented. Simple speech developed into complicated language; and language assumed the important rôle of clarifying the understanding. Yet language never was adequate to thought, or its matrix—perhaps never will be, surely not as long as language is vivified by the spirit of progress; but words came to be the indispensable tools with which the soul must work out its destiny. What the hand was to the brain, the tongue is to the mind. Thus humanity found one of its authentic gods in itself. In that discovery lies the chief hope of the race.

II

THROUGH VAGUE EPOCHS

DURING the long period of racial infancy, the various signs and sounds that were to develop into speech and become language, were slightly differentiated, if at all, from the things they signified. The grunt and the physical satisfaction were so closely associated that they confused the mind. The croon of pleasure was felt in a vague sort of way to call forth the pleasure itself. The scream of fright was a shield. The cry of pain was soothing to the hurt. The roar of defiance was a weapon. The call of desire was the means, partly at least, of gratifying the desire. Magic probably was born at this stage. Signs such as certain grimaces, sounds, and gestures were so agreeable to the gregarious or pack-instinct that they became conventional and in time

social. The smile, the laugh, the frown, the handshake, the rubbing of noses, the embrace, peculiar inflections and guttural sounds acquired more or less definite significance, and their traces have persisted through all the many modifications that crystallized at last into social conventions. Thus language came to have functions besides those of thought and expression.

In time, man seized directly upon separate objects and he communicated to his kind such impressions of them as were most needful to be known, most readily understood, and most easily conveyed. From an idea of the things most obvious of themselves, to ideas of their simplest acts and qualities, was a long but inevitable way.

Thus the wondrous tools of the mind helped it to conceive from the simple to the complex, from the concrete to the abstract. By means of these tools the mind developed and multiplied the ideas it already had; and its greatest idea perhaps, measured by its utility,—

the most ancient idea that has shown steady growth and such amazing conquest,—is the idea of practical symbolism.

The mystery of the origin of words, then, always has baffled us. Scholars have tried to penetrate it by means of interesting theories cleverly set forth. The theories have not agreed; many have been abandoned; the investigations have not been conclusive; even the epoch of word-invention remains indeterminate. Much has been conjectured, but little is known. It no longer is assumed that words were given to our ancient kind by special act of Providence. In the light of modern science it does not seem reasonable to suppose that speech was given to primitive mankind as we give prepared food to children. It is not likely that words came into existence spontaneously, since no child ever was born with one upon its lips. Indeed nothing is more evident than that words were invented; that they are, as we understand them, an artificial product of human personality; that they

respond to needs as surely as tools supply wants: in brief, whatever else they may be, they certainly are tools.

Nothing is truer than that necessity is the mother of invention. Words were invented because they were needed; they have been used by man throughout the great part of his long history; all the while he has used them he has modified them; he has borrowed, discarded, and created others. Words in themselves, therefore, are not as mysterious as is the faculty for the making of them. Their deeper physiological mysteries are all the more interesting because they are related solely to man amongst all the other dwellers of earth.

No one dares to assume that man is the highest type of consciousness existent; but it does seem true that the faculty of speech raises him supremely above all his dumb fellows of this world; and the mystery of it is that anatomically he is not superior to some others, while admittedly he is inferior to many. With respect to language, man is a demi-god

of this particular sphere; and through the faculty of speech he is conscious of infinity,—through that faculty he is able to perceive some scattered rays of truth so sublime that he may be excused for calling them divine.

Word-making is a generic ability of mankind. No family group of dumb humankind, however low in the scale of development, ever has been discovered. Careful studies of the Java skull show that, even in the brain of Pithecanthropis, the speech-areas, although small and undeveloped, already existed. The same is true of other relics, notably the meagre remains of the Piltdown man, whose lower-jaw, however, lacks the development necessary for articulate speech, as we know it. The most rudimentary languages familiar to us contain the essential parts of speech, nouns, verbs, etc., which require mind for their existence; and the fine relationships of these parts of speech reveal *mind* as the source of construction from which rules of grammar may be drawn.

The fact that this faculty pertains exclusively to human beings is startling enough; but its creative powers are more remarkable; and they emphasize, moreover, the purely human character of the faculty. All this points to the spirit (or mind or *x* faculty) of man as the wellspring of speech; and thus it is easy to associate language with morals.

If we concede that the conscious human mind brought forth every word of every language, then we must admit that the totality of language is infinitely richer than any of its branches. The recognition of this provisional truth gave rise to the old saying that a man adds another to himself whenever he learns a new tongue.

The epoch of word-invention must remain vague. Naturally this is true if the epoch falls within the period covering the infancy of the race. This period has been pushed back into a very remote æon. It is probable that man became man, so to speak, sometime during the 500,000 years of the Pleistocene period,

when his prehuman-nature gave way to humanhood. He was manufacturing implements in Europe as early as 150,000 years ago. Long before this his speech must have had its beginnings.

During many ages the prehuman ancestors of man had aspired, subconsciously perhaps, to an upright carriage. For ages, man himself had known the benefit of the nearly erect posture. His changed physical attitude was, in some mysterious manner, the forerunner of his spiritual attitude. He was beginning to look toward the stars. But the slow change from four legs to two did not carry with it unalloyed blessings. As man arose from the more or less horizontal to the approximately perpendicular posture, he began to hope, to dream, to laugh, and to weep. Spiritual suffering came not through the "fall" of man but through his rise. His new posture also imposed anatomical penalties, the effects of which have not yet passed away. The abdominal cavity, for instance, is ill-suited to

carry the viscera in an upright posture. But the liberation of the arms in locomotion; man's ability to travel erect on two hind limbs; and the transfer of the anthropoid function of the big-toe of the fore-foot to that of an opposable thumb of the human hand, were an enormous recompense for the ills suffered through the change. From the ability to suffer as a man came his faculty to enjoy as a god. His new sorrows broke in ripples of laughter; his horizon broadened; his spirit longed for wings.

For ages, man's brain had been helped in its development by the advantages of his opposable thumb, perfectly capable of co-operating with each of his four fingers. The hand had become an efficient assistant of the brain. The more he used his hands, the more he stimulated the development of his brain; and the more his brain developed, the more skilful became his hands. We utilize this reaction between hand and brain even to-day in the training of children.

For ages, the brain had been growing and

undergoing adjustments of mass suitable to superanimal needs. One of the most marvelous acquirements of the human brain was its power of speech in one little area of either hemisphere. In the right-handed person, this speech-center became localized in the left. A little spot, situated in what is called the convolution of Broca, had become susceptible to an acquired change that made speech possible. Thus man found himself endowed with articulate speech. Without going into the reasons why, this only could have come about through the use of his hands during his individual and racial childhood.

Yet strangely enough, the faculty of speech is not congenital. Man is born as dumb as any other animal; but unlike other animals, he is born with the will-power of bringing forth in his brain a faculty that sets him apart from all the beasts of the earth. Still, no language ever came to him spontaneously. Every word was born of a need. His mind kissed his brain and words blossomed from

his lips. Nor did the words issue merely as sounds, but they came full-fledged as verbs, nouns, and other parts of speech which make up a language in its infancy.

The development of the faculty of speech was not owing to any difference in brain-structure, since anatomically it is the same with several groups of primates. But in man's brain, the particles of gray matter in a part of the cortex when subjected to the incessant repetition of certain stimuli develop the power of speech. Why is this? We say, rather loosely, that the personality longs to communicate with its fellow in accordance with one of the feminine instincts of the race. Eagerness preceded effort. The first effort to speak was a shudder; the shudder became a gesture; and the first "language" was not of the tongue, but of the hand—a gestural speech. Thus language was born of the hand; and spoken language, even in its most perfect form, still retains a large gestural element. The source of words is the mind; their

impellent force is personality urged by the interaction between need and longing. Words are inventions of the mind, which the brain, the nerves, and the muscles have learned to use.

During the long period from somewhere well within the Miocene and extending through the Pliocene Age, a steady and coincident development took place of the hand, the brain, the powers of upright locomotion, and of speech. Already, as we have seen, in Early Quaternary Times this development had reached the flower called human.

At this time we find our prehistoric *human* ancestors in Europe. They walk as we walk; they have our hands and brains. Their speech is rudimentary, but the brain-centers related to the higher senses are well developed, and they control perfectly all motions of the bodily members. The anterior centers of the brain are keenly awake, and they have long been busy in the hoarding of experience and the developing of ideas. Fifty thousand or

more years ago, these groups of intelligent human beings possessed faculties and powers in all essentials "modern," though still in the dawn of education. These folk saw as we see, felt as we feel, and they otherwise functioned as we function to-day. They were men and women with our emotions, hopes, and dreams. They were bound to our cycle of childhood, vigor, and senility—beings of our own intellectual timbre, more roughly hewn perhaps and more ruggedly joined.

Beyond these racial groups in time, we see others vaguely that are intelligent, and still of an Eastern origin drawn Westward by migration, and ever lower in order as the period recedes, until man's earliest ancestry is reduced to the level of brutedom.

One of the most significant facts in the study of prehistoric man, and one that yet may throw much light on his language, is his rapid spiritual ascendancy. That his higher development was relatively swift and progressive is made evident by an examination of

his anatomical remains; and chief of these is the skull about which centers his most important evolutionary progress. A multitude of other facts related to his life indicate that his spiritual growth was rapid.

For much of our knowledge on these subjects we are indebted, directly and between lines, to the investigations of such scholars as Breuil, Cartailhac, Obermaier, Osborn, Avebury, Bégouen, Boule, Broca, Darwin, Déchelette, and a host of others. Through their eyes, as it were, we are enabled to visualize prehistoric times; and, as a result of their work, modern man gains a new conception of the antiquity of his race and speech; he is able to understand better than ever before the unfolding of the human spirit as it occurred in very early times. Illuminating relationships are established across thousands of changing years, forming a medium through which the human mind of to-day may come in touch with the powers of human observation, of discovery, and of invention during an

antiquity so remote that in contrast with it the period of "Egyptian, Ægean, and Mesopotamian civilizations appear as of yesterday." (Osborn.)

III

THE FACULTY OF SPEECH AND THE SPEECH-CENTERS

THE origin of man has been traced to Eastern prehuman groups. The origin of words has been traced to the mind through the faculty of speech. Just when our kind became human, no one knows. When man acquired the most important of his peculiar faculties, no one knows. This much seems probable: There was no common origin of language in the sense that from one primal tongue all others were derived. There are elements in the various known languages which are contrary to this view, even when all allowances have been made for transmutation under environmental pressure. Words, construction, and subtleties of meaning differ too widely in basic character to have sprung

from a common ancestral speech. Conscious personality and group-variations of character at different periods under different stress must have moulded into families our primitive speech, if the mind is its mother. In later times but very far back, the earlier tribal tongues split into branches and otherwise became modified.

The fact that words issue from anatomical locations clearly fixed in the gray matter of the brain, does not argue that the speech-areas originate the words. The origin of the word is the idea of which the word is, among other things, the symbol. That particular area of the brain which made it possible for us to utilize the symbols of our ideas became fit for the purpose, first, through gestural relationship with the motor-centers in the brain. More searching inquiry shows that in all right-handed persons the speech-center is localized in the left hemisphere of the brain; left-handed persons have it in the right. Stone implements made by early man demonstrate

that we have been right-handed for many thousands of years at least. Everything seems to indicate that the majority of our kind always was right-handed; and it has been proved that all right-handed persons have their word-areas in the left brain. This establishes the relationship between the right-hand, or the principal gestural organ, and the speech-area.

The thinker slowly and laboriously invented the instruments with which to define his thoughts. Habit gradually gave to the instrument so much the mastery of the mind that as modern man approaches adult life he is only capable of thinking by means of the instruments of his earlier racial invention. One may visualize without language, but no one can think in terms other than words. This characteristic of mental process determines true thought. Emotion is a very different phenomenon. Feeling finds expression in a wide range of terms and in various media. Certain emotions may be expressed

better in music than in words—certain others in form—and still others in color. Again there are feelings that can not be expressed at all in words, for the mind harbors more than it knows and it has no clear symbols ready for use in certain of its conscious states.

This is not to drag in metaphysics; nor is it a theory made to fit certain isolated facts; but it is, rather, a deduction from physical facts. Clinical experience has shown that damage done to the speech-area may totally destroy the powers of thought while it leaves the emotional faculties seemingly undisturbed. It is clear, therefore, that words in their combinations are the instruments of thought; and that they are, in a limited sense, the masters or moulders of thought, if not actually the thought itself. Thus the ethical relations between language and thought may be much more intimate than is commonly suspected even by the most carefully spoken person of extreme moral sensibility.

We are indebted to modern physicians for

the discovery of relations between word and brain. The physician has laid bare the only link ever found by science between mind and matter. It came about through the study of injuries to the human brain. The vivisection of brutes never could have revealed it. Thus it has been demonstrated that an injury to the visual-area of speech produces word-blindness. That is to say, the eyesight is unimpaired, but the portion of the brain that registers for interpretation the written or the printed word becomes illiterate and useless. Oral words are correctly registered in another area, and still another region of the brain permits them to be intelligently uttered.

Likewise a damage to the auditory locality of speech may produce total word-deafness whilst the victim still retains the perfect faculties of reading and writing. Such unfortunate persons may be deaf to words, as *words*, spoken either by themselves or others; and consequently they are capable only of incoherent speech while yet competent to

recognize a multitude of other sounds as well and as rationally as ever.

Another kind of word-failure, or aphasia with agraphia resulting from brain injury, is common. The patient sees, hears, and understands the spoken or the written word, but he is incapable of speaking or writing it. That is to say, his motor-mechanism of speech is destroyed.

Three distinct speech-areas have been located in the brain, while a fourth exists which has not yet perhaps been found. We are conscious of words reaching us through the three special senses of sight, hearing, and touch. The visual-area is known to be in the cortex of the angular gyrus; the auditory-area is found in the first temporal convolution; the touch-area, developed in the deaf- and blind-mute, has not, I believe, been found. These are the passive or sensory areas of speech which register the incoming words. That part of the faculty of speech which is active is called the motor-center.

This area contains the mechanism for giving forth words orally and in writing, as well as speech-signs and gestures. The center lies in another part of the brain cortex closely related to the areas which start the muscular movements of articulation; and it is contiguous to the region that governs the movements of the hands. This small body of gray matter is located, as we have seen, in the convolution of Broca. Every spoken and written word depends on the integrity of this little body which, when injured in adult life, renders it difficult for the will to utilize the corresponding body in theopposite hemisphere—after middle life it virtually is impossible.

These areas of the brain which harbor the faculty of speech do not originate our words any more than paper and type originate them; but like paper and type the sensory areas register the incoming words, and like a phonograph the motor-areas discharge the outgoing words. Therefore, of the mind all words are

born; in the mind they dwell and have their being; but in the brain a mysterious mechanism gives them currency.

A curious characteristic of this mechanism—one that identifies it as a mechanism—is that it can not turn out indifferently the product of two languages. Each language requires its own anatomical area. The group of cells educated for English, for instance, can not be made to turn out another language. Each language must have its own group of cells. This has been demonstrated clinically in the study of injuries to the brains of polyglots. A man knowing several languages may have the area of one destroyed and retain the others. These areas are so intimately related, however, that harm done to the group of cells built up for one language is very likely to damage the other groups; although in the reports of Hinshelwood, of the University of Glasgow, it is recorded that a patient retained his Greek perfectly, his Latin less well, and that he was progressively weaker in

French and English—the last being his mother-tongue; also that the progressive weakness of his power over the several tongues was in the reverse order of their respective acquirements. This anatomical characteristic, or mechanism, of the speech-areas seems to be general with them.

Another mystery of words in relation to their centers in the brain clings to this clinical fact: When the most usual form of aphasia, for example, is produced by disease, and when the disease yields to medical treatment, the patient recovers his verbs first and his nouns last. Clinical observation has noted that as recovery advances the verbs come first, later the prepositions, and last of all the nouns.

This is mentioned as one of the mysteries of words, and so it seems to be, although Dr. William Hanna Thomson, in his remarkable work on *Brain and Personality*, says: "The reasons for all this are that verbs are our innermost and, therefore, first learned words, because we know that we see, we hear, etc.;

before we know what it is we see or hear, while nouns represent things outside of (?) us to which we lastly give names. The nouns which we learn after all others, and therefore forget soonest, are the names of persons, so that elderly people very commonly complain how (?) they can not recall persons' names."

Founded on some of the theories of memory, this is good reasoning; but it pushes back the mystery only a step. Why should this mechanism manifest a peculiar selective power over the different parts of speech? Why should the verb-cells be stronger than the noun-cells? Or if there be no actual verb-cells and noun-cells, why should the verb-impressions be deeper than the noun-impressions? Again, if they are not "impressions" but rather the functions of automatic cells fixed by habit, why should these functions wake up from the slumber of disease with a verb rather than a noun on their lips. After impairment, why should this gray matter resume its function with a selective

affinity for verbs over the other parts of speech? There are nouns as old as verbs—perhaps older. Man probably named many things before he was conscious of their functions and qualities. The question may be solved when we learn more of our subconscious nature. This and many other mysteries of words may clear up as our knowledge increases of physiology and psychology; for, although we have made great progress in these studies, still we may be only in the primary grades.

Disturbances of the faculty of speech in brain-shock or paraphasia have been carefully studied; and it has been noted in this condition that while the patient may be able to speak, his words show a tendency to jumble. Wrong words persistently and vexatiously present themselves. That is to say, the mechanism in the region of Broca is out of order; it fails to function properly. If words originated in the mechanism and not in the ideas, of which the words are symbols,

there would be no consciousness of faulty function—of the wrong word. But the contrary happens: the mind is conscious of the failure of its machine to do its work. This indicates that the mind makes use of this part of the brain at least, much as one uses a typewriting or other similar machine. In using a damaged typewriting machine, for instance, one may have a clear motive and he may be able to strike the keys accurately, but the instrument responds faultily with wrong letters (parts of words) just as a slightly injured speech-area responds to clear purpose with faulty words (parts of speech). If the mind were only a function of the brain—or at least, if words were a function of the speech-center, merely—naturally there would be no consciousness of impairment. This phase of consciousness, therefore, must occupy some complex in time or space or relationship outside, if not separate from, that occupied by the functions of the brain. All this deepens the mysteries surrounding our words;

or, rather, as we think on the subject, we become more keenly aware of our lack of exact knowledge—certainly, in the relationship of brain to mind.

For the most part, the brain is a barren waste. Only a few parts of the cortex have been cultivated and made productive; yet there are many useful little garden patches which have been tilled by labor, titillated by play, and watered with tears besides the little areas of speech. There is one, not yet located I believe, which registers musical notes, and another to give them forth. These regions may remain uncultivated and lie fallow through life; or having been cultivated, they may be rendered useless and sterile by accident or disease while the speech-areas remain unharmed. There is a register-area for mathematics, another for form, and another for color. We all have known great artists! consummate colorists, exquisite delineators, and superb acrobatic performers on musical instruments who were virtual idiots other-

wise almost entirely. The specialized mechanisms in the brain are, it is true, so related that damage done to one usually impairs others; but sometimes it does not. One exception is enough to kill any rule.

There also are well-developed regions in the gray matter for the registration and the giving forth of mathematical symbols expressing series, functions, etc., as well as arithmetical numbers. Dr. Thomson reports a case (*Brain and Personality*) of word-blindness and muteness caused by apoplexy. Yet the patient was capable of directing his extensive business affairs during the seven remaining years of his life; and he also was competent to make his will, because his auditory mechanism and his faculty of reading and writing figures were unharmed. He tried persistently to regain some of his lost power over words, and failed. Dr. Thomson says: "Mentally he was just the same, and his personality with all its peculiarities remained the same, but those particular

chords of the instrument were irretrievably broken."

What then were these "particular chords of the instrument," and how do they relate words to mind? How is the mysterious link which has been discovered by the physician in the brain of man to be interpreted by the philosopher in the realm of thought? Until this interpretation is satisfactorily made, the mystery of words deepens.

To repeat! The structure of man's brain and that of the anthropoid ape's differ in no respect. The same anatomical features are present in both. Both have the convolutions in pairs. Each hemisphere, both in man and ape, duplicates the other. In man the speech-area is located in one hemisphere—in the ape, in neither. If speech depended solely on the anatomy of the brain, the highest tribe of apes should be as capable of speech as the lowest tribes of men. For the same reason the speech-area should be doubled; that is to say, it would be found in both

hemispheres. But no speech-area exists in the brain of ape, and it occurs virtually in only one hemisphere of the brain of man. The other hemisphere of the human brain remains as barren as both hemispheres of the ape's brain. The faculty of speech therefore did not originate in anatomy. Since it exists, its origin must have been phsyiological.

In all right-handed persons, then, it is the left hemisphere of the brain that holds the speech-centers. Words are uttered by means of the left convolution of Broca; they are seen by means of the left angular gyrus; they are heard by means of the left superior temporal convolution. Where they are felt, by the right-handed blind deaf-mute, is not known precisely; but that this center also lies in the left hemisphere there is no doubt.

The bald fact that the left cerebral hemisphere has held the speech-centers of the majority of mankind through its long history would indicate that the left brain differed in some innate respect from its twin, the right.

Such inference would be incorrect, however, because some persons, in no sense inferior to the others, have their speech-faculties as exclusively located in the right hemisphere as the large majority of folk have in the left. Therefore one must look elsewhere than in original structure, composition, relationship, etc., for the reason why the faculty of speech became localized in one side of the brain—usually the left.

Originally the brain is uniform of structure throughout in apelike man and manlike ape. No part of it is endowed with the faculty of speech. The mind of apelike man begins to feel the need of language. It is more and more pressed by necessity. The instrumentality of words becomes an imperious need at some epoch in time—at some phase of evolution—at some peak of change—on some plane of development—or at some state of consciousness. This need becomes a necessity in the early stages of human development. The birth of language now can not

be delayed. Meanwhile the mind has been seeking methods and means of satisfying the want—of obeying the law. It would be futile to try to follow the methods understandingly or to try to describe them intelligently. It is possible, nevertheless, even with our lack of knowledge and poverty of data to take a glimpse at the means.

The first speech was gestural, and very largely gestural its successors remain. Primitive man struggled with gestural problems which he tried to bend to his *Will*. His will was to communicate with his fellows. Gesture was his most effective, if not only, means. He probably was right-handed then as his generations mostly have been since; but whether right- or left-handed, his hand was his chief organ of gesture. That part of his brain which governed the movements of his most effective gestural organ was the part that must have been most susceptible to the educational influences of his will. Thus the

physiological intimacy began between hand and speech-center.

The area in the brain which controls the movements of the hand is closely associated with the area that governs the muscular movements of face, lips, and tongue. That there is a relationship between gesture and grimace may be readily demonstrated. Facial expression is known to be closely related to movements of lips and tongue. From gesture to grimace; from facial expression to guttural, lingual, and labial sound is only a step when largely considered. Of course the mind dominated gesture, grimace, and vocal sound; for without the human mind the sounds, and all the rest, must have remained like those of the ape—they never could have developed into human language.

Right-handed man naturally used his right-hand more than his left in his early sign-speech. As the will sought to assist the hand by forcing other organs to take part in speech, it adopted what one might well call a com-

mon-sense-method. The centers in the left brain most closely associated with the governing center of the right-hand were pressed into service. Obviously, it is more in harmony with the principle of common sense to call upon nearby associates in the left brain than to seek aid by crossing to the right over the bridge called *corpus collosum*. Hence the habit of doing this special work became fixed for life in the centers of the left brain.

What caused the general run of mankind to use one hand more than the other is unknown. The phenomenon may be related in some way to the law of rhythm that seems to operate throughout all nature. All that can be said about it is that nature makes it a rule to accent, as it were, one of a pair of organs. They never are exactly alike in size, shape, or intensity of function. That the right-hand should have received this "accent" or functional emphasis through the ages is another mystery associated with words

through their relationship with hand and brain.

The reason why some persons are left-handed and fewer ambidexterous is not essential to the present discussion. It is sufficient to note that the speech-centers of the left-handed are situated in the right brain. The relationship between the hand and the mechanism of speech in the brain is conclusively established by the fact that the hand most used determines by force of habit to what part of the brain words must go for registration, and from what part they must come on their mission from mind to mind.

From known facts it is reasonable to assume that the ambidexterous person has speech-centers developed in both hemispheres of the brain. I am not aware that clinical experience has shown this to be true; but that it is true of the perfectly ambidexterous, there can be little doubt. If it is true, it presents an educational problem of importance to infancy and youth. For, by developing the speech-

centers in both hemispheres the person would be considerably fortified against the possible aphasias in later life, caused by traumatism and disease.

It would be interesting, but not to the point, to compare the theories which try to elucidate the process by which the hand, for example, obeys its motor-center in the brain. The fact that it does obey that center is enough for present purposes.

The speech-center of Broca's convolution, for instance, is of the brain itself. What then is the physiology of its function? Why is one of Broca's convolutions dumb through life, and why does the other speak? To say that words are of automatic origin does not explain the function of speech. If it can be shown, however, that secondary anatomical changes are purposely, albeit subconsciously, wrought in certain areas of brain substance, then the mystery may be penetrated a little way farther.

The sounds of words may be imitated auto-

matically and thus endlessly repeated; but they can not be used as words—as parts of speech—until they are defined or given meaning. The definitions of words must be learned. The learning of word-meanings is a process much more complicated than the act of repeating their sounds. The complexity is increased in learning to read, for there is no similarity between the sound of a spoken word and the appearance of one written.

From the vast amount of data available, it may be safely assumed that any normal person of any tribe can be taught to read. Learning to read is a laborious process: it requires acute attention, perseverance of application, and a long series of repetitions in order to identify the letters of a word, and to associate meanings with words separately and in their combinations. The word and its signification—the symbol and the idea—must be simultaneously recognized by the mind through alterations specially made in definite regions of brain substance. This only can

be accomplished through duration in time by concentrated and specific effort. It would hardly do to call the process automatic. If any process may be imputed to the will, certainly this one may be. Besides, it easily is demonstrable that until some modification of gray matter is effected, the process of learning to read does not take place.

The principle underlying the mastery of a language is exemplified in the well-known reaction of nerve to a stimulus. Usually the nerve-substance is only slightly disturbed at first; that is to say, the reaction is feeble and brief; but a continual repetition of the stimulus increases the disturbance, intensifies the reaction until through habit, or what not, a permanent alteration is brought about in the nerve-substance. A new function follows the alteration; the function becomes more and more nearly constant under successive acts of stimulation.

It is only through the "spirit's plastic stress" and a corresponding susceptibility of

the gray matter that education conceivably is possible. Thus only may a part of the brain be taught a new function; and thus only may it be cultivated to receive and to bring forth that of which it previously was incapable. It is true that no physical changes have been observed in the gray matter cultivated by act of will often repeated; but if physical interference may disturb nervous function, it follows that physical changes have occurred in the substance during the process of its education.

If the brain-cells could teach themselves, there would be no conscious effort—no consciousness of will-power—in the learning of a language. There must be effort back of the stimulus to initiate it; and back of the effort there must be purpose; and back of all there must be will-power to stabilize and to make continuous the purpose in a series of intelligent efforts. The detached question of *will*, *imagination*, and *personality*, is quite another matter.

The proof that there are material changes in the cell-groups of gray matter which have been educated in language is shown, as we have seen, by the study of injuries to the brains of polyglots who successively acquired several tongues. When the speech-area which governs the mastery of the mother-tongue is injured, the areas cultivated for the other languages may perform their functions without appreciable embarrassment. This proves that there are definite and distinct regions in the nervous substance which have been modified: one for the requirements of one language, and one for those of another. Whether these modifications are wrought in strata or in superficial contiguous zones would be difficult to say. This however is sure: That which is subject to material interference must have some material basis.

So we see that the human brain, in regard to language with which we are now concerned, is capable of a vast increase of function not only, but also of the acquirement

of new functions over those that came by inheritance.

The mysteries of words, then, when slightly penetrated or pushed backward, are seen to involve educational and ethical problems of importance. All training indeed, whether artistic, scientific, or moral, no longer can be regarded vaguely as "mental," but must be recognized as involving physical changes in nervous substance; and that only through the modification of nervous substance may any training produce permanent or practical results.

No doubt, all the arts and crafts have their special centers in the cortex of the brain. In learning the art of painting, for example, it is as necessary to modify some part of the brain-substance as it is in the process of acquiring a language. The same principle applies to all the handicrafts, as has been proved repeatedly by clinical experience.

IV

LINGUISTICS IN GENERAL

WORDS can not be satisfactorily studied by themselves. Important as they are, separately considered and in their relations with each other, their categories and their wider kinship are even more important if one would pry into the secret of their significations. Although the popular conception of language is that it is merely a mass of words capable of combination according to rule, at need and will, it really is much more than the whole bulk of nomenclature in the world.

Language is a social institution of a special nature; and its peculiar province is to express ideas by means of a nicely organized system of signs. Thus the science of language embraces the study of signs employed by the intellec-

tuality of mankind with reference to social necessities. We learn what the signs are, what governs them; and by this means we perceive the more definite boundaries of linguistics, which occur inside the general scope of the science of signs.

To the psychologist falls the task of determining the scope of semiology; the linguist is concerned chiefly with the characteristics of speech or tongue, whereby a part is used with which to explain the whole. The sociologist is interested in the relations that connect the broad institution of language with associated conventions.

History shows that the psychologist devotes himself too exclusively to the metaphysics of the individual mind; also that usually the physiologist is too much engrossed with the working of the mechanism of the speech-centers, the muscles, etc., of the individual; and so forward in a different way with the grammarian, the philologist, and the others. Each neglects more or less some

characteristic of language as a whole for the characteristics of the tongue as a part. Specialists also seem to overlook the fact that there are traits of language no longer subject to the will; and other scholars over-emphasize the voluntary control of speech.

While the mysterious energies of language forever at play are many and diverse, the basic problem of linguistics is that of signs. It is from the study of signs that we borrow our most telling significations of a language. The sounds of words in themselves are of secondary moment since they serve mainly to distinguish one system from another of the same order. One only has to listen to a strange tongue to realize what a small part of a word is its sound; and at the same time, one is compelled to feel that language is a very large social phenomenon.

It is plain that words can not be regarded solely as symbols of ideas. One aspect presents their relations to each other; another side reveals them as pure sounds; again they

may be viewed as orthographic units, having much to teach one who has the patient industry to inquire into their histories and changes. Both as thought stimuli and continua, words afford an attractive field of investigation. Their capability of associating ideas, and their powers as evocatives of images, emotions, and physiological processes are recognized. Moreover it is suspected that they may be capable of determining point-of-view not only but that in divers respects they are the mere creatures of view-point; and that they may be colored by methods of observation or enriched by experience.

Words may be decomposed into letters and syllables which in turn compose themselves into separate and composite symbols. Letters and syllables coalesce into word-sounds through the magic of phonation; yet they can exist only by means of the co-ordination of vocal and auditory functions. The faculties of co-ordination, of association, play necessary rôles; and until these faculties are

better understood, the mysteries of words must remain rather thick.

The spoken word, simple as it seems, requires a great number of muscular movements with extremely complex associations. All this is difficult to understand and harder to explain. Indeed oral speech has several strong characteristics which we are wont to ignore. Some of them pertain to the individual; others are social; some are essential; others are accessories; some are invariable; others are accidental or whimsical.

Let me illustrate the simplest relations of the spoken word, although reference has been made to it in another chapter. Not fewer than two persons, of course, must be assumed. A psychic phenomenon arises with one. This phenomenon affects the center of speech which, as we have already seen, is situated in the third frontal convolution. A physiological process follows when the speech-center starts the phonetic organs in action. The sounds signify the psychic image in a series of

sonorous waves rolling from the mouth of one person to the ear of the other. This is purely a physical phenomenon which started as a psychical and passed into a physiological, as an intermediary step. Through an inverse order the physical phenomenon starts a physiological process involving the organ of hearing and its center in the brain. This process conveys an acoustic impulse which, in turn, arouses a psychic phenomenon whether it be an image, an emotion, or a concept, according to the standards of meaning accepted by both parties to the act. In conversation these phenomenal series follow in alternate repetition. To make language possible, there must be, at least, an approximate standard of values for signs, gestures, conceptions, and feelings. This social crystallization took place before words were invented, or rather *as* they were invented.

This is the simplest illustration that can be made of the circuit of speech. It does not take account of many co-relative phenomena

such as active acoustic impulses that awaken latent acoustic sensations, the muscular images of phonation, etc. It is sufficient for the moment to show the essential relations in the circuit without any attempt to differentiate the various images produced. The circuit starts in the mind of one person, passes exteriorally, and enters the mind of the other. It is (*a*) psychical—(*b*) physiological—(*c*) physical. With the second person it is (*a*) physical—(*b*) physiological)—(*c*) psychical. The circuit always has two opposing parts, active and passive; or, let us say, one part is projective, the other receptive.

Words unite in phrases to produce synthetic phenomena; words are related to the organs of sight and, as we have seen with the deaf and blind, words also are related to the organs of touch. Words have special areas in the brain, some of which areas are provided with motor-mechanisms for propulsion, and others with sensory mechanisms for registration.

Thus words do not exist in sound only, since the sound merely is an instrument of the idea; neither can a word exist fully in its written or printed form, for the form is a symbol. It can not exist as a word merely in physiologic function, because the physiologic function must pass into a psychologic process before the mind can interpret the final phenomenon as a word.

Words, therefore, are one of the many complex elements of language. Their broader relations and subtler significances may be perceived only through various avenues of approach, as we shall see presently. It also will be clear to us that words have two notable phases: one that reflects the individual, as it were, and one that reflects society,—neither phase of this aspect of the phenomenon can stand without the other.

Besides, words have time-functions that affect them each instant with the consciousness of duration. They are influenced by the three tenses: conception of time present, past,

and future. And so it appears that a word can not exist in any one simple phase through which it passes, but that it must maintain its complex being in many phases at the same instant in time, or lose its integrity. Any other conception of words only leads us in a circle.

The mystery of words therefore forces us to consider several sciences: physiology, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, physics, semiology, comparative grammar, philology, linguistic and grammatic norms.

Of course the great grammar exists in the mind of the multitude. The grammar of our books is more or less dead and more than less embalmed. The only perfect grammar is a mutable sea of laws bearing on its bosom flexible but constant relations between series of phenomena in a system of signs. Through the mind of the masses this sea ebbs and flows, forever beating on the shores of consciousness. Never does the individual mind perceive more than a narrow horizon of this mysterious sea.

Linguistics, or the broad science of language, seeks to ascertain the general principles which govern the multiform manifestations of energy throughout language. The more special aim of this science is to render intelligible the affinities between different tongues. It does not restrict its inquiries to any epoch or family group of speech. It is as much interested in an obscure idiom of a savage tongue as it is in the most polished period of classic utterance. The decaying and archaic forms of speech comprise a field as fecund as that of the younger, virile growths. In a word, linguistics is concerned to its full limits with all forms of expression common to language past and present. It can not neglect the history of language in general if it would discover the history of its families. One's mother-tongue is not actually known until one has formed some sort of acquaintance with related tongues. Something should be known of the universal forces engaged in the phenomena of language. The study prom-

ises well when it proceeds from general laws to particular phenomena—from the history of language as a whole to the historic incidents of its parts or groups.

Linguistics has many tasks: First, it must limit and define itself. Then it must recognize the affinities between itself and many other sciences; and it must group the relations that pertain especially to each science, although these relations can not always be clearly separated. It must consider man not only as a biologic species but as a sociologic order, and it must accept language as a social fact. It must study not only the race, but the psychology of the race. It can ignore neither nervous structure nor nervous function. It must take note of the differences between oral and written speech, and it must find the law that correlates these differences. It must determine the points of contact between philology and linguistics—understand how one science varies from the other, and, at the same time, how one supports the other.

Linguistics is interesting to scholars not only, but it should be attractive to all persons who, inclined toward general culture, aspire to enlightenment. Not that it is possible for any one person to master the science, but it is easily within reach of multitudes of persons wishing to profit intellectually and spiritually by a study of this subject.

At present the science is too closely identified with specialists; the lay mind has not found it very inviting. The average person regards it as ornamental or dry. Yet its board usefulness, its cultural uplift, and its special utilities must rely upon its universality of interest—upon a popular awakening to its educational facilities, to its intellectual benefits, and to the value of its leavening force as applied to finer ideals.

One great task of linguistics should be to clear away the popular misconceptions springing like mushrooms from the fantastic errors of specialists, and to displace absurd specu-

lations and dry lingos with reasonable deductions alive with human interest.

Already a great deal has been done. The relations existing between effects of linguistic energies at play, have been discovered to be orderly. Wherever order is established, successful investigation is possible. The science of philology has not been idle; on the contrary, it long has been a favorite field of research. The mistake made by philologists, however, has been in assuming that philology is the principal means of understanding the phenomena of linguistics; whereas in truth it is only one means of studying them.

Modern philology may be said to have had its beginnings in the latter part of the 18th century; and its father was Friedrich August Wolf. The subject is broad, having to do with literature, criticism, history, interpretation, comparison, explanation, archaic researches, etc. Its great weakness has been a tendency to concern itself too much with written language and too little with the spoken forms.

Philology naturally led up to the comparison of one tongue with another, to comparative grammar. Franz Bopp, early in the 19th century, although not the first to do good work of the kind yet rendered useful service in showing the affinities between Sanscrit, Greek, Latin, and the Germanic tongues. The forms of one language are clarified by an exposition of paradigms selected from another.

Following Bopp's came Jacob Grimm's well-known work before the middle of the 19th century; and then the researches of Pott, Kuhn, and others. In the train appeared Max Müller and his school, with the result that a great deal was added to the knowledge of language. Müller, especially, did much to popularize the subject. In due course Schleicher accomplished considerable in the detailed codification of his own and previous research. He systematized indeed the work of Bopp and that of other predecessors.

All this work is meritorious, for it opens up to the science of language hitherto unsuspected fertile fields. The most obvious defect is the emphasis thrown, consciously or not, on the study of the comparative relationships of tongues. Moreover the tendency of this work is to ignore, or at least to slight, other vital relations; consequently many erroneous conceptions of language as a whole were encouraged. Confusion was wrought in the study of linguistics by strange statements and by fantastic speculations which were accepted, if not given, as true explanations.

About the middle of the 19th century or a little later, the conditions involving the life of language began to receive more rational attention; and since that time they have been questioned to a better purpose. The study became more and more concrete. It was perceived, for instance, that language is not a self-developing organism, but that it is a product of the human spirit at work in a col-

lective manner; and therefore that the "life of a language" is a figure of speech, since language lives only by virtue of those who speak it. A more careful study of the Indo-European family of tongues threw much new light on the Romantic and the Germanic groups. This fresh light made it necessary to revise many of the earlier conceptions.

Whitney's *Life and Growth of Language* gave a new impulse to the study of linguistics. The impulse soon was followed by a school of neogrammarians, conspicuous in which school were Brugmann, Osthoff, Braune, Sievers, Paul, and Leskien. This school cleared up the historic perspective of achievements in the comparative method of research; and it rendered the further service of placing the facts in their natural order.

In more recent times the most notable contribution made to linguistics—the most rational and comprehensive—is that of the late Ferdinand de Saussure of Geneva. Unfortunately Professor de Saussure died without

publishing his work—indeed without leaving notes of any material value on the subject. But his work lives in the minds and in the note-books of his disciples. As recently as 1916, thanks to their love and loyalty, some of his distinguished pupils and colleagues conserved in book form at least the spirit of the master's thought. The unavoidable defects of a work of this kind are modestly acknowledged in the preface; and the brilliant achievements are in evidence throughout the 336 pages of the *Cours de Linguistique Générale.*

Much may be said of the work done in all the special fields of linguistic investigation. For immediate purposes it is sufficient to note that the requirements imposed by the several allied sciences render the subject hopeless of mastery by any one person—certainly by the general run of mankind. This truth seems all the more pointed by a contemplation of the failures of so many of the specialists whose very successes have not always been convinc-

ing even if now and then dazzling to the layman.

It is plain, therefore, that simpler conceptions must be sought if popular interest in the study of linguistics is to be awakened and sustained. For as I have said, popular interest is the only practical means of attaining the broad, permanent, and beneficial results desired of this science.

What then are these simpler conceptions so much needed by the masses? I should say they were two: (1) A conception of a provisional order which for practical purposes disregards the special subtleties of the phenomena of language as a whole. For these things and their intricate relations may very well be left in the philosophic domain of linguistics—problems for specialists. (2) A conception, also provisional, which permits the consideration of one of the great parts of language—preferably one's mother-tongue—as a social, moral, and intellectual medium capable of circulating the necessary conven-

tions amongst individuals and groups. For although the laws of language are many, and although the relations are subtle and diverse —appearing now and then even whimsical and capricious—and, although some are physiological, some physical, others psychical and what not, yet the principal (because it is the practical) significance of linguistics is social.

Thus, while language in general may be classed as a natural phenomenon, a particular tongue must be regarded as an acquired means to an end—an artifice of conventionality—one, therefore which is subordinate to the purposes of society—one that is superior but helpful to the individual; and happily one that is somewhat amenable to conservation and to improvement.

V

ORAL WORDS, ETC.

NOTHING is mysterious that is well known or unknown. Mystery is the protean spirit of twilight more nimble than the waves of the sea. Proceeding from clear vision to the point where vision ceases, an intermediate station may be found perhaps at which this spirit is most active. If, for illustration, a curve were drawn from the known to the unknown, from that which is clearly perceived to that which is just beyond range, at a point somewhere in the half-light the element of mystery would be deepest. This probably is true of words and the relations that involve them.

Few instruments of the mind are more continually used, and abused, than are our words. From babbling infancy to garrulous dotage,

they are our most intimate companions, our most faithful servants. They play such a large part in the phenomena of our being that, paradoxically, we fail to regard them as the chief actor-element in our lives. They are too much of us to be dissociated from us. We accept them as a matter-of-course, just as we accept our bodily members. We pass through life's little day oblivious of their deeper significations,—only mildly attracted by their mysteries.

Some of the characteristics of words have been noted, others have been suggested. We have seen that the simplest aspect of a word is complex, and that the word itself is widely related. The spoken word, for instance, is a sound entirely homogeneous produced by the organs of speech. The sound is made up of elements which flow together so harmoniously that where one sound ends and another begins is indeterminate. These parts blend and flux into an acoustic impulse which carries the image as a soul.

Reduced to its simplest analysis, the spoken word contains three elements: (*a*) its vocal sound; (*b*) its acoustic impulse; (*c*) its mental image. These three elements of an oral word determine the quality of its impression or registration, as well as the character of the process, and the spirit of its interpretation. The oral word therefore bears no more necessary relation to the phonetic organs than to the auditory; it is no more closely related to the physical than to the physiological process; and the image or the soul of a word is as indispensable, surely, to the psychic phenomenon as to any other link in the chain.

The spoken word has no more primary connection with the alphabet than with the ideograph. The alphabet relatively is a late invention of signs with which to suggest word-sounds in writing. The alphabet performs its function principally through the sight. The symbols are learned, and they are given their arbitrary phonetic associations and their acoustic equivalents which must be fixed in

memory by repetition extended into habit. Some earlier alphabets were so admirably constructed that each graphic symbol stood for a single invariable sound. There were no letters representing double sounds, and none for sounds that vary according to the position of the letters. This was an ideal means of phonetic writing from which later methods generally have diverged.

Leaving out of this discussion the various alphabetic schemes to designate the concatenation of single and syllabic sounds which flux into an homogeneous word-sound, and making no attempt to add anything to the special work that has been ably done on the principles and elements of phonetics, yet it is evident that the characteristics and the relations of words are many and complex. The time-factor in the succession of sounds entering an oral word; the rhythmic impulse affecting sound-words separately, giving them a significant unity in combination; the relations between classes of words falling into an

indefinite number of species; the relations between the phonetic apparatus and the sounds produced, etc., would require volumes of discourse in any worthy attempt to unravel the mysteries. Yet I dare say, in all the different factors that produce the sounds, and in all their differential elements, there are principles which, if recognized and studied, would greatly aid us in our efforts to understand the phenomena involved.

Many analyses have been made of English word-sounds by specialists in phonetics. Unfortunately these analyses have discovered far too few of the principles entering the syntheses which we call *words*. For after all, it is the synthesis that clears the understanding; and it is the analysis, too often, that clouds it. Thus far, no study of isolated sounds seems to promise an explanation of the sound-flux which, in passing through cerebral processes, enters the mind as a *word*. The important elements of a word are not more marked in its sound than in its quality of registration

through the organs of hearing. The component sounds of a word therefore are valuable only when they have become synthetic by the blend of elements which, being internal to language, are closely interdependent. Just as the philologists have unbalanced their work with too much attention to the written forms of language, and too little to the spoken; just as the grammarians have over-emphasized the importance of the comparative method in their researches, so have the phonetic specialists, for the most part, shown too great a predilection for the study of isolated sounds by the analytic method, and too little regard for the synthetic effect of sounds that form words.

Take, for example, the utterance of an isolated sound which is to enter a word: the phonetic organs assume their necessary position with relation to each other in order to produce the sound required. In the uttering of this sound, a certain individual liberty may be taken at will. The ear alone deter-

mines the quality of the acoustic impulse. This is the simplest exposition; but when sounds are combined, the process becomes more complex; the personal liberty is restricted; at once it becomes necessary to forecast the effect sought and to take note of the effect produced. It is far from possible to pronounce always as one would. The physical ability of the organs of articulation must be equal to the group-requirements of the sound. In the words of de Saussure: *La liberté de lier des espèces phonologiques est limitée par la possibilité de lier les movements articulatoires. Pour rendre comte de ce qui se passe dans les groupes, il y à établir une phonologie où ceux-ci seraient considérés comme des équations algébriques; un groupe binaire implique un certain nombre d'éléments mécaniques et acoustiques qui se conditionnent réciproquement; quand l'un varie, cette variation a sur les autres une répercussion nécessaire qu'on pourra calculer.*

It appears then that while there are many

problems involving the spoken word, that which relates to its sound and flux can be understood only through a knowledge of the laws which produce the synthetic result of these sounds.

That is not all. There are many other subtleties and little-regarded relations of the spoken word. Professor de Saussure's researches (better shown in his lectures than was possible in the already mentioned posthumous book) are the most comprehensive and exhaustive exposition of this subject thus far attempted with success. He shows, for instance, the differences which characterize the sounds of doubled consonants, as illustrated by the double *p* in *appa*,—the first *p* corresponding to a "fermeture," the second to an "ouverture"; he follows the same principle with occlusives, applying it to the fricatives also, as in the double *f* of *affa;* the same to the nasals, as in *amma;* to the liquids, as in *alla;* "et en général à tous les phonemes jusqu' aux voyelles (aȯóa, etc., sauf a)."

These differences of pronunciation Professor de Saussure discussed under the terms *implosion* and *explosion:* "implosion" covers the class falling under the closing, or *fermeture,* form of articulation; and "explosion" covers those that naturally come under the opposite form of articulation called the *ouverture,* or opening.

The merest passing reference to the complex characteristics of words and the principles which govern their relations, is sufficient indication of the mysteries involving all parts of speech. It is true that these mysteries are mainly attractive to specialists; and that a better understanding of them would be of doubtful utility in a popular sense; yet in following the subject, one gets into deep water—and out of it if he can. For one who persists, however, there are benefits to be obtained—even from the pursuit of abstractions.

Broadly, language represents the sum of impressions registered in the brain of man-

kind; these impressions are determined by accepted standards of meaning. There is an infinite number of subtle and complex factors intimately related, both internal and external, to language; and all are interdependent. Thus, in general, the traits of language distinguish it as a social convention—a collective institution—not subject to the *will.*

More specifically, oral speech has distinctive features of its own which make it more amenable to individual *will.* Within certain limits, the person speaking forms his own combinations; he colors his version with his own juices. He may offend against the impersonal principles of language whilst rendering picturesque and telling speech. That is the reason why language in its broad character has been likened to a symphony, while oral speech has been compared with the rendering of the composition. The composition may be perfect—its rendering very imperfect. One is impersonal, and the other extremely personal. All this makes it clear that lan-

guage regarded as an organism, and speech as fluid expression, can not be studied from the same viewpoint, notwithstanding their obvious intimate relationships.

Again, language regarded as a system, so well shown by de Saussure, has two equally important elements—external and internal. The external elements of a tongue, naturally, are those which affect it from without; and the internal, are those which affect the *system* of language in any degree whatever. Just where the external series of phenomena ends and the internal series begins, is not essential to this discussion; but what has an important bearing, is the vital fact of a great multitude of linguistic phenomena connecting the simplest parts of speech with each other and with the complex whole. Some of these elements comprise the influences of ethnological groups including the reciprocal relations between the history of the group and the history of its tongue—the morals of the people reflected in their speech—and con-

versely, in large measure, that inscrutable soul of a language, which gives a marked element of individuality to a nation.

Furthermore, a tongue is influenced by local idioms, politics, conquest, colonization, commerce, and all the many reactions inevitably taking place between State and State. Words and idioms are exchanged. Imported exotic elements of speech rarely long retain their exact original meanings. Thus modifications occur slowly but irresistibly; new subtleties of meaning arise while the older disappear and are lost. Some States, such as Switzerland and parts of the British Empire, for practical political purposes admit several tongues; others, such as France, encourage a unity of language. As civilization advances, special departments of language are developed to facilitate the working of special institutions such as, for instance, the law, medicine, engineering, theology, art, and, in a word, science in its various fields, art in its many forms. All these evolve special nomencla-

tures to serve the particular needs of each; and elements of these nomenclatures gradually infect the popular tongue. At first the result is in the nature of an infection; but in the course of time the system linguistic rids itself of the poison, retaining only the healthful residue—reacts favorably, in other words.

Besides, language as an institution is influenced by other associated institutions: the school, the church, the Academy, the military, the court, the press, and by the literature of the people as it circulates in books or is conserved in libraries. In our own English tongue it is especially notable that the tendency of popular idiom, with all its faults, is to invade the literary or book-field. Indeed in all first-rate languages, there are reciprocal influences between literary expression and current speech.

As to oral and written speech, we have two systems of signs,—one represents the other. The oral tradition may be wholly independent of the written; and examples of this fact still

extant are well known to scholars. The systems of written language need not detain us here, whether alphabetic or ideographic, for their phenomena virtually produce the same relational effects,—the same general harmonies pervade the whole social convention.

VI

SIGNS, PROCESSES AND ASSOCIATIONS

ASSUMING that the conception of a word varies more or less according to viewpoint, its *reality* at once becomes shadowy. Perhaps a word has no reality in the sense of a dominating essential character, unless the acoustic image be so designated.

We have seen that a word is not merely a sign expressed gesturally, phonetically, or graphically, etc.; for it also is a physiological function, a physical process, an acoustic impulse bearing an image, or capable of arousing an image, which amounts to the same thing: a psychic phenomenon revolving around a central concept, or a sensorial phenomenon with a peripheral sway over certain emotions, etc. It is not merely the name of a thing, nor is

it a symbol only of the thing's functions, actions, or qualities; but also very frequently it is the sign of another sign, even unto the third and fourth generations of signs.

It would seem, therefore, that a word is the matrix of associations. Consider that these associations may be expressed in linear form as the links of a chain, or their unity suggested by related parallels, by intersecting circles, helixes, and so on. The phenomenon is composite; its character is complex; and to those of us who insist on seeking *realities*, the simplest word will remain forever an abstract mystery.

For practical purposes, it is necessary to admit a certain arbitrary meaning to the term *sign*, as used in a linguistic sense. Thus in the treating of words as signs, the process is made easier if we let the term embrace the total associations, the complete transmutation of energies, and the combined characteristics which articulate the acoustic image with the concept.

Another significance of *sign* in this respect becomes apparent at a glance. If the soul of a word is its acoustic image, as it seems to be; if it is the one element or trait which all the others make possible through their synthetic action—the one element which, if lacking, would render the others inchoate—then the term *sign* is more logical, even, than it appears to be on the surface. This is quite apart, of course, from its arbitrary character as it relates to different tongues considered as conventions for purposes of comparison, etc.

For the moment then let us consider words as signs. The sign first of all is based on convention, custom, habit. Its primitive value in itself was lost during the period when pre-historic man began to hunt in packs. As he became communal the rules governing his expressional signs began to crystallize, and so the signs became relatively fixed and arbitrary. (Language being the most widespread and complex of all the systems of

expression, naturally became the most characteristic of all.

Admitting the arbitrary character of *sign*, it is impossible to regard the word *symbol* as a true synonym. The symbol never is wholly arbitrary; it always maintains some more or less direct, natural relationship with the object for which it stands; it has an obvious *raison d'être*. In the words of de Saussure: "*The scales as the symbol of Justice could not be replaced by anything else, for instance, not even by the chariot.*"

We inherit our signs, in a way, as truly as we inherit our complexions; and if we take liberties with either it is at the peril of being too well understood. The character of our earliest signs, even down through many generations of them, may be guessed at pleasure. No one supposes that we can define them other than approximately. They have varied according to racial groups; their individualities evolved from the spirit of the hunting pack and the communal necessities of the

tribe; adown the ages they have been modified by the various principles prevailing under different religions, governments, and by the changing social habits of ethnological clans.

There always have been reciprocal relations between communities of signs and groups of people. At one time the ethnic force predominates over the linguistic; and at another period, or in other circumstances, the linguistic influence spreads more victoriously than arms. This is proved by the history of peoples and their institutions, as well as by the relics of their tongues.

If one would inquire into the fundamental traits of prehistoric civilizations and peoples, a great deal might be learned from a study of linguistic palæntology; but unless the study embraces much else, unless it goes beyond researches in ritual signs and fossils, word-signs or vocabularies with their unreliable etymologies, many erroneous if not wholly worthless conclusions must follow as a result.

Without doubt, linguistic signs form a valuable historic document; but it is one that must be deciphered accurately; it must be studied with its corollaries; and it must not be too literally translated. The spirit of truth will be found oftener in a broad and liberal interpretation than in an attempt at exact and definite deduction.

All etymologists have labored with uncertainties, and not a few have been baffled. The wisest are slow to announce that they have succeeded in the tracing of true origins. Etymological ancestry is like a family tree: the thing looks well on paper, but it does not always trace the new blood that has been injected from time to time; alien strains often are mistaken. Meanings change with the shifting of residence, with altered environment, with the entrance of a new spirit such as accompanies a revolution in a community, and so on.

Again, the absence of a word in the vocabulary of a people at a certain epoch is not

always reliable evidence that the civilization of that time was ignorant of the thing for which the word stands. One may as well infer that the French, according to the old saw, have no *home* because *la maison, le chez nous, le foyer*, are used by them as equivalents of our English word. Everybody admits that no people ever were more keenly awake to the finer significance or clearer meaning which we give to the word *home*, than are the French. Neither is the frequent occurrence of a word in an ancient idiom necessarily the proof that a certain corresponding thing existed in the civilization of the people, or that a corresponding feature was present in their more immediate environment. To assume this would be to ignore the exotic instinct—the tendency to borrow—which we know pervades all human states of being and virtually all tongues at all times.

Language regarded as a system of signs, no matter how expressed—phonetically, gesturally, or graphically—is conservative and

inert. Its initiative is repressed by the mass-habit, the inertia of which is owing somewhat to its arbitrary character. The system more or less is bound by precedent; it is hampered by inherited tendencies; it derives some of its meanings from tradition, and it takes on others from the times.

Opposed to this system of signs, so arbitrary and sluggish, are the mutable energies of fluid speech. This phantasmagoric sea ever is beating against the more solid shores. Innumerable and fluctuating factors disturb its surface. An infinite number of ephemeral signs, like waves, eternally striking the great land-masses of language, leave their impressions and thus effect those changes, which we recognize as inevitable. But the opposing orders of phenomena are less contradictory than they seem at first glance. The logic of change is unbroken when language is regarded in the light of its double aspect. Note must be taken of shifting phonetics, of mutations between image and con-

cept, and of the impossibility of treating separately the different factors of a phenomenon without regard to its unity,—all which add to the difficulties in trying to solve the mysteries of words.

Signs only can be effective and constant through the law of standards. An idea is represented by a sound: the sound must have a distinct value in order to condense the image from the shapeless cloud of thought or feeling of which the idea is a part. When the sign-standards are relaxed, the word-values diminish and ideas of a similar order are confused—the *bête noir* of careless speech.

This necessary conformity of signs to standards is the basis of the nomenclatorial conception of language. But the conception fails to recognize the "plastic stress" and the positional values of words, neither of which lessens the force of the law of standards, since speech, phonetic and graphic, is vastly more than the words that enter its composition. The relations of the words to each

other, the value of their position, their synthetic action with regard to the thought, and even their rhythmic unity, etc., are all as important to the function of language as the words are themselves. That is to say, the phenomenon of language must be considered as a whole rather than in its parts, for the parts can not be detached. A study of the separate parts, however carefully conducted, can not afford a clear comprehension either of themselves or of the function of their *ensemble.* The relationships between the parts of speech are the medium through which articulation is possible between ideas and signs, whether sounds or graphs—the medium by which one manifestation of energy is capable of transmutation into another so that the series of transmutations shall result in the intelligible phenomenon called speech.

Virtually, this is the only known means whereby the chaos of thought may be resolved into precise form. *Il n'y a donc ni matérialisation des pensées, ni spiritualisation des*

sons, mais il s'agit de ce fait en quelque sort mystérieux, que la 'pensée-son' implique des divisions et que la langue élabore ses unités en se constituant entre deux masses amorphes. (de Saussure.)

The relations between the idea and the sign are as vital to language as the etheric impulses are to a system of radio-telegraphy. Either system is intelligible only through accepted standards; and each is effective only through its articulate impulses or continuity of relationship. Thus linguistic signs, conventionally standardized, are capable of giving definition to ideas and suggestive meanings to emotions, although no unification of signs is capable of giving substance to the things for which they stand. The concrete elements and the unity of language can not be defined because they are unknown. All linguistic signs are relative in value; and the law that governs their relativity is arbitrary or conventional. The individual must conform to the collective spirit of this law. He can not

alter it; and his moral obligations are satisfied only when he uses his best efforts to live up to the law.

The simplest practical deduction from the foregoing is concerned with the value of words as we use them daily in our lives. Their function is facilitated by our care in choosing the words that are most appropriate to the ideas which we wish to express. The liberty of exercising care in the choice of them, as we have seen, is the chief liberty of the individual under the collective laws of language, established by society.

VII

ORDERLY RELATIONSHIPS

It is difficult to realize what a network of laws enmesh our poor little vocabularies; nor can we easier perceive from what mysterious source these laws have come. Have they no intelligent purpose? Are all these series of flexible yet constant relations the result of "blind forces" working to some purpose by fate or to no purpose by chance; and have they no destiny which, seeing the way, guides them through more than multitudinous wildernesses? Is intelligence the offspring of order, or is order the symbol of intelligence? We do not know; but we can not help suspecting that, somehow, *intelligence* and *order* are interdependent. And seeing order everywhere within range, we must believe that it extends beyond; and that where one is, there the other must be, also.

As soon as we see order in relationships, and when we perceive that the order is constant, we call this phenomenal spirit a *law.* Then we lean back in our chairs, content with our knowledge and not always unmindful of our wisdom. This frowzy lack of humor, so often seen in smug professorial dignity, blights many a promising career.

Linguistics is an incomplete crystallization of the phenomena of language; but the crystallization is sufficient to show the great number of complexities that condition words and their relations. What are these laws, and how are they revealed? The study of grammar, so well begun by the Greeks and so successfully pursued by the French, has yielded its well-known rules. The rules are narrow, logical, and theoretically, strong. They enable us to distinguish between correct forms and those that are not. Practically, these rules have become so honeycombed with exceptions that they are weak.

Philology already was taught at the school

of Alexandria, but not until the latter part of the 18th century was it brought under the methods of study known as modern-scientific.

The method of comparative grammar was introduced early in the 19th century. Tongues were compared with each other; they were grouped under family names; and their relationships were investigated with more or less success. Later, in close succession, came the etymologists who contributed less than was expected of them, but who did discover bonds of union between comparative mythology and linguistics, between comparative grammar and classic philology. Then these bonds or laws were codified; and they have been commented on without end.

Since the middle of the 19th century perhaps, the most progress has been made in the discovery of laws which condition language as a whole—which connect its parts—and which relate its factors with their combined functions. A study of these laws has shown somewhat the real nature of language; even

better, it has swept away numberless errors; and it has opened up rich fields for linguistic research.

As the study of linguistics conformed more and more to the methods of science—that is to say, as it became broader and more rational—discoveries were multiplied and their meaning grew clearer. Linguistics now has taken its place among the other sciences; its objects are more definite than formerly; its definitions are less murky and phantastic; its phenomena are not so elusive and shadowy as once they were. Not only are corollary subjects forced to yield important illuminations, but subjects which at first glance seem foreign to linguistics, also bring forth light.

Physiology, physics, psychology, history, ethics, anthropology, phonetics, politics, war, geography, archæology, ethnology, etc., are called on, each in turn, to contribute some useful information bearing on linguistics. Studies are going forward in audition, phonation, and in the formation of acoustic, mus-

cular, and conceptual images. Even the human anatomy is playing its rôle. Semiology, if not yet brought up to the full requirements of science, nevertheless has offered useful suggestion, and already it is the groundwork of reasonable, therefore promising conjecture. In a word, linguistics is receiving careful attention in its various aspects, or from different points-of-view. Language, tongue, graphic and oral speech, with their subdivisions and relations, are regarded with some consideration for perspective.

The elements of language are sought both internally and externally to its organic structure; and progress has been made in the appreciating of their reciprocal relations or interdependent laws. The phenomena of written and phonetic language are compared and weighed; their systems have been analysed and deductions have been made from the analyses. At last the conflict between pronunciation and spelling seems not quite hopeless, since the transmutations wrought by

many factors, including that of time, have been noted with some exactitude.

The problems of phonology have been valiantly attacked, and not a few of them reduced to an understandable solution. Hidden elements have been brought to view; obscure links in the chain have been made clear; the vocal organs have been studied to the effect that now they yield not only sounds but some philosophy as well; their functions have been explained; the laws connecting these organs with the speech-centers of the brain have been identified and followed intelligently. Clinical experience has furnished much information about words and the principles which relate them to language. Vocal sounds have been arranged in classes, and their relations have been scrutinized. As the special traits of word-sounds have become clearer, the broad study of speech has been facilitated. The chain of sounds entering the synthetic flux of a word has been analysed, link by link, and it has been subjected to research cover-

ing implosive and explosive phenomena. The laws of simple vocal sounds have revealed new aspects of the phenomenon of syllabation, and further examination of these laws has modified very materially some of the older theories. Thus we have learned how to avoid vicious circles in our reasoning whilst trying to form a conception of these phenomena. In all this, the time-function has not been ignored; and the result, happy in the recent past, augurs well for the near future.

A study of the general principles of language has brought out the nature of the linguistic sign-system, together with its many significant bearings on the parts of speech. The arbitrary and static elements of language, although closely related to the fluid elements of current idiomatic speech, have revealed new aspects when examined from different points-of-view. The confusion, for instance, resulting from the double aspect of mutability on the one side and rigidity on the other, virtually has cleared away. The con-

ventional nature—the collectivity—of language has been contrasted with those of its elements which permit individual freedom of choice in the use of a tongue; and for that reason, the relations between language and the masses using it are better understood to-day than they were formerly.

It appears, moreover, that the values of words have both static and evolutionary elements. Sign-posts have been erected at the cross-roads leading from different directions to linguistic interpretation. Dual principles, external and internal to language, have been discovered at work in its evolution. Either phase of this phenomenon gives its own values—that is to say, equivalents found in two different orders. Indeed, language is regarded by some careful students as a system of pure values, complex in nature and most rigorously organized—a system which, considered as a scheme of synchronic solidarity of parts, promises perhaps the best results.

From opposing elements order has been

drawn; from seemingly conflicting methods, harmony has been deduced. An examination of the synchronic and diachronic elements of language (elements of a *state* of language and of a *phase* of its evolution, respectively—de Saussure) has shown an unmistakable unity of linguistic laws regardless of the bifurcations through which they have been approached. Everywhere appear the fundamental laws which bristle with integral characteristics of opposing axes.

Scientific methods applied to linguistic research have separated the abstract entities from the concrete: the soul of a word no longer is confused with its form in sound or with its graphic sign; the spirit of a tongue is not confounded with its sustentacular principles. Many difficulties have been cleared away, which formerly obscured the unities of the concrete and the abstract phenomena of linguistics. Modern methods have enabled some of the more intelligent of our specialists to discuss, with a semblance of reason, such

things as values, realities, entities, and identities. *Thought, material, sound, form, substance, spirit,* as used in dissertations on this subject, have lost much of their former ambiguity; and they now are aiding us in the perception of laws at work, as well as in the process of forming a conception of some of the effects of these laws.

The values of signs in both systems of oral and written speech, have been placed in classes; and one class has been dissociated from another for the practical purpose of clearer exposition; and, again, they have been considered together in their reciprocal relations for the purpose of gaining a perspective of the mass-phenomena.

It has been demonstrated that language is conditioned by laws; and the operations of many of these laws in their different spheres have been visualized. Their interdependence is admitted. The value of one series of relationships is modified or even determined by the value of the other to which it is correlated

through correspondence or by opposition. For some are the laws of association, others of suggestion by contraries, antipathies, etc. Through all runs the general principle of co-ordination terminating in psychic syntheses of conceptual imagery.

A study of the physics of language, its mechanism, its functions, its groups and orders, has thrown much light on fields hitherto dark; it has broadened the scope of relativity, and it has discovered many factors heretofore unknown. The grammatical laws have been segregated as a whole and subdivided into classes. Morphology, with its diverse categories of words and syntactic relations, have been correlated and explained together with the grammatical abstractions; that is to say, with those grammatical elements which are of a conceptual nature and which emerge from the concrete elements of structure, etc.

Phonetic changes, their conditions, and the methods by which they are studied, have

been brought within reach of anyone who has time and industry to give to the study. The causes of phonetic changes, with their limitless possibilities, now may be known to the student who is not afraid of work.

The laws of analogy, it is true, have given no end of trouble; but even these have been clarified; their changing phenomena have been followed successfully; their reactions have been noted; and their psychologic nature has been established. In addition, the reason why certain words in all languages are virile, while other words are sterile and feeble, is known. The relations between the evolutionary laws and certain results of the laws of analogy have been determined; and it has been shown that they involve some of the broader questions of interpretation.

The virtual pathology of popular etymology has been contrasted with the healthier growths of linguistic science. The principles of agglutination have been compared with those of analogy for purposes of differentiation; and

all these phenomena have been analysed, in a sense, both subjectively and objectively.

Furthermore, the geographical distribution of tongues, and the laws which permit one to flourish beside the other, or to amalgamate with another; the principles governing the language of literature and those which condition the local current idioms; the laws of dialect; the soul of slang; the strong laws making for precision, and those that are weaker tending toward looseness and inaccuracy; the various lines of energy hitched to the chariot of spiritual unity—of linguistic harmony—dragging the car to its destiny, have all been discussed within reasonable limits; and they have been explained at reasonable length; so that the differentiation of tongues and the bonds uniting all may, at least, be partly comprehended.

Finally, the consideration of all these laws, and many others, has directed research back to the era of primitive speech. Ethnological questions have been answered in part by race,

tongue, and epoch. Social laws and their effects on language have been traced far back by linguistic palæontology to social and other types. At last all this is confronted by a wall behind which no man has seen.

Consciousness and order and the faculty of speech! these are the abiding mysteries. They thrill our words with something akin to life. A creative will dwells in the faculty of speech; words issue from its inscrutable power. Intelligence is one phase of consciousness, order is another. Personality is incidental. Law undulates through consciousness and order as waves travel through the ether. Waves beat upon the mind—the reaction we call intelligence. One series of waves we term light, another we call law—mere figure of speech. Through light the mind perceives orderly relationship in three-dimensional space and in many dimensional tone and color. Through law the mind perceives orderly relationship in multi-dimensional if not infinite domains: one of these we call linguistics.

VIII

SLANG

From a purely literary point-of-view, few studies would prove more curious and fruitful than the study of slang. It is a whole language within a language, a sort of sickly excrescence, an unhealthy graft which has produced a vegetation, a parasite which has its roots in the old Gallic trunk, and whose sinister foliage crawls all over the side of language. This is what may be called the first, the vulgar aspect of slang. But, for those who study the tongue as it should be studied, that is to say, as geologists study the earth, slang appears like a veritable alluvial deposit. According as one digs a longer or shorter distance into it, one finds in slang, below the old popular French, Provençal, Spanish, Italian, Lavantine, that language of the Mediterranean ports, English and German, the Romance language in its three varieties, French, Italian, and Romance Latin, and finally Basque and Celtic, a profound and unique formation. A subterranean edifice erected in common by all the miserable. Each accursed race has deposited its layer, each suffering has dropped its stone there, each heart has contributed its pebble. A throng of evil, base, or irritated souls, that have traversed life and have vanished into eternity,

linger there almost entirely visible beneath the form of some monstrous word.

VICTOR HUGO—*Les Misérables.*

One of the elementary principles of linguistics is the tendency and ability of every living language to absorb words and phrases from outside sources, including other languages, without losing its individuality and its essential characteritsics. (There is no fact better known than the fact that in all languages additions are continually made to the vocabulary by the legitimization of slang and dialectic words and phrases.) Among the thousands of slang words that live for a day, there are some that have sprung into favor and have become immortal. Now these words, when once formally adopted, are just as much a part of the body of a language as are the other words in accepted use in that language before their advent. Just as the Latin language adopted and was enriched by words imported into Rome from the Roman provinces and colonies, so have modern languages become likewise enriched and enlarged by importations from distant points. The comparative philologist and the educated linguist do not deny, but recognize, the fact that evolution and devolution are both continually going on in every language, causing more or less marked changes which become appreciable at the end of a sufficiently long period of time; neither would they deny that, when the transformation due to these causes has become sufficiently great through dialectic segregations, the resultant language—which is at first only a dialect—may, in time, become a

distinct language. But insistence is laid upon the fact that the transformation of a dialect into a language is a process that usually has required centuries. The transformation of the original Latin language into the modern Latin languages, so called, which include Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan, Provençal, Romance, Roumanian, etc., illustrates the slowness of the process. These languages remained Latin dialects until the fifth or sixth century. In fact, in the Italian, for instance, the vulgar Latin dialect became Italian only in the thirteenth century, and then mainly through the initiative and works of Dante.

DR. C. O. MAILLOUX—*Excerpt from a letter to the N. Y. Herald.*

SLANG has no country, it owns the world; and if language exists beyond our little globe, slang is punctuated by the stars. Sometimes it is called dialect; but dialect is less elemental than slang, which is nearer universal. Slang is the voice of the god that dwells in the people. It is a spiritual law. It is the coarsest of crude matter. It is the rude artisan that carves ugliness into beauty. It is the drunken workman that defaces his work. It is the jade who defiles a statue. It may be anything.

Slang

Slang, argot! Nothing else in language is more strange, more strong, uglier, or more beautiful. It is the element in language that lives most, lasts longest, and decays quickest. It is vital. It belches words which become miasma. It spews words that fall into the gutter and disappear—cruel, warty, misshapen, monstrous! words that are ashamed in the light—words that are the seed of hideous fungi growing in darkness from decay. Slang also drops words that quiver, palpitate in the light—words that strike hard, that smell of sulphur and trail smoke.

Slang is the fetid breath of the sewer—an unclean exhalation of the underworld. It is a stench. Some of its words are pustulous, infectious, horrible: some are criminals, others merely the stupid monsters of ugliness—idiotic ejaculations. Some are only unclean; others are solely vicious. Taken together, they form the vocabulary of the Good God and the Great Beast that dwell side by side in humankind.

Slang

To some of us language is like a landscape: various, diverse, mysterious. There are shining peaks and blue skies, and over all the glory of color. There are jungles, also, and dismal swamps. These are alive with things. The leaves rustle, claws protrude, fangs gleam, eyes glare: everything threatens; the vitality is hideous.

Slang is one of the most interesting of all linguistic phenomena. There is nothing strange about it as a sociologic phenomenon. For truly, "it is the language of wretchedness"; but it also is the speech of joy. It is everywhere and it glides through everything: commerce, business, the professions, gambling and other forms of thievery, intimate conversation, sports and play, love-making and war, art, science, and religion. Now and then it becomes stable; oftener it is ephemeral—too full of dialect's local color to be intelligible generally as slang.

The mother talking to her babe speaks the argot of angels. The murderer hisses to his

pal the slang of hell. The author writes to-day in the argot of yesterday; the poet sings in it; the philosopher thinks in it; and only he who has mother-wit enough to pray in it, may win the ear of the Good God, or the frown of the Great Beast.

Much of the slang of Shakespeare's day has become good idiom in this. Shakespeare, in his most intellectual play, lets Hamlet indulge freely in "quips and cranks and wanton wiles." This is natural. The spring of laughter and the fountain of tears flow from the same cavern of the heart. That which was slang to the frequenters of the *Globe* is standard English to those of the modern theatre. Such words as *mob*, *boss*, *cab*, *taxi*, *car*, *stunt*, *dope*, *boob*, *jazz*, and so forth, may all find their place shortly in respectable society. Cervantes and Le Sage, denuded of slang, would cut sorry figures in literature. The writer of to-day who would be read to-morrow should write in slang.

Slang is multifarious in kind. One is heroic, daring, bold, dazzling. Another is

low, crawling, poisonous, and vile. At the bottom of misery and misfortune lies a reptilian instinct ever ready to strike at "fortunate facts and reigning rights." The venom of this instinct is slang. The venom is an excretion of social deformities and human infirmities—ideas are congenitally diseased; they are born exuding foul humors; these humors infect manners and distort events. Civilization has a skin-disease; it is covered with eruption; it is subject to boils and it is eroded by ulcers. The boil may be a king, the ulcer a financier, the burrowing microbe a thief, and the itch may be a liar or a social climber with a well-paid publicity staff. There are blistering marriages, flaying divorces, abrasions called battles, and burns called public men—many of them worse than "public women." Some of these ills are superficial, and others are symptoms of deep-seated disease. All these things produce suffering. Suffering causes wretchedness; and wretchedness speaks slang.

Who shall stop his ears to slang when it issues from hungry mouths—from hearts that suffer till they hate—from womanhood torn by agony or drunk on sensual joy?

Slang issues from the two mill-stones: stolid cruelty above and mad pain below. Hatred has its hiss. Iniquities have their howl. The quivering multitude has its voice—for the poor can not be deprived of their sole protest. The hiss, the howl, the voice—all coalesce into speech—this speech is slang.

The bludgeons of the law, the devastations of power, fall on the innocent as well as on the guilty. Misfortunes make us democratic. There is a democracy in the rags of misery. Democracy fraternizes the victims of that stony severity called charity; it unites the hearts that bleed and the eyes that weep; it swells in the rebellion of curses; and it hovers over all the evil diseases of our civilization. This democracy speaks slang. Thus slang is the ebullition on the surface of the

people, and it has its parallel deep within the heart. Therefore history can not be written without regard to slang.

Whatever else he may be, man is a material spheroid whose spiritual center is consciousness. Perhaps everything else is environment; and, so far as consciousness is concerned, the environment is the relationship between ideas. The ideas vary from unseen atoms to constellations of shining stars. They all are reflected in slang. They are expressed in argot. They live narrowly in dialect. But consciousness is of two kinds: the radiant and the black. One gives out light and warmth as some divine orb. The other lives in the shadow of a devilish, dead sun, and therefore it exhales darkness. The luminosity and the warmth of the one, the darkness and the woe of the other, express themselves in slang. Nothing could be more mysterious; for from some inexplicable synthesis of the two, genius is born.

Joseph Wright, M.A., Ph.D., D.C.L., of

the University of Oxford, compiled a work of many thousand words entitled "THE ENGLISH DIALECT DICTIONARY, *Being the Complete Vocabulary of all Dialect Words Still in use, or known to have been in use During the last Two Hundred Years.*" The work is great, incomplete as it is. It is a kind of sacred book. It reveals the decrees of fate to the elect; that is to say, to those who think. To one wise enough to understand, it unfolds the Law; and therefore it discovers the wisdom of the prophets. It preserves for us "the tongue of those who sit in darkness." It presents a riddle which read one way, spells shameless metaphor; and if read another way, it gives the syntax of poetry. Here, in the words of Villon, *sont les neiges d'antan.*[1] Here are the weeds of yesterday, the flowers of to-morrow. Here we may trace origins through philological processes;

[1] "Antan—ante annum—is a word of Thunes slang, which signified the past year (the yester year), and by extension, *formerly.*" (Hugo.)

and here we are shocked at words that leapt full-armored from the brain of man as Minerva from the brain of Jove.

These immediate, spontaneous, mysterious words are startling. Were they born without parents; that is to say, without etymology, analogy, derivatives? What were the hidden links of thought or suggestion connecting them with others that went before? Were they born of popular madness? Are they the eruptions, the lava, the flame and ash of language?

As we have seen, law is an invariable relation existing between series of phenomena. The changes in grammar maintain, in general, a tendency toward simplification. This tendency also is called a law. Gradually prepositions take the place of case-terminations of nouns; articles denote genders; pronouns indicate persons; and verb-tenses give way to auxiliaries. This is called the law of specialization. The mind struggles to express its ideas with increasing ease and clearness.

This illuminates the law and, in a way, it accounts for slang.

Thus is language subject to transformation; and each transformation is the result of new forms supplanting the old. The process is not uniform. Parts of speech which embarrass the tongues of the many, persist for a time in serving the tongues of the few; in time these parts perish as other forms more easily slip into their places. The newer forms usually do not at once rise to the dignity of those supplanted; but time and usage beautify many which, fathering others, disappear. This continual process is called the evolution of language. Slang is a strong element in the process.

As the servant of man, language has acquired a large part of his moral possessions as well as a stewardship of the most precious of his material property. Slowly through many centuries, language has assumed this power and made these acquisitions. The study of language must include, therefore, something

more than orthographic change, grammatic loss, and historic speculation. It must deal with the phenomena of the mind, and it must approach them through the field of human interest.

Through the science of language, we assemble data on subjects enabling us to make rules that shall help us in our most practical affairs. We discover laws that enlighten us in various ways, but particularly in the method employed, consciously or not, for the modification and the preservation of the most important instrument ever invented. This science enables us to discredit with reason a good deal that has been written on the subject of language. It permits us to see the fallacy of the contention that perfected language was indigenous to prehistoric human soil; that as soon as the soil became productive of cultivated literature, decadence in language became active; and that this was the rule. The mythical "fall" of man is equalled only by the "fall" of his language.

Language is at once physiological, physical, and psychological. Orthoëpy largely is physiological. Psychic phenomena transform and otherwise modify speech; and these phenomena are as active to-day as ever. Ceaselessly, intelligence and ignorance work side by side as a team in the modifying of our tongue. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, and quite paradoxically, they shape it into an engine more and more capable for its purposes. Ignorance and Wisdom are the two gods of destiny. The collective human *will*, a vast underlying, impersonal power, is a potent factor in this process: a factor that has been ignored and even denied by students of speech. This *will* everywhere is present, and ever busy changing, mutilating, repairing, and transforming language. Countless millions of efforts are made every day to express a little more clearly than language permits, those ideas which the mind seeks to utter. Millions of these efforts mutilate whilst trying to simplify grammar; millions combine to form the crude and sim-

pler phrases of slang; millions of efforts hack away at an adverb until it is trimmed down to a preposition. In this continual process countless individuals combine all unwittingly against existing forms of speech. Numberless obscurities, swarms of failures precede the nobler successes. The process is psychologic in which masses of people collaborate.

Slang is rich in figures of speech. Metaphor hangs over it as an iridescent cloud. In the darker depths of the cloud savage lightnings dart. Smiling phrases of picturesque speech flash out and disappear, leaving us puzzled.

There is refuge in cunning, as the diplomatic element of language so well exemplifies. Slang is so diplomatic that usually as soon as it is understood it changes. The greater part of it is nascent and ever-changing. Words and phrases disappear for a century and suddenly reappear. To study slang is to uncover the heart of man from the débris of the past. The convict speech of the last century becomes the standard of excellence in this. Felony

becomes respectable and boasts of heraldry. The great soul of mankind is a tumbling sea of light and darkness. What is its destiny? We think of it and shudder. The shudder is slang.

Slang is endowed with perpetual and disreputable youth. The paradox of it is: if it survive youth it becomes admirable idiom. Slang is emotive, symbolic, intellectual. It is the most entrancing element of language, because it displays so many unsuspected and diverse forms of thought. It is the mirror of human character: traits of the populace are set forth as by reflection from fragments. Slang retains fugitive moans and furtive smiles. If we were wise enough, we should be able to read in it an explanation of human misery, and perhaps the source of happiness. It should tell us the reason why the children of men are tortured for their heritage of feeling. It might even explain the absence of compassion in the scheme of things.

THE MEANING OF WORDS

PART II

I

MEANINGS AND MORAL VALUES

If Part I has other than academic value, it should lead to a practical consideration of the meaning of words. Indeed it is only through an appreciation of their significations that any study of words is of value. The practical application then of Semantics or the Science of Significations is of prime importance.

Part I has treated casually of the complexity of laws that govern words; of the different aspects of the many elements of linguistics; of characteristics and relationships perceived from various points-of-view; of the *life* of language and of the *tendencies* of the parts of speech, etc., which, of course, are understood to mean the trend of intellectual activities wherein are found the life of language and the tendencies of words.

The purpose of Part II is to regard words, things of daily use, in their simpler aspects. Some of the deeper questions must be touched. Delicate nuances, subtleties of meaning, can not be ignored; and ethical questions must arise. But on the whole, unclouded meanings, unified by liberal consent and best usage, will be sought to the end that good form may be conserved, and that the tendency toward looseness of expression and demoralization of language may be opposed by persons inclined to be careful and considerate of their speech.

It may be well to think of words, for the moment, as the immaterial shadows of things physical, the echoes of things spiritual. As shadows and echoes, they are associated with the images that people the conscious world. Also they are more than shadows and echoes, for in a sense, as residents of the mental world, they are both angels of light and demons of darkness, having power to bless or curse. They may hold our souls in thrall or make us free through the liberation of our

thoughts. If we regard them merely as symbols, they seem endowed with sentience; but since we know they are not, we can not shift the moral responsibility of decent usage from our own shoulders to their wings. We must deal with them as with any other phenomenon. If we handle them wisely, they will serve us well; if we use them ignorantly or viciously, it is only through chance that they do not harm us.

The intellect, with all its achievements, never has been able to estimate the value of a word nor to compute its power for harm. Only the Ideal Soul is wise enough and good enough to gauge the worth of a kindly word spoken at the right time, or to take account of the evil and the misfortune of a cruel word uttered at the wrong time. Common experience tells us that the stress of anguish may be broken by a word; and that a word may open the very gates of hell. No phenomenon is greater than this.

Consider for a moment. What makes a

shrew a shrew? Her words. In them you feel her vexatious temperament, the violence of her nature, and in them you may taste the vinegar of her disposition. What makes Debs the most loved of living men? You will say, Because he is the most loving. That is only part of it. His suffering for his ideals, his righteous consistency, his inflexible spirit, his unbowed head, his forgiving heart, and his great love for his kind—all these, in themselves, are mute. Numberless men and women possess these same characteristics. If such traits were not widely in the hearts of human beings, Eugene V. Debs, would be a lonely bird over an abyss—impotent as a wail in a desert world. The aptness of his words—that is his genius, his eloquence, and his glory. In his apt words you feel the gentleness, the sincerity of his soul. Through them you catch glimpses of his vision. They are the medium through which his superb character is revealed. They are the dynamics of his great influence. They give you con-

fidence in his acts and faith in his love. For the real meaning of a word is not in the dictionary but in the human consciousness. And that is the reason why bad breath and worse teeth, offensive as they are, are attractive when compared with many words that men and women daily use. Better than "good birth" is attractive speech. We may excuse faulty attire, forgive the social slips of those who have forgotten from their little book on etiquette—in a word, we can overlook almost all shortcomings and errors of conduct save those only of speech. There is something in a man's words that marks him with the mark of Cain or puts the halo around his brow. Yet, what a curious thing is language? Words are the least part of it. Their aptness, inflections, tones, pronunciations, stresses, and combinations—their parallelisms and contrasts—all these are immeasurably greater than the mere words themselves.

Some words seem immortal, as if possessed of spirit that persists through change of form

in life and through all the mutations of death. At times, words shape our attitude toward life; they are responsible for our acts; and they govern our thoughts. Wantonly they have scarred and maimed millions of hearts. They have sowed the seeds of bitterness in childhood—seeds that grow into evil plants. They have filled prisons with felons, asylums with pathetic wrecks, and homes with needless pain. They have robbed the soul of courage, and they have thronged it with the phantoms of fear. They have driven light and love from the brain, and they have put the serpents of hatred and the beasts of prey within the dark cavern of the skull. They have wrapped the earth in a mantle of misery.

The volume of meanness encompassed by a word uttered, or by one withheld, is astonishing; and the amount of goodness and joy released by the simplest of words, is equally amazing. The weak have been made strong and the ill have been healed by a word. Barren ways are changed in a trice to flowery

walks by loving words: poverty is turned into riches and wretchedness into gladness. This should give pause to hasty speech.

I can understand in a way how a man can be miserly with money. To him gold represents years of struggle for what he believes to be success. It assures him certain comforts and a kind of pleasure in the things that gold will buy. Going a step higher, it makes it possible for him to help others. It gives him power over misery—a power to suppress want—a power to kindle happiness—a power to protect the weak from the might of wrong—the only power that is prized by any worthy soul; but I can not understand the man who is grudging of generous words or one who is indifferent to the decent parts of speech.

I can understand how the madness of anger may sling a word as a dart to wound a foe or even to hurt a friend; and how vanity may sputter smarting words, scintillating in an artificial light, for the childish pleasure of being reputed witty. Anyone can under-

stand this, because all have been at times both angry and vain, and occasionally too blind to see that the wit that wounds is not *wit;* and that the humor which humiliates another is not extraordinarily *humorous.* These things are clear enough; but that which is not clear is the state of heart capable of uttering deliberately a cruel word, or that condition of mind morbid enough to withhold a kind word. Nothing could be meaner except the adding of lies to the cruelty.

Kind words should not be uttered merely as a duty, but rather as an evidence of character and as a proof of rational attitude. They should not be given in the spirit of charity, for in kindness there is but one caste, and, therefore, no condescension.

So much for a little aside on the ethical significance of words. Ethics is the secret of their alchemy. The alchemist is the will of man.

Yet talk of this kind does very little good I think to speech as it is spoken, to language

as it is written, or to morals. The real morals of a man can not be changed by a sermon. The folk of this world are less careful of the garb of their souls than of the clothes of their bodies. In my enthusiastic youth I had faith in protest against absurdity and evil. I believed that man, above all else, was a rational being. At maturity my faith falters as I perceive that man is not so much a rational as he is an emotional being.

II

POSITIONAL RELATIONSHIPS, ETC.

One of the most obvious characteristics of language is the changing signification of words. No tongue ever has long constrained its parts to their original meanings; nor is it desirable that any speech thus should bind its words. The nature of a living language is contrary to any such fixed state.

Language, if it is to reflect the mentality of the masses using it, must be capable of accommodation, of adaptability, and of flexibility in the meanings of its parts. Take, for instance, the two classes of words called abstract and concrete. Their meanings shift from one to the other; or a word may signify at the same time both the abstract character and the material action or quality of the object for which it stands. This phenomenon

is not of recent appearance. It goes far back into the history of language. All tongues, ancient and modern, abound in examples. This transformation of meaning conforms to a law of mentality working *en masse*. It has perplexed the etymologist perhaps more than any other specialist.

The richness of a tongue is owing largely to the facility with which words take on new meanings whilst retaining vestiges of the old. Values are multiplied whenever a word may be used in several senses on as many different occasions. One purpose makes it desirable to employ a word in its broad and general use, while it accords with another aim to restrict its meaning. Metaphorically, a word may mean one thing, and strictly, quite another. Logically, a word may be both concrete and abstract. Thus, language is enabled to meet the changing requirements of society made necessary by the diversity of intellectual pursuits.

All the institutions of society, all the fields

of research, every occupation, art, and trade—every one of them contributes an element of diversity of meaning to the words at its command. Not only that, but, as we have seen, a protean spirit is manifest wherever circumstances demand change. Add to this fact that which permits the *will*, through the faculty of speech, to create new words in response to fresh needs, a phenomenon is met which would be hopelessly involved were it not for the laws of harmony relating the whole to its different factors. For, as meanings shift, expand, contract, and otherwise change, the very elements that produce the changes also condition our consciousness in relation to the altered significations of the words affected. If it were otherwise, there would be confusion; and the diverse elements or collateral meanings would thwart their own ends. Indeed, every change of meaning represents a separate value, and every value is equivalent to another word.

Naturally, meanings which may be modi-

fied also may be lost. We know this is the fate of multitudes of original meanings. Very often, only the collateral signification of a word persists. This is seen in all tongues. The causes of these diversions of meanings frequently are obscure and difficult to define. Sometimes they can be traced to perversions which, having broken the rules of one epoch, are accepted in another as grammatical exceptions. Usually the changes wrought in the significations of words are of slow process. They pass through intermediate stages, and they end often in direct opposites by some law of contraries.

There is a factor of division as well as of multiplication affecting word-meanings. Thus significations are reduced rather than restricted. That is to say, one part of a word is made to do the service of the whole. Or, instead of calling the factor one of division, it may be termed one of absorption. This is shown when, two words combined under one meaning, one is lost or rendered useless

through the absorption of the meaning of the other. In this or similar manner, adjectives sap nouns, verbs absorb complements, and phrases are boiled down to single terms. Phrase-clipping without abridgment of meaning, is a common phenomenon of language. The method of shortening which makes a simple part serve the purpose of a prolix whole tends toward the increased power of a tongue. Certain things are assumed to be understood; the processes of expression are simplified without embarrassment to those of the understanding. Then in the course of time, as it often happens, the process of abridgment alters the entire meaning for better or worse.

It long has been noted that words intimately associated acquire a similar cast, so that one part of the group awakens virtually the same conceptual images that ordinarily respond to the group-stimulus. Also words become modified in meaning by habitual association in phrases. When they are used for a long time

in a specific phrase-sense, they lose all individual meaning by taking on only the signification acquired through association of idea. In time these words, even when appearing outside their habitual places, carry the associated meaning. This is well-shown in many negative and interrogative phrases. All this is evident in the various tongues when carefully studied. The inference is that this method of association follows a psychologic law.

The same principle holds good in all compound words which, by virtue of their unity of meaning, become in function merely single signs of speech. They are so interdependent that they necessarily coalesce in meaning. This psychic rule makes for simplicity of image and clearness of presentation; if it were otherwise, there would be mental confusion instead of clarity, crowded instead of consecutive thought. Regardless of the number and complexity of factors which stimulate the mind, conception requires consecutive simplicity of idea.

Again, in amalgamated groups the parts produce no separate impression on the mind. The blend formed by association of one with another is so old that it is conceived as an amalgam. It is only when these groups are compared with similar groups of another tongue that one realizes their composite nature. Thus the amalgamated group has a solidarity of meaning; but its meaning, like that of a single word, may be modified according to the same principle that permits modification of the other.

Further, word-meanings are influenced by their positional relationships. Disregarding the loss of inflections and other grammatical shrinkages, the order of construction that fixes the positional relations of words in a sentence has, during more recent times of linguistic history, established values that can not be ignored in the study of meanings.

The science of significations enables us to retain the spiritual unity of a tongue despite the confusion wrought by phonetic and mor-

phologic changes. Age-old traditions of language which have acquired a subconscious status are not confused with the elements of speech that grow out of conscious imitation.

III

PROBLEMS AND POWERS

We are both masters and servants of our words. How they serve us has been seen. Their mastery over us begins with infancy and ends with death. They are our first teachers, our last counselors.

The necessary influence of language over mind becomes clearer when we reflect that we are born dumb. The mother-tongue must be learned at the cost of long and continuous effort. Will-power makes possible the effective concentration of attention through several faculties in synchronous operation. The attention becomes habitual, almost subconscious. Changes are wrought in the brain by a complicated process. When we have learned to speak, we have become in a manner artificially reconstructed, physiologically

modified. We, ourselves, have had to produce these changes in nervous substance. The processes are our own, only the method, as a pattern, was supplied to us. In this sense the mother-tongue dominates us as a law of governance. Thus our greatest lesson in psychology is the language that we first learn.

Nothing perhaps wields greater power over the inner life of the individual than does his struggles with language. These ceaseless efforts not only determine his attitude toward what we call life, but they mould the character of his thought. Continually spurred by necessity from the days of resilient youth to those of rigid age, man must struggle with the problems of language. He encounters mysterious things during every moment of consciousness; these he must harmonize, somehow, with his conceptions; he must associate cause and effect; he must link up word and image; he must learn the values of signs and the accepted standards whereby values are

appreciated: weighed and measured. He meets with formulæ of the past which he must learn to utilize. He uses analogy; he suppresses; he harmonizes and unifies in order to attain a solution that is practicable. His very subconscious processes in turn are reflected in his speech; these again crystallize into precedents which future generations will accept as he accepts those of generations past.

Man employs a large number of words and phrases instinctively. He has slight conscious recognition of their meanings, but he is conscious of their utility. As he seeks the shade of a tree or water from a spring without thought of the laws of light and chemistry, so he uses these formulæ of speech whilst vaguely sensible of their meanings, and without regard to their phenomena. Again, thrilled by some unusual circumstance, his intellect awakens to new possibilities of expression. He becomes conscious for a moment of some old creative power that has lain dormant. His understanding quickens:

wisdom stirs in his brain and blossoms from his lips. New ideas, fresh imagery, new-born concepts and emotions must find suitable signs to represent them in the objective world, since the *word* itself must remain forever subjective.

There is another aspect of this matter that is too common to be overlooked: the sign of the concept, image, or feeling, takes the place of the concept, etc., by a kind of reflex action. This phenomenon accounts for the desert wastes in language, for the infinite mediocrity of literature, for the inanities of current speech. The relations between word and concept are displaced by relations merely between words. The longer process is sacrificed to the shorter. Words become empty of meaning; they multiply hollow sounds; they are as tinkling cymbals.

This phenomenon has little to recommend it as the conservator of intellectual dignity and integrity. It is admirable only for the facility which it lends to automatic expres-

sion. It saves time and it spares thought. Yet regarded as one of the facts of linguistics, it is not open to reproach. It serves mediocrity very well indeed; that is to say, the majority of us. Also it satisfies the useful purpose of revealing to us the huge proportions of a tongue, to say nothing of language in general of which the most perfect tongue never is more than a part. The purpose of language is as limitless, as fluctuating, and as ceaselessly progressive as human thought is itself. The majesty of language inheres in that creative power which dwells in the faculty of speech. Even the superiority of one tongue over another no doubt lies in the better facility with which one tongue uses its creative powers when contrasted with another.

The power of language over the mind of the masses is no less marked than is the influence of a tongue on the mind of an individual. Great currents of thought sweep through the mentality of the masses. Popular idioms tally the currents. Just how

much the language affects the thought and the thought the language (since thought and language are not identic) is of less moment than the fact that they do influence one another. The thought of the multitude creates a world of abstractions that are signified in the popular speech; and the popular speech reacts on the mass-thought.

Language, in one of its aspects, is a social institution crystallized in the fluid medium of intellectual activity. In everyday speech these crystals are used much as builders employ ready-made material in the structures they erect. The innumerable ready-made abstractions, generalities, and classifications admirably serve the popular need; they supply a useful translation of fact, easily transposed to the purposes otherwise difficult of execution. Notions of magnitude, duration, number, phases of change, relative conditions and situations, could not well get on in a popular way without this vast intellectual preparation made in abstract linguistics.

The intellectual activities of man brought forth his language. *Order*, which is indispensable to intellectual activity, finds its parallel in the laws of linguistics. These laws are so nicely related to what they govern that we loosely call language an organism. It is evident, however, that its organic character arises from similarity rather than from actuality; and it is owing to the order in mental processes that language has its being. The human *will*, socially expressed, is as apparent in the orderly development of language as is will-power associated with the faculty of speech. The individual *will* delimited by the social *will*, as exemplified by the institution of language, has given rise to the misleading theory of blind organic laws as the basis of language.

IV

PRACTICAL REFERENCES

Up to this point, the subject has been treated with no practical reference to any special tongue. Now it may be well to taper the discourse to the English language in order to determine what helpful suggestions, if any, may be had from the foregoing. Further, it may be possible in the following, with its brief citations and casual examples, to throw some light on the wholesome usage of words by taking a glance at their meanings through much mutation and some order.

What constitutes the purity of our own or of any other tongue, is a matter of much diversity of opinion. Even those who agree on what makes for the purity of a language often disagree as to its value. So far as English is concerned, if the introduction of foreign

words tends to contaminate it, then its purity must be limited to the paradoxical sense of its pure contamination.

The English-speaking people, as every other more or less, has found it interesting and convenient to borrow from abroad. Intellectual and material resources always have been exchanged with profit. Each importation fetches with it its own vocabulary. It is economical to accept one with the other. At all times this has been the rule of practice. The borrowing of abstract conceptions has proceeded after the same fashion. In brief, that which has been found worthy in any epoch by any people has been appropriated for the benefit of mankind at all succeeding times.

Moreover, the practice of borrowing words is governed by their usefulness rather than by pride in their kinship. That is common sense. A farmer needing a field-harrow will not borrow the model of a garden-rake. The same applies to all classes of words whether artistic, scientific, and so forth.

Language reflects the intellectual activities of the race; and therefore all the different tongues are ever striving with their natural limitations for greater freedom. The only question arising from the appropriation of foreign words, is the *manner* of the process. This, it goes without saying, should be intelligent, therefore, consistent and conservative. Too often the idea of the purity of a tongue is purely a matter of prejudice. A foreign word that is needed—one that is fit—one that adds to the powers, the subtleties of expression, to the readiness of understanding, to the utility, or to the beauty of a language, should be introduced into that language without affectation or reserve.

One disadvantage of adopting foreign words is owing to the absence of the time-factor. Words of the best kind are old enough to have acquired associations in the thought of the folk using them. Some attrition seems necessary to give a word its true fitness. It must be measured by standards, polished by

use, and shaped by the genius of the tongue which adopts it in order that it may fulfill its highest destiny. This is no reason why foreign words should be rejected; but it is a good reason why they should be scrutinized, and accepted with judicious conservatism, and then used with a delicate sense of propriety. Rampant neologism has spread disgust so widely that a disapproving sensitiveness has appeared toward new words. Thus many of them suggest pretense, exaggeration, and superfluity with very little reason. To some fairly discreet minds, they create distrust of the laws of analogy and grammar.

A word-stimulus becomes weak, losing its potency to arouse an image. The invention of a new word, or the adoption of a foreign term to take its place, not only is desirable but more or less imperative. New signs also are needed for new ideas, if a language is to continue its development; to this rational purpose new words not only are introduced, but new meanings are given to old words. In fine,

this process is continuous in all tongues; it is a natural order of evolution; but the evolution is paralleled by disorderly devolution. If the two processes were equal there could be no linguistic progress. Sometimes the one is stronger, sometimes the other; the broad view, however, gives us faith in the orderly process of evolution.

With due regard for the need of "new blood," conservatism should moderate the force and limit the scope of innovation. For it is by virtue of conservatism that continuity is maintained between the earlier and the later forms of expression, especially between the older and the newer meanings of words. This applies not only to words but to forms of construction and rules of grammar: all must be modified with etxreme caution, else tradition, intellectual and historic resource, may be harmed.

The gist of the purity of a tongue lies not so much in the restriction of foreign words, or in the reservation with which new meanings

are given to old words, but rather more in the retention of clearness and propriety in the use of words already in the service of the tongue. The process is less simple than it seems, since it includes not only a judicious reserve toward the new, but an active elimination of the weak and unfit among the old. All cloudy meanings, most of the tautological forms, all trivial, mean, low, and contemptible words should be cut out and forgotten. This can not be done without knowledge; linguistic discipline is essential. Keenness of perception, sensitiveness to good and evil words and forms of speech are necessary to those who would conserve the best elements of their tongue whilst eliminating the unworthy elements. The recognition of this truth should be the motive behind the usual dissertation on linguistics; also it is an apology for the presentation of a book on language to an indifferent public.

He who has a word to say in defense of good form, in favor of correct usage—he who attacks the corrupters of his tongue—is popu-

larly regarded as a kind of Don Quixote. Indeed this modern knight of words cuts a sorry figure in his assaults on windmills and winesacks. Yet who can deny that he performs at least some small service? Not only is this redresser of linguistic wrongs subject to the goodnatured indifference of the masses, he is a victim also of frequent drubbings by the critic who durst not attempt to construct but who is doughty to demolish; and besides, our Sire-suppresser of the evils of speech must put up with the jeers of the modern philologist who sees no good in trying to conserve the correct usage of words. Contemporary philologists seem to believe that whatever is (in usage) is right and proper. This casts all linguistic law to the winds, flouts the aristocracy of intelligence and learning, and worships unbathed democracy as the true god of language. The laws of correctness are abrogated for the usages of caprice, ignorance, and for careless inaccuracy.

Betwixt the two extremes probably there is

a reasonable middle ground. The correct use of words may be encouraged while an over-critical, or finical disposition toward the subject, may be scouted with reason. There never is any occasion to make mountains of mole-hills. The broad view can not take note of insignificant detail and immaterial defects, both which may be remedied without militant strictures or the attempt to give elementary instruction to such a mature and sturdy growth as our mother-tongue.

All have seen valiant knights of speech hurl with fine scorn and mighty ignorance their barbed and glittering spears; we have heard them revel in sarcasm and chuckle at their own wit; in a paragraph, we have known them to dispose of an entire subject with all its relations and roots running back through centuries of history; we have seen them armored in shining brass and barricaded behind epigrams; we have encountered their irrefutable sneers; we have heard them assert, in effect, that if a word meant something in an

elder day it should mean nothing more nor less in a later. An added meaning, a variation in shade, an increase of capacity—these have been accounted linguistic offenses;—and we have not been able to escape the conviction that the enthusiasts were unduly carried away from a rational course by false perspective, albeit with good intents.

We always have had over-zealous defenders of our tongue, ever ready to kill words and phrases "smelling of the plow-tail," as Boccaccio says, or coming from the "vulgar lower classes," as the snob would say. Despite the strictures, however, of these purist knights, such phrases as "let the mind lie fallow," "harrow up the soul," "sow sedition broadcast," "winnow a mass of testimony," and others of a like kind, have crept into English, and they show no signs of leaving it. Slang passing into dialect and dialect into idiom vitalizes and enriches language. For example, "to keep posted" has taken on a wider meaning than "to keep informed." To be

"posted" implies not only to be "informed" of the facts, but to have the facts classified and ready for use. Likewise, "endorsement" is broader through extension of meaning than "approval," because it suggests responsibility for the object endorsed, which may be anything from a note of promise to a person's character.

On the other hand, popular education has done too little for the cause of good English. This neglect no doubt has marred our literary style in proportion as it has smothered our instinct for correct and fine speech. Not only do we find the refinements of our tongue neglected in our public schools, but even frowned upon in the halls of élite training. When such a distinguished scholar, author and professor as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch advises against fine writing, one may well despair of its encouragement by littler lights. "Whenever you feel an impulse to perpetrate a piece of exceptionally fine writing," says "Q" in his Cambridge Lecture on *Style*

(1913–14), "obey it—whole-heartedly—and delete it before sending your manuscript to press. *Murder your darlings.*" This "practical rule," given by Sir Arthur to his pupils, has a good deal to commend it if "fine writing" be understood to contain a pinch or two of irony in its flavor.

Everybody who reads *Scribner's* loves William Lyon Phelps. "As I Like It," is the first thing we turn to in opening that magazine. When you read Phelps you come in touch with a very unusual *person:* good-natured, almost jolly, but always well-behaved. He sheds his learning in such a pleasant way that his reader feels wise without troubling himself to become so; neither can you help feeling that Phelps walks around on his feet, sees with his eyes, thinks with his own head, yet—and this is the miracle of it—he writes your own thoughts, and always he does it just before you thought of doing it yourself. All that is very well; but there is a drowned fly in the cream, just the same. If

it were not for that fly! Of course it is small business to pick flies from such good cream; still, who swallows a drowned fly, if he knows it? Let fashion do what it will; let "Q" say what he will to his pupils; and let Phelps set as many examples as he please, intentionally or not, to delight the literary ghost of Roosevelt! the fact remains that dead flies are not nice, even in the best of cream. Here is a blue bottle-fly, not "As I Like It" but as it appears on page 243 in the cream of *Scribner's* for August, 1923:

"When we remember what hardships he endured on the road, what reverses of fortune he suffered, enough to shatter a less indomitable spirit, when we remember the long weeks *without hardly any* sleep (italics mine) and the wretched cold food he ate in impossible conditions, the fact that he lived to be over eighty must be reckoned among his achievements."

It no longer is fashionable, if it ever was, to praise the prose of Ingersoll, Beaudelaire,

and a few others who put more poetry and beauty into their prose than all the dear Lowells ever got into their verse. Poetic prose, rhythmical without rhyme, lyric in feeling, at once strong, clear, and beautiful seems to have passed out. In its stead we find a style that is hard, slipshod, disagreeable—too much like average conversation. In this, as in some other respects, our educational system or vogue compares unfavorably with that of some other countries. In France, for instance, careful consideration is given to the teaching of a correct use of words not only but to the development of taste and style in discourse. From the notion, or one similar, that a rich man may dress like a slovenly pauper, many of our college men take ugly liberties with their mother-tongue. Barbarisms, however, are inexcusable in the literary expressions of the educated.

"For me, words have color, form, character. They have faces, parts, manners, gesticulations; they have moods, humors, eccen-

tricities; they have tints, tones, personalities." [1]

To the majority of us, words are merely parts of speech; they perform only the primordial functions of language. To this same majority, architecture means little more than a "pretty" exterior of a building. The masses are interested more in the usefulness of a building than in its architectural features. The attitude of mass-consciousness is similar toward the various forms of art; that is to say, the question of beauty rightly enough is secondary to that of utility. A meal to a hungry traveler is of more importance to him than is polished diction. A few creature-comforts obtained through crudely constructed phrases of ugly words are more to be desired than is beauty of language if it must be coupled with privation. This is the rule primitive and primordial. But there comes a time in the progress of a people when the laws of beauty are operative because the

[1] *Japanese Letters*—Hearn.

demands of a higher and nobler nature have become imperative. This condition manifests itself both by a quickening of the masses —a dim longing in the heart of humanity— and a peculiar activity of those whom we call artists, for short. The leaven is at work. Slowly mass-consciousness becomes aware of needs that rise above the strictly utilitarian. Gradually the laws of beauty, the principles of subdued adornment, become insistent, and, thanks to them, language assumes finer qualities and subtler graces.

In admitting this statement as true, there is no occasion for anybody to presume superiority of viewpoint. The attitude of the crasser majority is as logical as is that of the more cultured minority. Both positions are natural, and their underlying principles may readily be discovered. But when an architect, for instance, emphasizes in his work only the features of its primitive requirements, he frankly lowers his profession to the trade of the builder. So, when the author argues by

precept or example for the slipshod use of words; when he intensifies only the basic function of language; when he suppresses nice discriminations in his choice of words; and when he ignores the simple elegancies of diction, he becomes a reactionist in effect, a decadent in spirit, a pessimist in linguistics, a reprehensible writer, and a mistaken person.

To quote again the very quotable Quiller-Couch: "Words are, in fine, the only currency in which we can exchange thought even with ourselves. Does it not follow, then, that the more accurately we use words the closer definition we shall give to our thoughts? Does it not follow that by drilling ourselves to write perspicuously we train our minds to clarify their thought? Does it not follow that some practice in the deft use of words, with its correspondent defining of thought, may well be ancillary to the study of natural science in a university?"

In previous chapters it has been shown that words are more than mere parts of speech;

that they are complex in character, multitudinous in relationship, and various in function. They no longer can be regarded merely as wheelbarrows to ideas. They have accumulated heritages of which they can not be deprived without a distinct loss to literature, without embarrassment to higher social intercourse. To dispossess them of their inscrutable powers slowly acquired would be to denude literature of its flower and foliage; much of its beauty would be lost, and its suggestiveness would suffer; the blossoms of poetry would fade, and the fragrance of language which excites emotion would pass away; the contagion between moods would weaken; verbal qualities of reflection and of parallelism above and beyond the cold level of fact would vanish.

To the lover of *belles-lettres*—to the sensitive soul of a Keats or a Hearn—words are living, mutable things. In a sense they are capricious, for they suggest different conceptions to different minds and to the same

mind under different stress. While having standards, they impart different shades of meaning to us all in our varying moods. Words are rigid only in the lexicographic tomb where their embalmed bodies are mutilated and labeled; but their airy spirits dance over the earth playing pranks of enchantment with the minds they serve.

In the poetic atmosphere of romance, words are mortals even as we; they are the spirited subjects of the emotive intellect; and they are dominated by the laws of birth, life, and death. Some words pass trippingly down the ages, suffering little change; others are stillborn; some lead heavy, unhappy lives; while others are gay as butterflies beneath cloudless summer skies; some are balmy with the breath of humor; and others are like sparks struck from flint and steel: some are puny, and others have constitutions of iron; many are ugly monsters born to crime; some are like songs—the soul of music dwells in them; some are like stinging bees, come to

torment; others are like winged arrows shot at shining marks; some are poisoned barbs that kill, others the brutal bludgeons that bruise and stun; some are the demons that torture; and others are the good angels that sustain and soothe.

If anything in this world has a spirit it is a word; if anything has a mission it is a word; if anything has power for good or evil it is a word. Words are beings that inhabit some mysterious dimension; they come to us unbidden; they will not endure capture, for they die in slavery. Words which we calmly search out and appropriate often prove to be corpses; they no longer can serve the mind as swift and competent messengers of thought and feeling, but they seem made for ideas that are moribund; they are vehicles for the dead; they are hearses driven by sombre undertakers; others are dead bodies unburied; we may wrap them in gaudy rags but they remain the lifeless things of idle show.

Words are gregarious and clannish; some

marry and thus travel in couples; some go in families or groups. A swarm hovers over a man all his life, and we speak of it as his vocabulary. Words have affinities or likings; some are elusive as the fallow doe when the leaves begin to turn; others thrust themselves upon us, and like unwelcome guests bore us with their dullness; some are impudent as a Spanish beggar; others are coy as a maiden with her first lover; some are bawds —the shameless jades of speech; some are outlaws heard only in whispers—banished forever from the printed page—prisoners in obscene chambers denied of air and light. Some words come to us only in dreams; some steal upon us unaware to shame us by their presence; others blossom from the lips to bless all in their company; some are lecherous beasts that prowl, as wolves, about our nobler moods to devour the best children of our thought. Some words are the voice of frenzy, the cry of pain, the moans of the dying; some are the challenge of the strong who dare,

others the plea of the weak who fear; some are the clarion of victory, and others are the echo of defeat; some are liars and some are the soul of truth; some are sneaks and others are as candid as the eye of courage; some are all laughter and others all gloom; some are smiles and some are tears; and all are what we are ourselves—modified by the tones they wear, as we are by our raiment.

(As Hearn says, words have personalities; they combine as if by magic, and lo! a poem is born.) Some lend themselves to the honeyed seductions of rhythm and metre; others are as stubborn as the highland glebe beneath the breath of frost. Some words have auras, and some stink—many suggest colors and fine odors; and every one carries a meaning, almost known to babes, that has escaped the dictionary-maker. Words indeed are mysterious beings. Whatever they may have been originally, they have evolved into something higher, something very unlike their earliest ancestors, as we are unlike ours.

There is a certain fatalism about words. We do not even choose our vocabularies; and if our vocabularies do not strictly choose us, at least we are dependents, in a sense, as in another, from our ancestors. There is a similar fatalism in all things, especially with regard to morals. We are given both weeds and flowers. Spiritual longing teaches us to suppress on the one hand and to encourage on the other. So it is with our words. Decency bids us to uproot the coarse and nasty elements of our speech. Kindness enables us to cultivate the wholesome, the generous; and wisdom helps us to kill all cruel forms. Art says, make friends with the beautiful—make war on the ugly. Utility demands the use of clear, persuasive, unequivocal terms. Only falsehood and diplomacy need the uncertain, the two-faced words. Thus it is a form of immorality to be slovenly in speech, or to revert to cruder forms of expression, even in addressing the culturally deficient and the spiritually bankrupt, for to them we owe our best, since they of all others need it most.

V

SELECTIVE TENDENCIES, ETC.

GREAT liberty has been taken with words, but none greater than that which expatiates on their *blind power* and *automatic tendencies.* This is all right metaphorically, but manifestly words have no will-power nor blind power of their own. They exist only by virtue of the mentality that employs them. When we speak of words as possessing this or that vital propensity, we speak in effect of vital phenomena represented by words, or poetically ascribed to them. When we refer to the power of words we assume that certain mental functions are vicarious.

Language is a phenomenon of intellectual activity; many of its parts are of subconscious birth; but once they have been subjected to

the conditions and the requirements of a tongue, they become capable of reacting on the mind, forcing it to submit in a measure, to its own creations. Words, like boomerangs launched forth from the mind, return to impinge upon the source of their power.

Language-change is a dual process simulating birth and death, growth and decay. Slang enters the phenomenon and plays its rôle in the art of meaning which, strictly speaking, has nothing to do with Semantics, since Semantics is the science of the explanation of meanings. As previously suggested, slang mirrors a vital element in the mental configuration of a community; and for that reason slang-words reveal less of themselves than of their users. Every slang-word is related to some fact vividly held in mind; some of these facts are more difficult to reflect than are others; and that is one cause of the death of many slang-words before reaching the state of dialect. Also slang very often is the product of fugitive sensations, emotions,

impulses; and at such times its parts are not properly *words*, hence their high mortality.

Dialect is as natural as grass. It springs from the people as readily as grass from the sod. It *is* a kind of wild grass that persists in repeating earlier forms. For that reason it has been widely reprobated; that is to say, for its lack of culture, while its vitality and usefulness have received slight commendation. Only now and then is something said in its favor to offset the much that has been said against it.

It has been noted, for example, that the well-known London "Cockney" is a legitimate child of the Kentish tongue. This is true especially of the dialect spoken on the south side of the Thames, although Kentish seems to have influenced the North London dialect as well. "Thet" for *that* is clearly Kentish, and it was so spelt as early as A.D. 825. A number of other Cockney words readily can be traced to Kentish origin: "benk" for *bank*, "keb" for *cab*, "kissins" for *cousins*,

"blest" for *blast*, "hite" for *hate* ("I just hite dripery" for *I just hate drapery;* "me country plice" for *my country place*, and others). The *i* for *a* is a Mercian form of pronunciation generally in vogue during Elizabeth's time from the Trent to the Thames. Thus the dialect which represents an early form of speech is interesting at least as a historic heritage.

The ease with which English adopts new, terse words, modified phrases, etc.; its facility for word-coinage, and its readiness to bring forth slang, have given to it the reputation of being the most susceptible, in this respect, of modern languages. Its eagerness to receive "all comers" is responsible for its devolutionary reactions. At least the votaries of "pure English" so regard it. In the long run, however, the devolution is more seeming than real, since it is intermittent and mild. The willingness of the vernacular to accept words from the farm, from the city trades, from various sports, and, in brief, from the different strata of society, is accompanied

usually by a selective intelligence of sufficient power to raise the worthy words to a dignity of usefulness, to a clarity and a strength, which fit them for idiom, and finally for literature; at the same time the unfit are relegated to forgetfulness. Numberless examples may be given. Take the word *plant* as applied to a place equipped for manufacture. Apparently this word has come to stay. Such words as *forestall, fain, embellish, dapper,* were admitted despite the protests of well-meaning conservators of our speech. Seventeenth century critics objected to *plumage, tapestry, tissue, ledge, trenchant, resource, villainy, strath, thrill, grisly, yelp, dovetail,* etc. The Reverend William Fulke was hostile to *neophyte, homicide, scandal, destruction, tunic, despicable, rational,* etc. To-day taste and scholarship are revolted by many words steadily gaining in public favor. Who shall say what their fate will be? The word *negotiate,* for example, as applied to the ascent of a difficult hill, or to the hard way over rough ground, or to a

laborious way through a pass, is coming into popularity, especially in this country. *Negotiate* is used in this sense by many of our writers and by some of our authors. The first time I remember to have seen it so used was in 1910, February number of *Hampton's Magazine:* "We had some three hundred and fifty miles of almost solid ice to negotiate before we could reach our hoped-for winter quarters at Cape Sheridan." (R. E. Peary.)

One of the everyday phrases of the business world is, "to take it up with" so and so. "I will take it up with him," means that I will see him about it—consider and discuss the matter with him. It is not a very attractive phrase, nor especially needed. Yet it implies the careful and the detailed consideration of a matter; and, as it is ordinarily used, the phrase suits its purpose well enough. "In the near future" is another phrase offensive to many without reason. "In the near future:" at a time not far off—surely is as good as "in the far future," or as any other of

a number of similar forms in current use. As we have seen, words and phrases regarded as atrocities to-day may pass into acceptable usage to-morrow.

Professor Brander Matthews of Columbia University says, as reported by the press: "I am a professor of English, and I use the word *joint* with a full appreciation of its meaning. A *joint* is a place where men, drunk or sober, are *steered* in to lose their money. *Joint* is a perfectly good word." I have no doubt of Professor Matthews' qualifications to speak authoritatively of *joint*, or of anything else under heaven, for that matter. But if the dear old professor only would be more gentle in the dispensing of his wisdom! Consider the plum-tree, how suavely it drops sweet fruit at your feet. Why should a professor follow the traditional method of a porcupine? We all know that slang is general in learned and polite society—the politer the society, the more slang is used. This professor also is reported to have said, "I don't want to be put

among that *bunch.*" *Bunch* as applied to a number of unpleasant persons is not a bad use of a very good word. Professor Virginia C. Gildersleeve is of the opinion "that slang is all a question of taste"; perhaps she is right.

The prize ring made "to come back" popular. The old fighter who had been out of training for several years is said to be unable "to come back"; but the young bruiser who has not been "away," because still in training, does not have "to come back." This phrase also is much used in political discussions. As the usage of words tends toward the metaphorical, there can be but little objection to such popular forms.

"Swinging round the circle" was employed by President Johnson on several occasions, among others during a famous speech-making tour. He used it in this sense: "I have opposed traitors in the South, and now I am swinging round the circle and fighting traitors at the North," meaning the "radicals" in the Congress and outside. Through carelessness

the phrase has been commonly applied since to the tours, with their rear-end addreses, made by some of our Presidents and by most of the candidates for the Presidency.

"To differ with" originated in analogy, "to agree with." Analogy is a good servant of the reason even if it does occasionally confuse us. If in a sense it is blind, and headstrong in its ways, nevertheless it is an important factor in the motive power of speech. Ordinarily it is constrained by the laws of harmony and the need of clearness. Analogy, as a primitive element of language, is the means by which the mastery of a vocabulary easily is obtained; but when pushed to extremes, it confuses and impoverishes a tongue.

An intensive slang phrase very generally used in America is "good and ready." It is employed in the sense of *fully ready*. A countryman says, "I will do so when I'm good and ready," meaning that he will take his own time about it; that he will not be hurried—the occasional implication being that he will

not do it at all. It is an ugly phrase to be sure, but it is in perfect harmony with the social conditions where it is most in use.

Another and a better slang phrase of wider currency is, "he has made good," meaning that he has succeeded—done what was expected of him; his conduct was not disappointing. It is used in still another sense: he has *made good* a loss; he has restored something—atoned for something. In this sense it is employed oftener perhaps in England than in America. Despite the ever-increasing social and business contact between New York and London, it is notable that the chasm between British and American colloquialisms shows slight signs of narrowing. "The cold shoulder," "the marble (or frosty) mitt," "I should worry," "let George do it," etc.; are rather ambiguous phrases in England—or were before the War; and their ambiguity is no reflection on English taste or quickness of comprehension.

The Baron Avebury in *The Scenery of*

England coined *manywhere*, an agreeable word that is quite as good as *otherwhat*, and as useful as his *paleolithic* and *neolithic*. *Kickumbob* appears in the works of John Taylor, and it is recorded in the Oxford Dictionary, together with the freakish *jigamaree*.

If one had time and patience enough to study the coinage of words with reference to locality, the vicinity of Boston might prove to be a fruitful field. It is said by C. W. Ernest in an Address before the Massachusetts Library Club that in the neighborhood of Boston, *commonwealth* came into being in 1634; *help* (domestic labor), in 1640; *congregational* (applied to a religious sect), in 1639; *homestead*, in 1648; *platform* (a declaration of principles), in 1649; *rum*, (an alcoholic drink), in 1650, together with many other words and phrases. Mr. Ernest may be correct, and probably is in the majority of his statements; but he clearly is mistaken as to *commonwealth*, since the word was used by Sir Thomas North in a translation of Plu-

tarch as early as 1579; and it also appears in the earliest English translations of Cervantes.

Many over-critical efforts, made by conscientious conservators of good English, are embalmed in most books on words and their uses, etc. Ambrose Bierce in *A Little Blacklist of Literary Faults*, condemns the phrase, "the goods were sold *at* auction." He says it should be, "the goods were sold *by* auction." The meaing of the first phrase is clear and its form is correct. It says in effect that the goods were sold *at* a public sale; *auction* defines the kind of sale; presumably they were sold *by* a person through his agent, the *auctioneer*.

Mr. Bierce also objects to *back of* for *behind*. "Back of all progress is human wisdom; back of law is force." There is nothing the matter with that. In no way does it offend either the law or the spirit of English. It merely is a question of taste whether in this sense one says *behind* or *back of*. Other things being equal, good usage inclines to-

ward the employment of one word which does the work of two; but here there are as many letters in *behind* as there are in *back of;* and besides, the two words *back of* often are preferable to the one *behind.*

Maetzner (*English Grammar*) calls *because* a "hybrid particle." "He recognized one fact *because* of another." "I knew it was night *because* it was dark." The condemnation of this hybrid has not visibly impaired its usefulness. *Because,* like many another hybrid, has done yeoman service for a long time, and it is likely to continue despite abuses. If ever a sturdy hybrid won a place in respectable society, this one has, surely, *because* it is deserving and *because* it serves us well both in good prose and fine poetry. Tennyson says in *Sir Galahad:*

My strength is the Strength of ten
Because my heart is pure.

Brainy is reproached as "pure slang, and singularly disagreeable." But the reason why

this word should be any worse than *spicy*, *rainy*, etc., is not revealed.

The use of *build* for *make* has caused a good deal of uneasiness in critical circles. It is urged tearfully that one should not say "build a fire" which, it is held, one can *make* but can not *build*. In a hair-splitting sense, that is true enough. One can, however, *build* a structure for burning, insured or not, and, having set fire to it, one logically is permitted by the laws of language to say that the fire was *built*. So may one pile up a mass of inflammable material and set fire to it; by leave of a little looser law of speech, he still may say that he *built* a fire. *Kindle* (from candle) a fire is better perhaps than either *build* or *make*, unless it be desirable to show by the verb what the method was of starting the fire. The objection to *make*, in this sense, is absurdly over-stated when it is said that virtually no other word correctly can take its place; for to *lay* or *light* a fire is equally good English.

It also has been sapiently declared that one can not *build* a tunnel; and that therefore it is incorrect to say so. Let us see. We can not *build* a hole, but we can dig one provided the surrounding walls need no structural support—for the walls limit the hole, make it possible for a hole to be a hole; and for that reason they may be regarded as part of it. Ordinarily, a tunnel is a thing as much of builded walls as it is of the (digged) excavation. Hence it is not incorrect to use the term *build* in this sense. A tunnel, properly speaking, however, is *cut* or *bored.* The same objection has been made to the word *build* when the construction of a canal is signified; and the same objection falls to the ground, since while the canal may be digged, its walls, embankments, may also be *built*, and almost always they are; hence *building* a canal—that is to say, digging the channel, constructing the embankments, building walls of masonry and locks of wood and stone, etc.—is not necessarily an incorrect form of speech.

"He had a good *chance* to succeed," in fine, his venture was hopeful of success—it might have succeeded—the hazard was less than the probability of success. I can not see why the sentence would be better with *opportunity* in the place of *chance*. The same sensitive critic (Bierce) condemns *chivalrous* as "archaic, stilted, and fantastic." Why not relegate the word *mother* to the limbo of the "archaic," as a term too old-fashioned and too elastic to be tolerated in this precise and refined age?

"In *climbing* one ascends." Very well. It is true that one way of ascending is by climbing; and there are as many ways of descending, plus one, as there are of ascending. If one has reached an altitude by *climbing* and if he declines to tumble and if he wishes to descend by reversing his method of ascending, why should he not be permitted to *climb down* —and to say so if it please him? Whatever may be said against this colloquialism, this surely may be said in its favor: it is descrip-

tive, terse, graphic, clear, inoffensive; and it is as good as any one of a thousand other colloquial and even idiomatic phrases which can not bear analysis.

"Communities have *customs;* individuals, *habits*—commonly bad ones," says Mr. Bierce in *Write it Right.* Why "bad ones"? "Two (or more) *ones* hardly sounds right. The plural of *one* is not the best of taste, etc."[1]

It is true that "communities have customs," and for that reason individuals follow customs. Certain conduct in certain environment becomes customary. It is, for instance, a civilized man's custom to rescue a drowning child, to put out the flames of his neighbor's house, to send flowers to weddings and funerals, to help capture a thief, to turn a deaf ear to gossip, to smile at the sage who strains at a gnat and swallows a camel; but these customs are not habits. According to Crabb's *English Synonymes,* "*Custom* supposes an act of the will; *habit* implies an involuntary

[1] THE WORTH OF WORDS. (Bell.)

movement: a *custom* is followed; a *habit* is acquired."

"*Dilapidated* for *ruined.* Said of a building, or other structure. But the word is from the Latin *lapis*, a stone, and can not properly be used of any but a stone structure." [2] Such strictures placed upon the use of words in a living language, if taken seriously, would so confuse us that we should hardly know how to say anything with assurance.

"And *caprice*, which came to us by way of the French from (It.) *capriccio*, and (L.) *caper*, had a picturesque primitive meaning. '*Capriccio*, a sudden start, a freak motion; apparently from (It.) *capro*, a goat,' etc." [3] *Capricious*, according to the same dictum, "can not properly be used of any but a" goat or like beast. Thus the reporter who refers in the press to the *caprices* of Miss Millionaire, virtually calls her father an old goat—which may be all very well and meta-

[2] WRITE IT RIGHT. (Bierce.)

[3] THE CHANGING VALUES OF ENGLISH SPEECH. (Bell.)

phorically true; but how about the legal possibilities with their endless vexations?

The growth and the elasticity of a living language make it difficult to lay down precise rules for the use of words. The expansion of a language must conform somewhat to reason, to the logic of growth. It will not do to be too dogmatic in the treating of literal meanings whilst they are under the sway of evolutionary principles. Take the word *accident*, for example. "An injury may be and often is, the result of an *accident;* but *injury* and *accident* are two words far from identical in meaning."[4] That is true; yet we are justified by good usage in speaking of certain unpleasant and unfortunate occurrences, causing injury by chance, as *accidents*.

"*Anticipate*, 'to take beforehand, . . . to take first possession of, or to take before the proper time,' is not a synonym of *expect*, *foresee*. A man may *anticipate* his sweetheart in fulfilling some dear wish of hers, even

[4] THE WORTH OF WORDS. (Bell.)

before she makes known her desire; or he may *anticipate* some one in doing anything that he succeeds in doing first; or he may *anticipate* an obligation by meeting it before its time; but he doesn't *anticipate* any act by expecting to perform the act."[5]

Good usage has extended the meaning of this word, in a popular way, until it signifies also the looking forward with pleasure or confidence to something expected—to *anticipate* a good time. This modification may become eventually the principal meaning of the word; and like many other questionable changes of a similar kind, it has gone too far probably to be recalled.

"*Tea* is *tea*, and nothing else."[6] To call strong beef broth beef-*tea*, is offensive and inaccurate; but there is no importunate reason for confining the meaning of *tea* to an infusion made from the dried leaves of the tea-plant. English is richer because this word

[5] THE WORTH OF WORDS. (Bell.)
[6] WORDS AND THEIR USES. (White.)

has been applied to infusions made from other leaves similarly prepared, even to decoctions made from the dried petals of flowers. For example: senna-*tea*, camomile-*tea*, tansy-*tea*, and so forward. Common sense must occasionally humor convenience; and both may justify common usage when it facilitates clear expression which neither is ugly nor incongruous. *Tea* so long has been in use that no possible confusion can result from a compound of the word that designates another potable extract of similar preparation. *Eau* de Cologne, *eau* de rose, Bristol *milk*, *milk* of almonds, *milk* of sulphur, lime, magnesium, *crême* de mint, *cream* of lime, *cream* of tartar, cocoa-*butter*, *butter*-bean, *butter* weed, *butter*-milk, and many other like compounds, are no better and certainly no more logical of combination and usage than, let us say, camomile-*tea*.

"*Excessively* is not a synonym of *exceedingly* or *very*. *Excessively hot*, . . . is an ignorant misuse of the word."[7] Let us see if there are

[7] THE WORTH OF WORDS. (Bell.)

not exceptions. That which is excessive surpasses the natural state, the normal, the usual, the wonted measure, degree, number, or condition of something. The weather being abnormally hot might with some reason be called excessively hot, since the temperature exceeds the normal degree.

On the other hand, we have *banquet* and *dinner*. These two words clearly are not synonyms; to employ them as such is a misuse of good terms. All *dinners*, unfortunately or otherwise, are not *banquets;* and certainly all *banquets* are *dinners* only to the professional opportunist. The function of a *dinner* is to appease hunger and to impart nourishment. This function may be supplemented by a social expression of good-will and hospitality. Thus a *dinner* may be very plain and simple, or it may be very elaborate; but a *banquet* always is a formal affair at which the eating plays a secondary part; it is a ceremony which slowly has evolved from the gluttonous feast of celebration into one

of the many ceremonies indicative of hospitality and complimentary honor. It is true that the banquet often falls to the level of an orgy, with its vulgar display of wealth, its stale stories and senseless twaddle; yet the word is a good one, and all good words are useful. These few examples show that word-quibblers are as apt to be finical in the use of terms not etymologically consistent as slovenly folk are likely to misuse good words. We should remember that while some words originated in error and superstition, and some in out-and-out falsehood, yet words like men may detach themselves from the misfortunes of their family history and thereafter expand into broad usefulness. This is the spirit of progression. To chain a word down to its etymology is to limit its activities and to give the dry-rot to its utility. There are scores of useful words as we shall see that have wandered away from their etymological significations and traditions. Shall we restrict the word *journey* to mean a day's travel because

the word came from the Latin, by way of the French *journée*, meaning day, day's work, day's travel? There are many such words that should be sensibly considered by writers on words before they launch their books. It is interesting to treat words etymologically, but it is both interesting and practical to treat them with reference to the laws of a growing language and the spirit of a changing tongue.

Again, take the word *quarantine*, which came from the Latin by way of the Italian and Old French, and which signifies forty. In Old English Law it meant a period of forty days. The word in recent times has acquired a broader meaning; and now it may imply, legitimately enough, a special period of more than forty days, or any part thereof. The same is true of such words as *decimate* [8] (orig.: to reduce a number by taking every tenth); *sarcophagus* (orig.: a stone coffin with flesh-consuming properties); *candle* (orig.: a *white*

[8] THE STUDY OF WORDS. (Trench.)

wax taper); *miniature* (orig.: a "picture painted with minium or carmine"); *rubric*, (orig.: an exceptional part of a book or MS., such as initial letters painted in red); *surplice* (orig.: a garment worn over another garment of skins); *stirrup* (orig.: ropes used for mounting a horse); *haversack* (orig.: a sack for the carrying of oats); *barn* (orig.: a place or building used for the storing of barley or bere); *larder* (orig.: a special place for keeping hog's fat); *monody* (orig.: a simple ode); *lucubration* (orig.: meditation or study by artificial light at night); *costermonger* (orig.: seller of costards or apples); *palace* (orig.: a building on Palatine Hill); *nausea* (orig.: sea-sickness); *sonnet* and *sonata* (once the same); and so on with the names of the days of the week, etc.

Now a word about the dictionary. The growing inflation of the modern dictionary leads many to believe that the number of English words is increasing at a prodigious rate. The number is increasing without doubt,

but not so rapidly as one might suppose. So far as the English vocabulary is concerned, its actual increase since the days of Johnson's Dictionary is owing in large part to an addition of words hitherto unrecorded. The apparent numerical gain, which is so astonishing, is made up considerably of compounds, of words of variant spellings, of scientific nomenclature derived from many languages, but mostly from the Latin. If we omit these it probably will be found that an English dictionary of 100,000 words would be tolerably complete.

In the work of compiling an English dictionary, there are many nice differences to settle between function and form of distinct word-units. There is a surprising number of word-variations that are easily transformed into different words. The facility of compounding words is a temptation to the lexicographer not easily resisted, and which, when yielded to, encumbers the vocabulary. However cautiously he notes the uses of the

transitive and the intransitive verbs, he yet produces an effect upon the average mind of the doubling of many verbs.

Moreover, the disagreement of grammarians—their uncertainty in regard to the parts of speech—adds further confusion. "Every compared adjective," says Alfred D. Sheffield, "gives three words; every verb, from three to five." If we add to this human frailty of the lexicographer, the commercial rivalry of the publisher in his efforts to surpass his competitor in "numerical totals," it will not be hard to see how the dictionary has grown to embody several hundred thousand useless words. That is not all. By the use of prefixes and suffixes, any amount of dead wood has been added to the dictionary. Given the words, *existence* and *conscious*, for example: Is it necessary to lumber the dictionary with such words as *non*existence, *sub*conscious, *un*conscious, *semi*conscious, conscious*ly*, and so forward?

Were the dictionary to contain all the im-

provised forms of really serviceable words which have been and may be used, its utility would in no sense be increased. On the contrary, it would be much better to add a few formulæ for the permutation of words than to encumber the dictionary with numberless self-evident derivatives and compounds. A dictionary setting forth the laws of transformation and growth of words with their crystallized distinctions in meaning, their so-called trend, and their development, would be more serviceable as a *dictionary* than the usual mountainous assemblage of examples.

VI

HISTORIC PERIODS, ETC.

THE English vocabulary offers a fruitful field of study. First of all, the cast of thought that it expresses is individual. Ours is a distinct, not necessarily superior, civilization; and all the forms of intellectual activity represented by our tongue are so characteristic that one may well believe in the formative influence of a language over the people speaking it.

If we separate our words according to their historic periods, we shall be able to trace in a loose way the spiritual progress of the peoples that used the words. As Hugo says of slang, we may say of our whole vocabulary: To "those who study the tongue as it should be studied, that is to say, as geologists study the earth," English "appears like a veritable

alluvial deposit." In this deposit there are strata composed of a great variety of words. Some are very old. They were dropped by the different racial groups which were united by the language and the crude culture commonly called Aryan. Overlying these are strata which contain words of a later date from various sources. Some are of native origin; many are foreign; and a great number of our words are historic documents which, if translated with care, reveal the tendency of ancient thought, the characteristics, the attainments, and the pursuits of a people whose generations have passed through many thousands of years. These words form the slender but unbroken threads of historic unity. They connect temporary movements of thought, modern conceptions and emotions, with those of a more or less remote antiquity. Nearly all the words bear some impression, carry some trait, or conceal some hint of their vanished ancestry.

Thousands of years before the present era,

our ancestors, we believe, were living in what is now known as southern Russia. They and their associated tribes were the progenitors of nearly all the great peoples that have made history during the past 2,500 years. All these tribes perhaps spoke a similar tongue; and they were united by the bonds of a common culture. Their civilization is called Aryan; and their language was the mother of the Indo-European tongues.

When these tribes broke up, left the steppes country, and migrated to other parts of the world some to the eastward, some to the westward, and others to the southward—their civilization became modified. The group-characteristics of tongue and culture became intensified through isolation from the others and by the pressure of a new environment. These were the ancestors of the Persians and the Hindoos, the Greeks and the Celts, the Teutons and the Slavs, the Romans and the Gauls.

Through the West Teutonic division of

tongues, we come to our own language, which we find to be most closely related to the Frisian. In looking at the past through our own vocabulary, we catch glimpses of an early civilization that is of peculiar interest to the English-speaking peoples. By means of words still preserved to us, however altered in signification,—many of them coarse and brutal—we can recall remote perceptions; we are able to review acts of antiquity; and we can reawaken conceptions that were held by those who used our ancestral tongue to express their culture during its earliest known stage.

From that distant period came our first ten numerals, and such words as *father*, *mother*, *daughter*, *sister*, *brother*, *son*, *widow*, *nephew* (French from *neve*), *foot*, *tooth*, *knee*, etc.; together with the names of domesticated animals, such as *hound*, *goat*, *goose*, *horse* (*eoh*), *sow*, *ewe*, *wether*, *cow*, *wool*, *ox*, *steer*, *free*, *herd*, etc. It is natural that words of this kind should have been used by a nomadic people. That these tribes had made considerable prog-

ress in the arts, is indicated by such words as *axle, yoke, wheel, nave, wain or wagon, ore* (copper), *row, rudder* (paddle), *door, timber, thatch, mead, weave;* and their knowledge, their powers of observation, are shown by such words as *tree, birch, withy, wolf, feather, nest, otter, beaver, hare, mouse, night, dew, star, snow, wind, fire, east, thunder,* etc.;—all primitive terms, or those derived from early roots.

These and scores of other words tell us much of that prehistoric experience in which many elements of our own modern civilization had their origin. More than that, they show our spiritual kinship with peoples widely distributed over the continents of earth and with others across oceans of time. They keep the ghosts of the dim past before our eyes; they have borne across the centuries some of our simplest, finest, most poetic, and most purely religious conceptions; also they have preserved strange superstitions and the rites that still fascinate us, although we no longer know their meanings. Words of our vocabulary

have awakened modern sympathies for prehistoric and primitive experiences; and they have demonstrated to us that, however far we may have advanced along material and mechanical lines, in art and science, our spiritual character and psychological processes have not changed through tens of thousands of years.

Long after the Persian and the Indian ancestral tribes had migrated eastward, those of our European groups were making their way slowly "from treeless steppes and pasturelands into a country of forests." During "this West-Aryan or European period, when the ancestors of the Greeks, the Romans, the Celts and Teutons were still closely connected, a number of words for trees and birds make their first appearance." [1] To this period have been traced the words, *beech, elm, hazel, swallow, throstle, finch, starling, corn, furrow, meal, bean, ear* (of corn), to *ear* (to plow). This would seem to indicate a change of environ-

[1] THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. (Smith.)

ment and of pursuit. It probably was during this time that words for sea, salt, fish, etc., began to appear in Europe.

A movement among the European tribes carried the ancestors of the Teutons and the Slavs northward through the forests of Germany, those of the Greeks and the Romans toward the Mediterranean. Evidence of early associations between the progenitors of the Celts and the Latins, the Slavs and the Teutons, is found in their languages; but the ancestors of the Greeks apparently separated themselves from the other groups.

The next period, seen through the Teutonic group of tongues, is marked by an advance in civilization. Agriculture already had become a recognized industry. Civic organization had advanced. Commerce had been established; and the sea-faring life had well begun along the northwestern coasts. Natural phenomena were observed, named, and studied. At least all this would seem to be true, if we can judge by words of that time—for it has

given to our vocabulary: *bowl, broth, brew, knead, dough, loaf, hat, comb, house, home, borough, king, earl, buy, ware, worth,* and *cheap* (barter), *sea, sound, island, cliff, flood, strand, ship, steer, sail, stay, storm, shower, hail, whale* ("for any large sea-beast"), *seal, mew* (sea-gull), and words indicating the points of the compass, etc.

We assume that as the primitive Aryans had only one word for metal, *ore,* given to copper, their knowledge of the metals was slight. But now we come to a period, previous to the separation of the Anglo-Saxons from the other Teutonic tribes, when such words abounded as, *gold, silver, tin, lead, iron,* and *steel.* That metal-work was a new art, is suggested by the legends coming from that time, showing that the forgers and blacksmiths were given magical and even sinister powers by the popular imagination.

There were such words as, *leech* (a healer), *lore, write* (from *reissen*) to cut or scratch letters in tablets of bark or wood, and *book*

(from *beech*). Etymology would seem to show also that travel had become more or less common over the land. *Fear* (from *fare*) suggests dangers to be expected while traveling through strange lands and forests; *learn* came from a root meaning, "to follow a track"; *weary*, "to tramp over wet grounds and moors"; *earn* came from "field labor"; *gain* by way of the French, "from a Teutonic verb meaning 'to graze, to pasture' . . . to forage, to hunt or fish"; *free* came "from an Aryan root meaning dear," that is to say, applied to those connected with household-ties, and therefore not in bondage. This also is the source of our word *friend*. *Bless*, a religious word, was derived from *blood*, "to mark or consecrate with blood"; *mirth* and *merry*, meaning "short," presumably "that which shortens time, or cheers."

In studying the old words of our vocabulary, we should heed the warning of L. P. Smith, and others, against our giving to them their modern meanings. "Thus *fear* had the ob-

jective sense of a sudden or terrible event till after the Norman Conquest; the early meaning of *mirth* was 'enjoyment, happiness,' and could be used in Old English of religious joy; while *merry* meant no more than 'agreeable, pleasing.'" [2]

We have passed nearly through the period when the northwestern coasts and forests of Europe were inhabited by the descendants of Aryan tribes still in a crude stage of culture. They had made progress in the rough arts; and they had learned much from their neighboring tribes; but they still remained savages steeped in ignorance and superstition.

Now breaks the dawn of modern civilization. It is brought forth by the influence of the other more fortunate descendants of Aryan groups which had migrated to the Mediterranean regions, and which had come in contact with the ancient civilizations of Egypt and the East. Here the great classical centers of culture were established. From these

[2] THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. (Smith.)

came the beginnings of our modern culture, in its best sense, which influenced our vocabulary even before the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain.

From this time onward, our borrowings from the civilizations of Athens and Rome include a large part of our vocabulary. At the beginning of the Dark Ages, Christian influence was dominant in Western-European society. This, of course, modified our vocabulary. In addition, there have been Oriental influences, which left their mark, together with large borrowings from more modern sources, such as the Romance languages.

Finally, a very large proportion of all our words is linguistic padding and filling. The number of meaningless words is surprising. Words that are mere scarecrows and effigies of fact litter the pages even of our best books. This abundance of trash-words tells us how loosely we think, how ignorant we are of exact knowledge, how much savagery remains in us, and still how antique is our period.

Words that stand for other words—hazy symbols of empty signs—embarrass indeed all tongues.

There are two categories of words: one is founded on emotion, the other on reason. Our mental processes confuse the two. Words false and true—symbols of symbols and signs of signs—are jumbled together. All telling words are sparks of knowledge. All knowledge comes from collective and personal experience. Experience is an interpretation of energy. Therefore a word, or group of words, that means anything must identify some active or passive form of energy, or some class of energies. How many of our words do this, precisely?

The educational and ethical value to be gained from the progress already attained in physiological research, particularly with relation to the nervous system, is highly important to civilization, since it affects the individual and, therefore, the people as a whole. As gray-matter is more amenable to the

"plastic stress" during childhood and early youth, education in languages should begin early enough to be finished at the tenth or twelfth year of the child's age. Afterward only practice is necessary to maintain the cerebral habits and to retain the artificial changes wrought in nervous substance. For although the young brain is readily fashioned to perform new functions, also it readily lapses. Rigidity of nervous substance increases rapidly with the years, whilst the powers of reflection increase until at some period after middle-age when the zenith is reached. Until this point is passed, the judgment grows keener and the poise more stable.

Whatever the mysteries of words may be, there is no mistaking their ethical meanings. A man's language is a very important part of his conduct. He is as obligated to clean speech as he is to clean raiment. He is as morally responsible for his words as he is for any other of his acts. No amount of orderly care directed toward his immediate environ-

ment can atone for slovenly disorder in his speech. Ignorance of the niceties of his mother-tongue is contemptible; lame knowledge of its full powers is a form of reprehensible inefficiency of education. Linguistic lawlessness is abhorrent; for language is a law, and he who breaks the law commits something. Language also is an intellectual covenant with a godlike spirit. He who does not keep the covenant sins against the spirit. Brutality in language is taboo. A civilized person may be hurt more severely with a word than by a blow. Style takes care of itself. Plain and simple speech appeals to our better nature because it indicates clear thought and transparent motives. Diplomatic language occupies its own sphere, however that sphere may be regarded by the sensible and straightforward element of mankind. The moral need of looking well to our words becomes more imperative as we reflect on their characteristics and powers. Some words harbor the elements of ambush, of

assassination, of thievery, of licentiousness, and of every vice known to wickedness and evil. In others there is every known virtue. If moral conduct is good in our daily affairs, the ethics of speech should not be slighted. If it be well to cultivate the beautiful in our environment, it may be even better for our souls to foster the beautiful in our speech. If the aesthetic instinct is excusable, it is commendable in our words. If art is necessary to man, it is essential in his language. If science has any message to deliver, the means of its delivery is not without import. If poetry appeals to our higher nature, it makes its appeal through the fitness of words in their combinations—their suggestiveness and character. And so on with the rest:

"The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook."
—(*Proverbs.*)

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