

SOME NOTES ON LANGUAGE STUDY.

BY THE EDITOR.

LATIN, the language of the Romans, is the only Italic dialect that has been preserved in a rich literature and lives on in several daughter languages, viz., Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Roumanian. It belongs to the great Aryan family of which the Sanskrit and Iranian are the main Asiatic branches, and Greco-Italic, Slavic, Germanic and Celtic the main European ones.

Latin is of interest to us first because the Romans, like the Greeks, are our kinsfolk, but its importance to the people of English speech is still greater. Latin has influenced the formation not only of the old Saxon, since the Saxons settled in Britain, but also of modern English at a time when the language was forming. The Saxon inhabitants of Britain owed their civilization to Rome, and so Roman words were used for all those institutions, activities and ideas which came to them in the course of progress. The Latin *schola* became school; *penna* became pen; *corona*, crown; *crux*, cross, and so forth.

The Romans, however, were not the inventors of civilization. They had acquired their culture from Greece, and so Greek words had crept into Latin. The Romans were mere preservers and transmitters. Such words as church, bishop, priest, monk, baptize,¹ etc., are ultimately derived from Greek terms, after they had become Latinized. With the civilization of southern Europe, the northern European nations adopted from their teachers the names of the new institutions. For this very reason it is indispensable for a thorough knowledge of English that we possess some knowledge not only of Anglo-Saxon but also of Greek, Latin and medieval French, but especially of Latin which has contributed most to the vocabulary of English speech.

The importance of Latin for all English speaking people can

¹ κυριακή, ἐπίσκοπος, πρεσβύτερος, μόναχος, βαπτίζειν.

not be overrated, but though Latin is very important, its significance can be and has been misunderstood, and now and then it has happened that even scholars have misstated it. Considering the innumerable Latin words which have been incorporated into the vocabulary, it is obvious that to any one who wishes to acquire a fair command of the English mother-tongue, at least some knowledge of Latin is indispensable. However, Latin can not be called either the father or the mother of English, for English is and will remain a Saxon language. The character of a language is determined by its grammar, its declensions, conjugations and its syntax. They form the framework of thought into which are fitted all the many indigenous and foreign words. To be sure, foreign words tend to modify the speech of a people, they widen its horizon and enrich its thought, but for all that they do not change the lineal descent of its speech. For this reason English is and remains a Saxon language so long as it retains the Saxon spirit and the character of Saxon thought, which it evinces by Anglicizing foreign words and treating them according to the rule of Saxon grammar, Saxon inflection, and Saxon syntax.

It would be wrong to say that the English language has been overpowered or has suffered by the invasion of Latin terms, or generally speaking through the introduction of any foreign words which came in large numbers from all parts of the globe. On the contrary, the English language took possession of them; it grew in both exactness and wealth of expression and yet it remained English, the child of Saxon speech.

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Languages change, and they changed even more in former times when language was mere speech, i. e., purely oral language. Some letters can be pronounced either more or less sharply, and so the Roman *cornu* was pronounced *horn* among the Teutons. In a similar way the Latin *helvus* is the English *yellow* and the German *gelb*. The root of "hundred" (i. e., *hund*) corresponds to the Latin *centum*, and the Latin *homo* is the Gothic *guma* which corresponds to an Old-German word *gomo*, now lost but still preserved in the compound "Bräutigam" and in the English *groom*. The more a language becomes fixed by writing, the less it is subject to modifications, and the more stable it grows.

The languages of the North American Indians change so rapidly that when a tribe splits up and its members are separated for

only two generations they are scarcely able to understand one another.

We must grant, however, that there is a special reason why Indian languages change more quickly than others, and this is their habit of tabooing words. Whenever anything happens that impresses the Indian he avoids the word that denotes the offensive object, and so he has to invent a new word in its place. The words tabooed are sometimes very numerous, and this in addition to linguistic changes of pronunciation tends to produce new languages within a very short time.

English has become the more stable according as the written language has more and more become common property; nevertheless it is still subject to change and it has been changing to a considerable degree in the past. The linguistic cause of changes is governed by laws, the most obvious one of which was discovered by the Grimm brothers, those great scholars of Germanic language and literature who may fairly be regarded as the fathers of comparative philology.

The Grimm brothers were born and raised in central Germany, near the border line of High and Low German speech. In their time the people still spoke Low German at home and used High German as the professional language in school, on the stage, in the pulpit, in official documents, at court and in literature. The High Germans say *das* for the English *that*, while the Low Germans say *dat*, and a similar relation prevails between other consonants.

The Low German *t* changes in High German to *z*, pronounced *ts*, a double consonant and very sharp; and the Low German *p* is modified by a following *f* into *pf*.² Upon the whole High German becomes harder and more guttural, losing the dental aspirates (*th* as well as *dh*) and also the *w*, while the Low Germans near the shore, especially those Saxons who emigrated over the sea into Britain, were inclined to soften their language, to change the broad *ah* into *ay*, *ay* into *ee*, and *ee* into *i*, and gradually to discard gutturals altogether. At present, guttural aspirates of English speech are preserved only in Scotch dialects.³

A comparison between the two dialects which the Grimm brothers spoke and the languages which they learned in school, especially Latin and Greek, which were later supplemented by Sanskrit, led

² Instances: the Low German *tid* (pronounced *teed*; it is the English "tide") changes to *Zeit* (i. e., "time"). The Low German *pierd* (the English *palfrey*, derived from the Celtic Latinized word *paraveredus*) changes to *Pferd* (i. e., "horse").

³ For instance, *loch*, a lake.

them to the conclusion that some changes of the mute consonants are governed by a definite law, expressed in the formula AMTA or TAMTAM, which means that a tenuis or sharp consonant (viz., *p*, *k*, *t*) changes into its corresponding aspirate (viz., *ph*, *kh*, *th*); an aspirate into its media or flat consonant (viz., *b*, *g*, *d*), and the media again back into the aspirate.

There are two kinds of aspirates, soft and hard, or flat and sharp. One is the aspirate of the tenuis, *ph*, *kh*, *th*; the other of the media, *bh*, *gh*, *dh*. The hard or sharp aspirate of the labials is *f*, the flat or soft one *v*. In the same way we have two dental aspirates *dh* as in "that" and *th* as in "thorn." Guttural aspirates do not exist in English but are quite in evidence in German; they too are twofold, *kh* as in the German *ach* (i. e., "alas") and *gh* as in the German *ich* (i. e., "I" in English). Modern German, having lost the dental aspirates, replaces them by *z*, pronounced *ts*.

The law of the Grimm brothers means that under certain conditions a language is apt to change *p* into *ph*, *ph* into *b*, and *b* again into *p*. In the same way *k* changes to *kh*, *kh* to *g*, *g* to *k*; and *t* changes to *th*, *th* into *d*, and *d* into *t*. Thus we have a circle of Tenuis, Aspirate, Media, Tenuis, etc., which, read as an acrostic, makes TAMTAM or AMTA.

We quote only a few instances of the Grimm law. The Greek *ther* (θήρ) means "animal" but corresponds in its form to the English *deer*. It is *dius* in Gothic and changes in High German to *Tier*. The Greek *dyo* and Latin *duo* are changed in Low German into *tuo*, which is the English *two*, originally pronounced as in Low German *tuo*. It has been modified to the High German *zwei* which was the feminine form of *zwei*.⁴ Analogous is the transition from the Greek *deka* (δέκα) and the Latin *decem* through the Old Low German *tehan*, English *ten*, to the High German *zehn*. We select as a third example a word that in the first stage shows a tenuis. The Greek *treis* and Latin *tres* corresponds to the Saxon and English *three* and to the High German *drei*.

We present a few more instances in tabular form:

SANSKRIT	GREEK	LATIN	GOthic	ENGLISH	H. GERMAN
tvam	τύ	tu	thu	thou	du
bratar	φράτηρ ⁵	frater	brothar	brother	Bruder
pitar	πατήρ	pater	fadar	father	Vater

⁴ In Middle High German the masculine form is *zween*, the feminine *zwei*, the neuter *zwei*.

⁵ In classical Greek a *φράτηρ* is a member of a *φρατρία* or brotherhood, and the word has been replaced by *ἀδελφός*.

SANSKRIT	GREEK	LATIN	GOthic	ENGLISH	H. GERMAN
matar	μήτηρ	mater	——— ⁶	mother	Mutter
dant	ὀδούς Gen. ὀδόντος	dens	tundus	tooth	Zahn
[dadhamī ⁷]	[दधिमु ⁷]	do, dēre ⁷	deths	do	thue
pad	πόδις	pes, pedis	fotus	foot	Fuss, Pfofe

It will be seen that not all follow the rule exactly, for instance the Gothic *fadar*, ought to be "fathar"; and in other instances further complications arise through the kinship of *r* and *s* (e. g. the English *was* is the German *war*) and the frequent interchangeability of mutes of the same kind. Thus the guttural aspirate of the Anglo-Saxon *enough*, the German *genug*, changes in its modern English pronunciation to *f*.

Sometimes the meaning of a word changes. The Latin *vulpes* (or *volpes*) means "fox," the same term as the English *wolf*; while *fegos* (φηγός) means "oak" in Greek, but *fagus* in Latin means "beech." It is etymologically the same word as the German *Buche* and the English *beech*. Being derived from the root *fag* (Greek φάγειν, "to eat"), we must conclude that originally it designated a tree with edible fruit and that when the Pelasgian Greeks separated from the other Aryans, they ate acorns, while their Italic and Teutonic cousins found in their homes plenty of beech-trees the fruit of which they used for food.

Again two words which sound different are sometimes the same in meaning and etymology. The verb *plere* is the English "to fill," and that which fills a country is in Latin *plebs* (or with reduplication *populus*) and in English "folk," in German *Volk*, (pronounced *folk*).

Comparative philology traces this law of the Grimm brothers through the Aryan languages of Europe and Asia, but history has witnessed an actual transition from one stage into another in Germany in the beginning of the Middle Ages, modifying the language of the South German tribes. When they came in touch with the

⁶ There is no doubt that the Goths used the word mother, but I can not note it down here, because I am unable to find it in the Gothic documents at my command. Ulfilas uses in its place the endearing term *aiþei*; so in Luke ii. 34 and 48. Although the Gothic translator uses the word *fadar*, he addresses God in the Lord's prayer not *Fadar unsar*, but *Atta unsar*. The tenderness of the two terms *atta* and *aiþei* is almost untranslatable, for they are both far from the cold respect due to a father and from the levity of the unconventional expressions "papa" and "mamma." We come nearest to the meaning when we use two words such as "father dear," "mother dear."

⁷ The Sanskrit, Greek and Latin verbs corresponding to the English "I do" mean "I place; I posit; I put up." In Latin the verb "do" (*dēre*) has become obsolete; it has been replaced in the sense "to put up" by *ponere* and in the sense "to do" by *facere*, but it is still preserved in such compounds as *condere*, "to found" and *credere*, "to believe."

Celts and Romans, they changed their pronunciation which resulted in the formation of a new language called High German. The Old Low German remained unaffected by this linguistic modification, and together with Roman and Greek stayed on the same stage with the most ancient form of Aryan speech, the Sanskrit.

It is interesting to note that some dialectic changes of ancient Greek repeat themselves in the differences between German and English. The German corresponds to the Doric and Æolic, the English to the Ionic. The former were inlanders and preferred the broad *ah* sound as in father, while the latter, the English and the Ionians, both seafaring people, show a tendency to change *a* into *η* and *ah* into *ay*.

Concerning the aspirates, we may add that gutturals seem to prevail in the speech of mountaineers, while the inhabitants of the coasts prefer the dentals.

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Languages change not only in their linguistic aspect but also through a tendency to shorten words, and this is most apparent in the speech of the German nations. There is a great difference between Græco-Italic and any one of the Germanic languages which consists in the fact that the latter allows the accent of the word to play a most dominant part. The Greeks and also the Romans possess a kind of euphonic accent. The accent changes with conditions. Thus the word *poētae* (the poets) has the accent on the *ē*, but in the genitive *poētārum* the accent is thrown on the *ā*, and similar rules obtain in Greek.

Both the Romans and the Greeks possess a special sense for what is called prosody, which means the length or shortness of vowels independent of the accent. As far back as we can trace the development of their language, the Teutonic nations have insisted on keeping the accent on the root syllable. The inflection of the word was of secondary account, and its quantity changed according to conditions. They neglected euphony and cared most for the meaning which was emphasized by the accent. The French even to-day have a kind of accent of sentences, the accent of words may change. Not so in German, not so in English, nor in any other of the Germanic languages. Here a change of accent renders words almost unintelligible.⁸

⁸ When a Frenchman says "I am an infidel" instead of "in'fidel," one has to think twice before catching the meaning. The pronunciation "atroc'ity" makes a decidedly different impresson on the ear of English speaking people than atro'city. On the other hand French people may pronounce *la mai'son* or *la maison'* according to the euphony of the context.

This difference in the significance of accent is a national characteristic of the speech of our forebears, and it had important consequences for the development of their language. The tendency of Germanic tongues is to shorten the words and their poetry consists not in measuring the duration of syllables, but in counting accents.

Greek and Roman poetry is based on prosody alone. The lays of ancient Germanic poetry bring out the logical emphasis, suggesting that the dancing step of the ballad was the prototype of their rhythm, while the metrical laws of classical poetry follow the rules of music. They measure the duration of the syllables while the word-accent is neglected.

This difference in the principle of pronunciation renders it almost impossible to imitate classical meters in Germanic poetry, but whenever we introduce classical forms of poetry we must replace long syllables by accents and short syllables by unaccented syllables. But this is only a makeshift, for in Greek and Latin the duration of a syllable remains the same under all conditions, while in the Teutonic languages the same syllable may be long or short according to its position.

In the development of Germanic speech the dominance of the accent resulted in a shortening of words, the unaccented syllables being more and more slurred, and sometimes it came to pass that four syllables were changed into one. Take for instance the Gothic word *habadedum* which means "we had," literally translated, "have we did." This combination with the ending derived from the auxiliary verb *didan*, "to do," was the original mode of expressing the imperfect. It was contracted in German first into *wir habeten*, then into *hatten*, and the English have gone one step further and say simply "had."

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The most primitive languages appear to have been monosyllabic, and there was a time when the so-called roots were ideas of a general character which were used for the purpose of communicating intentions, or requests, or declarations. They first denoted actions, for language originated as an accompaniment of cooperative work of a communal activity.

Several theories have been proposed as to the origin of language.

First, language was conceived as a reflex of nature in the human mind, and it was assumed that the external commotion and noises echoed back as they came. This is the theory of sound imitation. Its originators called it "the making of names," using for it the ponderous Greek term "onomatopœia."

If the onomatopœic theory were right, we ought to call the dog "bow-wow," the cat "miew-miew" and the engine "choo-choo"; but the history of language proves that onomatopœic expressions are almost entirely limited to the modern nursery. Onomatopœic word-formations are made only by those who are in possession of a fully developed language. Therefore there is not the slightest probability for this theory, and it is obvious that the origin of language is much more complicated. The reflex comes forth from deeper strata of man's soul, and so philologists proposed a new explanation which regarded language as the reaction of man's sentiments. A sentient creature fitted out with an apparatus for making sounds would vent its feelings by shouts such as "ah," for grief, "oh," for regret, etc. But even that theory was insufficient, for these exclamations have remained the most sterile roots. We form the verb "to pooh-pooh," but not "to ah," "to oh," "to alas." Moreover primitive man has no such articulate expressions of sentiment, he vents his feelings in groans, grunts and shouts. There is a difference not so much of sound as of intonation.

The last step in explaining the origin of language was taken by Ludwig Noiré⁹ who points out that the origin of language is closely connected with man's communal work.

Man is a social animal, and the primitive society of mankind was held together by the fear of common dangers and methods of warning, by common struggles and common tasks, for all of which mutual assistance, mutual encouragement and mutual communication was required. This was done by shouts, serving as signals to fall in, as sailors utter their unison singing when pulling a rope.

Prof. F. Max Müller humorously called these three theories the bow-wow theory, the pooh pooh theory, and the Yo-he-ho theory.¹⁰

Noiré calls his theory the "Logos theory," and Prof. F. Max Müller has adopted it in his essay on "The Identity of Language and Thought."¹¹

The main problem, however, of Noiré was not so much the origin of language, as the origin of reason, and he came to the conclusion that reason is developed through language. Language is the machinery of reason; yet it is not reason that has produced language, but language has produced reason. There was not first a rational

⁹ For details see Ludwig Noiré's essay *On the Origin of Language and the Logos Theory*. As to Noiré's claim to priority, see F. Max Müller's little book *Ludwig Noiré*.

¹⁰ Cp. *Monist*, II, p. 80.

¹¹ Published in F. Max Müller's *Three Introductory Lectures on the Science of Thought*.

animal who through its reason invented language, but in the course of the development of social conditions language originated and language produced reason. The speaking animal became a rational being.

The same principle holds good still. Thought is the soul, and speech is, as it were, its body. In order to mould thought, we must formulate it in words. As Noiré says, Man does not speak because he thinks, but he thinks (i. e., he has acquired the faculty of thinking) because he speaks.

If these propositions are sound, we shall at once be able to judge of the enormous significance of language, and also the imperative need of cultivating in education the use of right language.

The sentiment and principles incorporated in speech contribute not a little to mould right thinking, for both intellect and character.

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While generally we must learn to master our own language, English, we must be acquainted with its roots, and we must know not only its vocabulary and grammar, its philological, etymological and logical methods, the machinery of its rationality, but also, so far as that be feasible, the spirit of the people who fashioned our language and that is deposited in the proverbs and pithy quotations of their literature.

Languages are most easily acquired by committing to memory proverbs, poetical quotations, famous sentences of history or literature, and other typical passages which reflect the spirit of the people. Such significant sayings, culled with discretion from literature, can as easily be used for the explanation of grammatical and syntactical rules as the silly sentences of our current text-books, which are mostly words without sense and interest. If the student of a language knows by heart these gems of thought which incorporate the national spirit and are typical of the people themselves, his philological instruction will become easier by an increased interest in the subject matter, and the study of a language will thereby serve a higher purpose.

Our present method of teaching the classical languages is pedantic and stultifying. It seems to be calculated to make the pupils disgusted with the subject even before they become acquainted with it. Our educators should bear in mind that it is easier to learn whole sentences than single words and actual quotations from the classics than abstract grammatical rules. We are naturally interested in the spirit of another people. Let therefore our pupils first become

acquainted with the wise saws of a foreign language and in learning them by heart let us call upon grammar and syntax as a help to explain the forms. Grammar and syntax are needed, but our pupils must first feel the need of them; for then they will welcome their usefulness and take an interest in rules. But always the concrete reality of the living language should precede the abstract generalization of its construction.