DISCUSSION BOOKS

General Editors :

Richard Wilson, D.Litt., and A. J. J. Ratcliff, M.A.

ENGLISH IN THE FUTURE

No. 61

ENGLISH IN THE FUTURE

by

J. HUBERT JAGGER, D.Litt.

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS LTD
LONDON EDINBURGH PARIS MELBOURNE
TORONTO AND NEW YORK

First published, 1940

PREFACE

THE future fortunes of our English tongue are beyond the reach of prophecy. The author of this book is not in a position to reveal; he can only surmise, or venture to suggest. He has endeavoured to indicate the opinions that seem to him to be the most probable, and has presented *pros* and *cons* as fully as he could without expanding the volume beyond the limits of the series to which it belongs.

Although some of the general works upon the English Language contain chapters on its future, the amount of writing devoted exclusively to this topic is not large. Of the 13,402 entries in Professor A. G. Kennedy's invaluable bibliography only 42 are contained in the subsection entitled "The Extent and Influence of English," and only three or four of these are of much value. Scholars are naturally reluctant to commit themselves to statements which, being highly speculative, are open to criticism from many sides, and which in some unsuspected way time may utterly falsify. Moreover, those inclined to attack this subject may well have been deterred by the fate of some of their predecessors, concerning one of whom an *Athenæum* reviewer remarked about a hundred years ago, "Whenever he makes a suggestion it is one with which the world is already familiar. Whatever is his own is simply absurd." But it is a subject of great and increasing national and

international importance, and has a special claim upon our attention at the present time.

It is also a subject with many sides, each of which casts reflections upon all the others. Of the various modes of dividing it for the sake of convenience and clarity, the one that has been adopted seems to be the least artificial.

In a few places, where it was necessary to give a more exact representation of a sound than the ordinary alphabet permits, phonetic symbols have been employed. In all these cases, it will be found that the values of these symbols can be gathered, by any one who is acquainted with English, from the context.

To my friend and colleague, Mr. J. J. Bell, who read the proofs for me, and to my friend Mr. E. J. Kenny, who scrutinized the typescript, I wish to express my very grateful thanks.

J. H. JAGGER.

Taunton, *January 1940.*

CONTENTS

PART I. THE ENGLISH OF BRITAIN

PART II. WORLD ENGLISH

PART I

THE ENGLISH OF BRITAIN

ENGLISH IN THE FUTURE

CHAPTER I

STANDARDIZATION

TO say, as a recent writer has done, that the English language consists of the words of which it is composed seems, at first sight, to be a revelation of the obvious. We are so accustomed to find sounds, meanings of words, word-forms, phrases, and sentences treated as if they had a separate existence that we habitually regard English as possessing a life of its own, apart from man, although no reflection is needed to show that sounds cannot be uttered without a mouth-apparatus to produce them or heard without an ear to hear them, and that words, phrases, and sentences are nothing more than symbols, and can have no meaning unless comprehended by an active or receptive intelligence. The fundamental postulate of all books on language is that it is a human activity. English at this present moment is not the collection of current words in a complete dictionary ; it is those same words in use.

Even when this fundamental postulate is remembered, there is a tendency to view our speech as a uniform set of sounds, employed by every speaker of it, and our vocabulary as an instrument of which every English-

speaking man, woman, and child has complete command, throughout its entire range. These notions, like the first, need only be mentioned to be rejected. But until the directions in which they have to be qualified are realized, a true picture of contemporary English cannot be framed.

No one is acquainted with all the 180,000 words listed in the *New English Dictionary* as in current use (purely technical terms being excluded). To read the *Times*, it has been calculated, a mental vocabulary of about 50,000 words is required, and probably a very well educated man knows the meanings of 80,000 or 90,000. These are far more than he can command for writing or speech; and a large number of them, perhaps 40,000 or 50,000, are book words, and are not used orally by any one.

The figures cited seem very large, but they are not really so, because the modern world is so full of things. Even the mental vocabularies possessed by children and persons of undeveloped intelligence are much more copious than might be supposed from listening to their talk. Low-grade mental vocabularies consist of the auxiliary words common to all of us—prepositions, auxiliary verbs, and pronouns—together with words of full and concrete meaning. Differences of education and intelligence are shown in the extension of these latter, but still more in the development of an abstract vocabulary. It is sometimes said that the extent of a person's mental vocabulary is a measure of his intelligence; the extent of his abstract vocabulary would be a more exact measure, if it could be ascertained. The extent of his concrete vocabulary is a measure of the range of his experience rather than of his intelligence.

Similarly, pronunciation varies. Though it is easy to compile a list of all the elementary sounds that are found in English speech, to do so provides no account of what is really happening, as we are incessantly made aware by our ears. Cockney, Southern dialect, Lowland Scots, Irish English, East Anglian dialect, Lancashire dialect, Yorkshire dialect—each of these has its own pronunciation. In front of the author lies a letter from a gentleman who grotesquely describes himself as a Liverpudlian, in which he expresses the opinion that there is not the slightest similarity between the Liverpool and Lancashire pronunciations. To suppose that all speakers of English used identical sounds would be as erroneous as to suppose that they all employed the same vocabulary.

English is the speech of the Cockney bus conductor who says, "You left a pie on that bag, sir," and of the city man who replies, "Oh, I shall have to pay on that bag, shall I?" and of the Scots policeman who retorts, "Och! wull I though!" It is the speech of the mill-worker in Oldham and Bradford, of the Durham miner and the Birmingham mechanic, of the curate in the pulpit, of Somersetshire and Dorsetshire farm labourers, and of the precise Oxford don, of the woman M.P. and of the butcher's boy. It includes the utterances of those whose speech is neglected and degenerate, whether in sounds or in words, as well as the periods of the cultivated diplomat. It includes the speech of the shop girls in Croydon and Aberdeen, and of their boy friends too; of the bookmaker and the jockey at Newmarket, and the barman in Dublin, and the masters at Winchester and Harrow. All these, in their hundreds or thousands, or millions, are sharers of English speech,

and—which is of most significance to our argument in this book—are contributing in some measure to the speech of the next generation. Nor must we forget the writer, the poet, the scholar, the journalist; for what they write is related to their speech, receiving influence from it, and exerting influence upon it. English in the future will be the outcome of all these, and its character will depend on the degree to which each is now participating in it.

Except for the individual quality of his voice, the difference between each speaker and his nearest neighbour is infinitesimal. It is only when one moves from one part of the country to another, or from one social class to another, that the separate currents in the broad river of English speech become perceptible. Although no description, however long, would complete the catalogue of minor variations, the general facts of the situation are patent. There exist, firstly, a number of local dialects, definite in character and confined to restricted areas; secondly, a form that is spoken by some people in all parts of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland; and thirdly, a speech used by a vast number of people—the majority, in fact, in each region—more or less closely related to the second current but lacking its uniformity, and in the mouths of some of its speakers bearing traces of affinity to one or another of the local dialects. These last two are commonly called Standard English. Professor H. C. Wyld has proposed to distinguish between them and to call them Received Standard and Modified Standard respectively.[1]

With the history of these various forms we are not concerned, except in so far as it throws light upon the

[1] *A Short History of English*, 3rd edition, pp. 148 and 149.

future of English. The local dialects can be dismissed almost at once. They are the attenuated remains of the regional dialects into which, until the fifteenth century, English was divided. As late as the seventeenth century men of all ranks continued to speak the dialect of their native county, although written English acquired a single form in the early sixteenth century. The dialects long ago ceased to modify Standard English except by the addition of an occasional word. On the contrary, they have been more and more overridden by it, and all of them are now mixtures of Standard and dialect forms. They are thus of little importance to us, and are destined to disappear ; nor should any sentimental regrets deter us from recognizing that their extinction is desirable.

Standard English arose as the speech of the metropolis and gradually spread over the whole country. At the end of the Middle Ages rapid changes occurred in word-form and in pronunciation, especially in the sounds of the vowels ; but by the close of the sixteenth century Standard English had reached, except for minor modifications, the form it still retains. At first it was affected by other local dialects, but for the last three hundred years such changes as it has suffered have been mainly due to the influence of the various forms of Modified Standard—to accept Professor Wyld's terms—upon each other and upon Received Standard.

Received Standard has a wider currency than any other variety, although the speakers of it are far outnumbered by those who use the various forms of Modified Standard. It is the speech of the most socially fortunate and of many of the best educated. But some of those who speak it are neither well educated in the intellectual sense nor socially fortunate, and a con-

siderable number of the best educated speak some form of Modified Standard Received Standard is the speech of the products of the English Public School system, and is sometimes called Public School English. It is also the speech of the by-products of the Public School system. It is the most uniform in sound of all the varieties.[1]

Modified Standard, being the speech of the majority, is the most important of all the varieties. Its lack of uniformity is not so great as to obscure its relation, in each region, to its counterparts in other regions and to Received Standard. There is one set of differences between English as spoken north of the Trent and English south of the Trent that merits detailed mention, because, as will be seen in the chapter on American English, the northern form agrees in these particulars with American—a fact of much import for the future. For the pure vowels eɪ and oɪ, which Northern has preserved, Southern (and Received Standard) has during the last two centuries developed diphthongs (ei and ou) ; and about the third quarter of the eighteenth century it began to alter the flat æ (as in *hat*) into aɪ in many words that in Northern retain the old sound.[2] Southern and Received also differ from Northern in the greater degree of persistence with which they move the stress towards the beginning of each word (*e.g.* Received *órganization*, Edinburgh *orgánization*), with, in consequence, a greater tendency to slur unaccented vowels. They also drop final consonants more readily ; and lastly, Northern has preserved r when it lies after a

[1] Professor Daniel Jones's *An English Pronouncing Dictionary* represents the pronunciation of this form of English.

[2] See p. 29.

vowel and before a consonant, as well as when final (*e.g.* Southern wəɪld, Edinburgh wɔrld, *world.*).

In each region the compass of Modified Standard is wide, ranging from a speech that is scarcely distinguishable from Received Standard to inferior forms heard in the slums of cities and on the lips of villagers whose recent ancestors spoke the local dialect. How far, then, are we to expect these forms to make themselves perceptible in the Received Standard of the future? Are they to encroach upon the best type of English, or may we expect it to gain at their expense?

Good speech is only acquired by effort, by trying to speak well, and in accordance with a good model. For centuries Standard English, which began its career as a local dialect among others, has been the speech of the court, of the intellectual class, the witty, the learned, and the prosperous. It has been in closer contact with written English than any other form of spoken English has been. It is, in consequence, better on the whole, and better spoken on the whole, than any other form of English. Standard English is preferable to any local dialect both because it is not local, and because it has acquired qualities far superior to those possessed by any local dialect. This conclusion is not derived from speech snobbery, but from common sense.

With social prejudice as a criterion for estimating the phonetic and linguistic worth of any variety of English we have nothing to do. We cannot afford to allow it to cloud our judgment in these matters. But it is the criterion by which the majority of the nation have measured, and still measure, the worth of each variety of English. People who speak Standard English dislike the sounds of Cockney because they are associated in

their minds with poverty and ugliness, and they admire Received Standard because its sounds are associated with social position, luxury, and financial security. These are not linguistic standards.

But they are facts which have to be recognized. With social prejudice as an operative cause we have a great deal to do. Received Standard has a social value which is usually of material advantage to its possessor, and so it is the object of incessant imitation and cultivation. On the other hand, the inferior parts of Modified Standard and the dialects have no social prestige, and the majority of their speakers are not well educated, and do not deliberately and consciously cultivate their speech. Hence Received Standard is continually gaining at the expense of Modified Standard; and the inferior parts of Modified Standard and the dialects, being the objects of neglect, are in many respects degenerate.

Until four centuries ago the conditions in Britain were not such as to allow a uniform speech to develop. Since then Standard English has spread over the whole island (and far beyond its shores), and the rate at which it has spread has steadily increased. It is not necessary here to elaborate the reasons showing that conditions have recently become much more favourable to standardization of speech; education, frequent and rapid movement, and broadcasting now bring people of all classes into much closer contact than ever before. Therefore we may conclude that the English of Britain will in the future be much more uniform than it was in the past and is now; and that, if there was no interference from outside, the characteristics of Received Standard would prevail more and more.[1]

[1] But influences from over the seas may be expected. See Chapter XIII.

STANDARDIZATION

It is now recognized that the real life of a language lies in its speech. But that is a comparatively new idea; for ages it was regarded as axiomatic that the written tradition was all that was worthy of study. It did not enter the head of any one that the oral tradition might be, ultimately, the more important of the two, that the spoken word, extinguished as soon as heard, might in its effects upon the future be more pervasive than the record in which all literature is embodied. Hence speech was disregarded in schools; nay, from this cause, and in the endeavour to teach Latin, English speech was even treated with hostility. It is a strange reflection that Shakespeare, when he was a pupil at Stratford-on-Avon Grammar School, would probably have been punished if caught using during lesson hours the tongue that has since become world-wide. The rules at Harrow directed that none above the first form should speak English in the school, or when at play; and in a book by a Huguenot who became a private schoolmaster in London in the latter part of Queen Elizabeth's reign "a tell-tale reports that a certain criminal named William 'hath spitted on my paper, torn my book, put out my theme, trod my hat under his feet, marred my copy, and [dreadful climax !] *spoken English* !'"[1] A great change in attitude has taken place in late years, but even yet the main emphasis is laid upon written work, and the technique of teaching speech is still largely undeveloped. But it is certain that before long pride in good English speech will be universally inculcated in schools, and that good speech will be cultivated more strenuously and skilfully than it is now. On this account, accordingly, we may expect

[1] J. H. Brown, *Elizabethan Schooldays*, p. 122.

the tendencies which are making for greater uniformity to be still further reinforced.

The written form of a language is more self-conscious, more elaborate, less spontaneous than the spoken. Being in its nature a permanent record, it is more conservative, and always, to some extent, lags behind the speech. Moreover, since its forms have been gathered from the spoken tongue at different periods, it contains a mixture of anachronisms. It acts as a kind of drag-anchor upon speech, slowing down its rate of change, and also imparting to it some of its own characteristics; and, of course, unless the two part company, as has happened to Chinese, it is subject to new influences from speech. Fortunately, Standard English has always maintained contact with written English, which is, and let us hope will remain, a factor of enormous importance in English as a whole. The publisher [1] who recently stated in a law case that we had now two languages, one oral and one visible, was wide of the mark. It is true that he was referring to the spelling, but it is not hard to show that even our spelling is making impressions upon our speech.[2] We can, at any rate, be sure that, so long as written and Standard English are not divorced, the latter will have a character that is not too far removed from the written English of to-day, which, though it readily admits innovations in vocabulary, puts up a strenuous resistance to innovations in grammatical structure.

Like every living tongue, Standard English, although it has shown itself to be the most durable part of our speech, is subject to changes; or rather, is always in a state of change. Each of us, not being the average

[1] Mr. J. H. J. Pitman.

[2] See p. 109.

physical man or the average intellectual man, has within himself tendencies to diverge from the average. Isolated from his fellows, each of us would move along his own direction away from the national speech with fair rapidity. As it is, social contact greatly slows the rate of change, and also regularizes it, so that all the persons speaking one type of speech tend to move in the same direction.

That sounds should change is not surprising, if we consider how small an alteration in the mouth apparatus or mouth habits of a person will produce a great change in his sounds. Actually, all sounds that are appreciably different from the norm of the social group or of the locality are quickly inhibited, but there are others which are not detected until it is too late. Sound-change, that is to say, whether it is due to something in the speakers, such as probably caused all the old English long *a's* to change to long *o's* (*e.g.* stān and bāt became *stone* and *boat*), or whether it is due to the influence of one sound upon others (*e.g.* of *w* upon *a* in *was*, *wash*, *wasp*) is nearly always an unconscious operation.

Change in grammatical structure is an obscure and very important subject which will receive treatment in the four chapters that follow this.

Change in vocabulary is the most obvious kind of alteration in a tongue. Since we shall have to speculate about the words that future English may consist of, and since the character of our future speech will be determined to no small degree by the methods of forming new words that are likely to prevail, it behoves us here to examine for a moment the main agencies that are bringing, and will bring, these new forms into existence.

The manufacture (and even the borrowing) of a word is always an effect of mental activity—of imaginative

energy or of the power of reason. In due course, if the new creation satisfies a general need or strikes the popular fancy, it becomes current coin, and then the labour which went to its minting is forgotten ; it is now for every one's use :

> We have such wealth as Rome at her most pride
> Had not or (having) scattered not so wide. . . .
> Lo ! diamond that cost some half their days
> To find, and t'other half to bring to blaze. . . .
> And the gross crowd, at feast or market, hold
> Traffic perforce with dust of gems and gold.

The makers of new words are those in whom the tide of life is at the flood. The poet creates new words of sensuous content to convey his imagery, as Milton did with *gloom* (perhaps) and *pandemonium* ; the scholar manufactures abstract terms, as Bentham forged *international*, and Newton *centrifugal* ; the scientist and inventor make names for new discoveries and products, like *dinosaur* and *cyclorama* ; the plain man, in complete unselfconsciousness, produces in obscure ways new terms like *scrounge* and *the jitters* ; and these four combine to modify the vocabulary of the next generation.

The masters of literature, in prose and verse, are responsible for a greater part of the modern English vocabulary than is generally realized. Their words are, in general, correctly made, in the sense that they are formed by modifying existing roots according to ordinary rules of word-formation. The literary artist, however, does not now seem to hold the place that he once did. The thinker is having his day, and is making English more precise and abstract. The man in the street comes, as he always has come, with his vivid

words and phrases, not found in the Standard of the past, and yet admirable in themselves, because they express feelings and images more directly and vigorously than the overworn coin of Standard. These words and phrases we are accustomed to call Slang.

Slang is a term that is loosely employed. It is often used as equivalent to low class speech or to dialect; or again, to occupational or technical language, which is more properly called Jargon; or to the private speech of thieves and gangsters, which is really a species of jargon, and for which the name Cant, which has long been given to it, is most appropriate. Slang is not any of these, although their practitioners are much addicted to the use of slang. It is (to quote *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*) "language of a highly colloquial type, considered as below the level of standard educated speech, and consisting either of new words or of current words used in some special sense." "Consisting of new words or of current words used in some special sense"—the definition brings out excellently the essential nature of slang—that it is the result of imaginative energy. Examples of new slang words have just been given; examples of slang words that are current words used in a new sense are "eyewash" and "lounge lizard"; examples of slang phrases are "to step on the gas," "to miss the boat," and "dead above the ears." The way in which a slang word can light up a dull sentence is illustrated by, "It is all very well for Hitler to go *gallivanting* all over Central Europe." (*News Chronicle*: the use of *gallivant* dates from about 1820.)

The manufacture of slang is a sign of liveliness and vigour. Slang is not created to a great extent by the middle class or the middle-aged and old, but by the

upper and lower classes and by the young. It is the special device of those who have no fear of convention, or are tired of it, or wish to shock and outrage it. It is often striking, metaphorical, and concise; and valuable because it is associated with recent experience.

The subject of slang is a luscious one, from which it is difficult to refrain. Vivid imagery is seen in *cheek* (for *face*), *cracked*, *grit*, *Cockney* (this is an old word meaning "a cock's egg," *i.e.* a pert, forward youth), and *fed up*. Slang derived from the jargon of trades and occupations generally takes the form of phrases, such as "the acid test," "while the going is good," "to strike it rich," "to be on the rocks," "below the belt," "to dry up," and "to vet." Many slang phrases are happily imaginative, easily catch on, and are quickly worked to death, *e.g.* "to put it across," "your number's up," "to miss the boat," "an also ran," "a pain in the neck," "a nasty piece of work," and "have a heart." The intention to violate propriety is seen in "guts." To dialect we owe such words as *snag*, and *to egg on* (*i.e. edge* or push); and to thieves' cant, *bloke*, *pal*, *rum*, *queer*, and others.

The mortality among new words of all kinds is high. The mortality among slang births equals the infantile mortality of the oyster. Many of those that are born die almost at once. Of the remainder the greater number last for but a few years. They become current fashion, their glowing colours fade, the experience from which they have been born begins to be forgotten. Then the wind changes, a host of new ephemerals is blown through the land, and the poor discarded favourites perish in a night.

Although slang is produced by the lively and vivacious, it is used by all of us. Even the great are obliged to un-

bend sometimes. There is the hearty manner, as of an astronomer giving a chatty B.B.C. talk, or of a schoolmaster telling his boys to *turn up* for cricket practice (but he instructs delinquents to *come* to detention). If the utterances and writings of any one who speaks Standard English are examined, it will be found that he uses it in different ways, according to the occasion. In a public oration, or in a treatise, he will employ the most correct exclusive Standard. But in private conversation he will relax, and will admit forms and expressions that he would eschew for more dignified purposes, just as his syntax will be simplified, and loosened, and his pronunciation, even, will vary. In short, he will become more colloquial, and in these free and easy moments he will show complacent hospitality to the linguistic demi-mondaine.

Familiarity does the rest, combined with the temporary advantage possessed by these lively creatures over the staid, and sometimes dowdy, reliable retainers and old-fashioned companions that his parents have recommended to him. Hence some slang words gradually make their way, perhaps unnoticed by him, upwards into the speech and writing of his serious hours. So Shakespeare wrote :

> (if) but this blow
> Might be the be-all and the end-all here . . .
> We'ld *jump* the life to come.

In this way some slang words survive and enter Standard English, bringing with them their energy and vividness ; and their numbers (about two per cent. of the word-stock consists of words of this sort made since the Norman conquest, besides many phrases) are suffi-

cient for them to constitute the revitalizing element that is indispensable for every speech that is to retain its life.[1]

It will be seen, therefore (to sum up the whole matter), that though the unifying influences—travel, reading, the schools, and broadcasting—are more powerful than they ever were before, and though we may expect the English of Great Britain to become more homogeneous than in the past, there is no danger of it becoming completely uniform. No two people speak exactly alike, or will ever do so. Each voice has its unique quality, that the most effective means of standardizing would fail to eradicate entirely. Words of all kinds are continually dropping out of use, and new ones, either the precise results of deliberation, or the effects of poetic genius, or the creations of popular fancy, are continually coming in to take their places. Pronunciation is changing imperceptibly. The natural tendencies to diversity inherent in speech will never be abolished, however much they may be checked.

It will be Standard that will spread, because it is the most durable part of English. It is desirable that Standard should be the form to spread, because it is on the whole the best English. And it is desirable that the spread should occur, because, since speech is the vehicle of communication, uniformity, which is the necessary condition of universal and immediate intelligibility, is one of the most important virtues that any speech can possess.

[1] See p. 92.

Chapter II

DEGENERATION

THERE is another side to the picture just drawn. Many people agree with Dr. Johnson's opinion that languages, like governments, have a natural tendency to degeneration. Even granted, they will exclaim on reading the preceding chapter, that English will become more uniform, and that Standard English will be the ancestor of the speech of future generations, will it not be overwhelmed and utterly corrupted by the evil influences that surround it? Although these anxious patriots often mistake growth for decay, it must be confessed they have plenty of material with which to support the gloomy prognostications they make in their letters to the public press and in private conversation.

A form of speech may be deteriorating in one direction while it is maintaining its general level, or even improving in other directions. Distinctness is the general virtue that a speaker should aim at. But the special aim of the upper class is conformity to a certain mode of pronunciation, because by a distinctive pronunciation it can most easily mark a class difference. One of the chief aims of written English is the intellectual quality of precision. The special aim of low-class speech is vigorous directness. On the whole, each gains its end, but the upper class and the lower class lose, in different ways, in distinctness

and vocabulary; and written English tends to be too abstract, and to become languid and conventional—at any rate, that is the opinion of some of its critics.

In the meaner provinces of Modified Standard, there is much substitution of sounds, such as v for dh and th, *e.g. wiv* for *with*, *faver* for *father*, and *ferty* for *thirty*, so that approximation occurs in the sound of words which in good speech do not resemble each other. "Ferty" is easily confused with "forty"; and in Cockney *day* and *say* become identical with *die* and *sigh*. Sounds are slurred and omitted, as in *raiway* and *aways* for *railway* and *always*. Grammatical solecisms occur, and the vocabulary is abject.

These points are illustrated in the following hideous specimen, which is said to be a record of an actual conversation heard in a railway carriage near London.[1] This is broken-down Standard; close scrutiny of it fails to disclose any dialectical characteristics.

"Yer know that fat gal? 'Er wot works that machine close to the door. . . . Nah! I don't mean Allus, I mean Vi'let: she ain't 'arf a fat cow, is she? . . . Yer 'member old Joe? 'Im wiv the red nose. 'E's aht in the Dardanelles nah. 'Strewth! 'E allus did 'ave a red nose: I bet 'e's got one aht there.

"Last Satday when I was goin' up Ropemaker Street I met Jim Cole. I'd got me arms full, like I allus 'as when I got a few ha'pence to spend. 'E didn't arf look all right. 'E wasn't wiv no gals when I see 'im. I didn't 'arf used to like 'im; 'e's got such a nice fice, ain't 'e?

"'Ain't 'arf got a fine kitchen nah. I spends all me time there. Steakpie, fourpence; liver an' bacon,

[1] Origin unknown.

fi'pence ; toad-in-the-'ole, frippence ; gorblimey, yer don't 'arf 'ave a blow aht ! "

The worst diseases that afflict Received Standard are of a nature totally different from those found in this passage—totally different, perhaps even more septic. Snobbery, affectation, and fashion are responsible, and have in the past been responsible, for many of them. It is not at all unlikely that it was a desire to be thought to have a gentlemanly (and ladylike) acquaintance with foreign parts and foreign tongues that effected in the eighteenth century the change of many æ's to aɪ s, as in *father*. If this had been a genuine sound change it would probably have affected all the æ's, but nobody says *baɪk* for *bæk* (back) and *hat*, *has*, *have*, *snatch*, etc., are uniformly pronounced with æ in the South and in the North.[1]

At the present time three much-criticized habits of those who speak Received Standard are the " refaned " manner, slurring of unstressed syllables as in paɪ for *power*, and what is called dropping the g, although in the sound referred to there never was a g to drop.

Mr. St. John Ervine has for a long time been purple with rage about the " refaned " affectation. In one of his outbursts he says that he has heard a curate render " He that hath ears to hear let him hear " as " He that heth yahs to yah let him yah." Substituting eɪ for aĭ as in " nace " for *nice*, and " fave " for *five*, exaggerating ə endings into aɪ (wɔɪtə, *water* into wɔɪtaɪ) : changing ʌ into a (lav for lʌv, *love*) and jes, *yes*, into jas or jʌs, and gəɪl *girl* into gel, are a few of the marks of this silly habit. It seems to the author, as to Mr. Ervine, that there can be no fairer speech in the world than

[1] See pp. 16 and 169.

well-spoken Received Standard English, and none more objectionable than the same form when smeared with the affectations of la-di-da. Yet our dislike to them must be mainly due to their associations, for there is nothing hateful in the sounds themselves.

Another disease endemic in Received Standard, and springing like the preceding from character, is the reduction of the vocabulary by the futile and mentally torpid. Oliver Wendell Holmes described the result in a famous passage in *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table* : "I have known several very genteel idiots," he says, "whose whole vocabulary had deliquesced into some half-dozen expressions. . . . These expressions come to be the algebraic symbols of minds which have grown too weak or too indolent to discriminate. They are the blank cheques of intellectual bankruptcy. You may fill them up with what idea you like ; it makes no difference, for there are no funds in the treasury upon which they are drawn."

That similar expressions flourished in England as well as in America is indicated by a remark in Disraeli's *Lothair*—"English is an expressive language," said Mr. Pinto (an intelligent Portuguese visitor), "but not difficult to master. It consists, as far as one can observe, of four words : *nice*, *jolly*, *charming*, and *bore*, and some grammarians would add *fond*."

The habit is as prevalent now as it was in the mid-nineteenth century. The reader will easily recollect not a few words, such as *frightfully*, *definitely*, *incidentally*, and *quite*, that the social influence of our nitwits has popularized in recent years. Some of them, like the already receding phrase "What about it ?" and the still coming "So what ?" appear to have been patronized rather

than invented by the frivolous imbeciles who are responsible for this spurious currency.

The same kind of vice infects the lower strata of speech ; *e.g.* " didn't 'arf," " ain't 'arf," and " don't 'arf " occur in the degenerate passage quoted a short while back. But owing to the social position of the genteel idiots their productions are widely imitated as smart, and have a greater chance of permanent survival.

Indeed, we are all more or less guilty of overworking certain words to avoid the trouble of employing really significant terms. *Get* has been for a long time, it is notorious, the chief victim ; since *get* was reduced to slavery more than a century ago, one duty after another has been heaped upon its head. At every street corner National Service posters proclaim that " we've *got* to be prepared," so we're *getting* ready. The average man *gets* up in the morning, *gets* dressed, *gets* his breakfast, *gets* to the railway station, where he *gets* his paper, and *gets* into a smoker. Before he *gets* to town the sky *gets* black, and he *gets* wet when he *gets* out into the street. At the office he *gets* into a temper because his typist has gone out to *get* her hair done, and is late in *getting* back. . . . Thus he follows the ever-running hours, with the constant help of *get*, until, at 11 p.m., finding he is *getting* sleepy, he *gets* himself a nightcap, and *gets* into bed again. *Have* is another factotum, but *gets* off more lightly than *get*. *Have* does duty at mealtimes, *e.g.* " Will you *have* (eat) some toast ? " " Will you *have* (drink) some more tea ? " and for personal experiences, *e.g.* " I *have* (am suffering from) a sore throat," " I have just *had* ten days' holiday."

rather similar affliction. A feature of contemporary writing that constantly excites remark is the ease with which phrases become stereotyped. A great deal of modern prose is a sheer triumph of adherence to convention, with, in consequence, a corresponding loss of energy and vividness. It does not seem that the set phrase ruled to anything like the same extent in the past. The immense amount of hasty writing that is now done, where the *cliché* is a " very present help in time of need," and the necessity of conforming to the requirements of the casual reader, to whom it is " a labour-saving device," are no doubt responsible for its immense vogue. Any one who does not, in each perusal of his daily paper, meet with " the lowest of the low," " under no circumstances," " and/or," and " if and when," will feel that he is " in unfamiliar surroundings." The writers who supply his mental food catch phrases more easily than they catch cold, and unfortunately their desire to fill space while telling him what to think and how to think it leads them " with fatal facility " to prefer the elaboration to the plain form, with the inevitable result that the latter drops out of use. Nowadays the future is never " the future," but always " the *near* future " ; things are not " lacking," but " *sadly* lacking," " if " is " if *only*," " because " and " for the reason that " are " *simply* because " and " for the *simple* reason that." Many people never express the opinion that " it is time that . . ." but always that " it is *high* time that . . ." The final step in this rake's progress is that they never have " very little time to spare," but are always " up against the time factor." They have now reached the hell of language, where the damned are tormented with inability to express any simple idea in a simple way.

Close by lies the abyss of Journalese, which is the employment of a pretentious vocabulary and phraseology instead of an honest workaday diction. The practitioners of Journalese never write that a man was born in Glasgow, but that he " hails from across the Border " ; a policeman does not walk to a house, he " proceeds " to it ; for them a fire is a " conflagration," and a person is not given but " made the recipient of " a present. They never use a concrete term if it has an abstract synonym. They prefer the tortuous to the direct, the periphrasis to the single word, and the long to the short. Their choice of words is the perfect opposite of what it should be, for it is quite unnatural. They also grasp at violent images, whose power to excite sensation they by excessive use rapidly wear out. According to them ambulances are for ever being *rushed* to spots where firemen are *fighting* flames.

Our own tastes mainly determine the fare that the journalist lays before us ; but he is cook as well as waiter, and that is how the mischief is generally done. Sometimes, however, he finds the viands ready prepared, and brings them straight to us. In this way our present preoccupation with international politics, and with social conditions and problems, is having an immense effect upon written English. Neither the politician nor the social worker is by nature a stylist ; they are so desperately in earnest about their subject-matter that they have no time or energy for developing a sense of the beauty or fitness of words. The politician is the more influential of the two, although not more noxious in himself. The commonest vices of the social writer are illiteracy and a general slipshodness of expression ; those of the politician arise from his fierce

determination to have a technical jargon. This, starting from him, is disseminated by newspaper correspondents who are striving to create the impression that they belong to inner circles and official quarters and diplomatic cliques, and so permeates and infects the language. Words like *coup* and *protocol*, phrases like " peace bloc " and " emergency measure," and other crumbs that have dropped from the politician's table become our meat. In the heyday of the League of Nations, " sanctions," long known to lawyers, was the food the common man fed on. At the moment it is " ideological impediments," which fills the mouth as satisfactorily as Mr. Winston Churchill's " terminological inexactitude " and Gladstone's (or Disraeli's) " inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity." Not long ago Mr. Punch became so fed up (or *surfeited*) that he published a drawing of a prominent politician leaving no stone unturned while exploring every avenue in search of a formula. This gentleman did not " meet with an insuperable obstacle," not he ; nor was he " confronted with an *impasse* " ; there can be no doubt that, though he was " brought face to face with a grave issue (or a live one)," he succeeded in " establishing a *modus vivendi*," or at any rate in " maintaining the *status quo*."

More academic phrases also have their vogue. Not so long ago the word was " true inwardness " ; nowadays it is " wishful thinking."

The disease of the *cliché* has gone so far that it will probably leave a scar. But that will be the worst. English has a strong constitution, and will not die. The accusation that it is becoming unduly abstract and conventional is much more weighty, and is a real ground for uneasiness if it is a true accusation ; for it is levelled

at what is regarded as the most serious part of modern English literature, and it is not easily recognized as an abuse ; moreover, the accusation is that this is an organic tendency.

It is best to acknowledge that the accuser can bring forward a great deal of evidence to support him, and the causes are not hard to find. Literary English is pre-eminently a middle-class form. As Mr. J. B. Priestley said not long ago, our ruling and official class never had much respect for any form of culture. A poet or a novelist, if of the upper class, was regarded, and still is, as *déclassé*. On the other hand, it was only exceptionally that he came from the lower class. But the middle class is the stablest class in the community, the class that obeys convention most closely. The classes that have no fear, the one because it is above conventional respectability and the other because it is below, do not influence Literary Standard directly. Hence " good written English " tends more and more to mean not that which expresses the author's meaning most vividly, picturesquely, emotionally, but that which adheres to convention.

The tendency to abstraction is even more marked. The middle class is the learned class. Not only the literary artists, but nearly all those engaged in hard intellectual labour, nearly all schoolmasters, doctors, and professional men and women of all sorts have, at any rate till recently, sprung from the middle class, and they form a very influential part of it, and have, naturally, modified their form of written expression—for convention, though powerful, has never succeeded in annihilating the power of English to develop—in accordance with their character and needs.

The result is a good expository style which suits the reasoner, but does not suit the literary artist. It is not sensuous. Its imagery is faint. And it is now easier to write in this than in any other style, because nearly all the instruction and practice in writing in our secondary schools and universities is abstract exposition. Literary artists exist, and prose in which every phrase carries a sensuous image can still be and is still being written. But such men and such writing are now the exception, and some critics profess to be able to detect an artificiality in all English writing of to-day that is not expository : it may be delicate, musical, easy, they say, but it is not altogether natural. If Shakespeare had lived in the twentieth century, they argue, " The quality of mercy is not strained " would have naturally presented itself to him in some such form as, " Mercy is essentially spontaneous " ; and a modern Macbeth would exclaim, " I have an inferiority complex," rather than, " Under him my genius is rebuked."

The best modern authors write in a temperate style, and hold abstraction under some restraint. Would that all their colleagues did so. Some of these throw all other considerations to the winds in their endeavours to be exact. This is the special temptation of the official mind, and results in such sentences as, " Clarity of impression is indispensable as a preliminary to expression," and, "The experiments that have been carried out by teachers along these lines with pupils found to be unresponsive to ordinary methods of instruction demonstrate the ability of the children in the senior school to respond with profit to opportunities provided for the active pursuit of interests aroused," where, " The experiments that have been carried out by teachers along these

lines" is equivalent to "when teachers have tried," and "demonstrate the ability of the children to" means "show that the children can." The more successful these writers are in their efforts, the more difficult they are to read.

From the pursuit of abstraction in order to be exact to the pursuit of abstraction for its own sake is but a step. Then the writer, in emptying his sentences of all imagery, also empties them of all meaning. He creates an intellectual vacuum in which he can gesticulate without meeting any resistance, and so deceives himself and his readers into believing that he is revealing profound truths when all he is doing is to render the obvious obscure. Mr. A. P. Herbert quotes a repulsive sentence of this kind which runs: "The unity of view of the participants in the conversations has been established regarding the exceptional importance at the present time of an all-embracing collective organization of security on the basis of the indivisibility of peace," [1] which merely means, "The diplomatists agreed that the only way to ensure universal peace is for all nations to combine to defend it."

Thus the cynic and the pessimist. By binding all the separate charges together they present an undeniably formidable case, and their despondency, if one confines one's view to English in the present, it is impossible not to share. But examination of the past shows that diseases and vices quite as serious have often attacked English, and yet it has survived.

Elizabethan English is often held up, by those who assert that modern English is effete and full of *clichés*, as vigorous, spontaneous, image-bearing, exuberant.

[1] *What a Word!* p. 15.

Agreed. Yet, besides being less precise—as any one who should try to translate, say, a *Times* leader into the prose of Bacon or the verse of Shakespeare would speedily discover—it suffered from two literary fashions quite as harmful as the excessively abstract style in modern prose. The first of these is known to literary historians as Bilingualism, and consisted in the incessant employment of a pair of synonyms to convey a single idea. The following passage from Thomas Newton, written in 1569, exemplifies it :

" They say old age creepeth and stealeth upon them faster and sooner than they thought it would. First, who causeth them to imagine and think such a false and peevish untruth ? For why should they think that after their youth and adolescency old age creepeth faster upon them rather than their adolescency and youth doth after childhood ? Seeing therefore they do not repine and complain any what, after they have been children, to grow up to be tall striplings and lofty young men, why should they be aggrieved and think themselves discontented, after they have been striplings and young men, to be old and aged ? "

Bilingualism was no creature of a day ; it lasted for upwards of a century. Though artificial, it was not capable of the extraordinary contortions of the famous style called Euphuism, which flourished at the very moment when the drama was about to soar to the height of its glory. Euphuism spread like a violent epidemic through literary Elizabethan. It became a rage at court, and infected the speech of Elizabeth's nobles and maids of honour for several years. A generation later, during the Commonwealth, as Swift said in a letter, " such an infusion of enthusiastic jargon pre-

vailed in every writing as was not shaken off in many years." Yet shaken off it was. English speech and writing came out entirely cured of these diseases ; none of them has made a permanent mark upon it.

Our descendants will be able to learn how we spoke from the gramophone and the talking film. But the written records of the past are all that we have to depend on for information about the speech of our ancestors, and we cannot be as sure about their attempts to represent degenerate speech as about their literary prose. What they have bequeathed to us strongly suggests that degenerate English was always as rife as it is now, and also that many of its features have disappeared without in the least affecting Standard. If we are to trust the speech of Mr. Weller and his son, the Cockneys of Dickens's time did not use aĭ for ei, or v for th and dh, as they now do, but substituted v for w, as they now do not. Double negatives, the use of a singular verb with a plural subject, confusion of present and past tenses, and of past tenses and past participles, were as frequent then as now, and they do not seem more likely to invade Standard English to-day than when Dickens was a young man. Here are a few sentences from *The Pickwick Papers* illustrating these remarks :

"Verever he's a-goin to be tried, my boy, a alleybi's the thing to get him off. Ve got Tom Vildspark off that 'ere manslaughter, ven all the big vigs to a man said as nothing couldn't save him."

"The first and only time I see you, your likeness was took on my hart."

"I never knowed a respectable coachman as wrote poetry."

"Afore I see you, I thought all women was alike."

The slurring of unstressed syllables is the subject of frequent criticisms, arising from the belief that it is a slovenly modern habit which will, in the course of a decade or two, eliminate many of the unaccented vowels, and reduce the remainder to the indeterminate vowel (ə).[1] The belief is erroneous. The habit is traceable throughout the whole history of English, and is a necessary consequence of the strength of the English accent. Actually, the tide has been for a long time running in the other direction, and unaccented vowels have been revived in many words, as in *Latin* for *Latn* and *regular* for *reglar*, so that the older standard pronunciations are now considered vulgar. Professor Wyld, who is our chief authority on this aspect of English, says, "It is sometimes said that Shakespeare, or Milton, or Dryden, if they could revisit this transitory life, would be shocked and distressed . . . by the slurring of unaccented vowels. . . . (But) our speech would in all probability strike them as highly artificial, affected, finicky, and over-precise."[2] In the same way the sound ŋ in many words, such as *doing*, which had changed to n, has been artificially restored by the zeal of the teachers, and t is coming where the present generation still omit it in *often*, *hasten*, *listen*, *postman*, and so on.[3]

The slurring of unstressed syllables can be defended. It gave us *lady*, *biznis*, *madam* (and *'m*) and a large part of our speech; and who will be so hardy as to so urge that *hlafdige*, *business*, and *mea domina* are better than these?

[1] As in butt*e*r, *a*bove.
[2] *A Short History of English*, p. 200.
[3] For the cause of these restorations, see p. 109.

As for mincing, affected speech, whether Danes and Saxons practised it, or whether it is due to the Norman Conquest, or to the knights and ladies of the ages of romance and chivalry, is not clear. The particular form that now prevails is, no doubt, of no great age, and will pass. But it will certainly be succeeded by other equally ridiculous attempts to indicate superior refinement, just as it has replaced a long series of tricks of speech. Chaucer satirized one of them in his *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, where he remarked of the Friar :

> Somewhat he lipsed for his wantonnesse
> To make his Englissh sweet upon his tonge

and he made the Pardoner confess

> Lordynges . . . in chirches whan I preche
> I peyne me to hav an hauteyn speche.[1]

Although fashion succeeded in causing the permanent dethronement of many standard æ's by aɪ, it has made numerous other attempts which have failed. One of its snobbish efforts in the eighteenth century was to try to replace the English iɪ (aĭ) by the continental iɪ, for instance, in the word *oblige*. *Oblige* is an old word in English, and probably reached its present sound in the sixteenth century, but in the late seventeenth fashionable persons began to rhyme it with *besiege*. This sham French form became standard for a time, and even invaded literary English. But the common sense of the nation triumphed in the end, and chased it away.

. . . . .

Dr. Johnson's view, then, that in every tongue there

[1] Gentlemen, when I preach in church I assume a lofty tone of voice.

are natural tendencies to degeneration is confirmed by a scrutiny of English. But there is a natural power to resist them. Whether the power of resistance is at the present equal to its task no one can say ; if the evidence of the past can be brought into court there is no need to despair. We can look with considerable equanimity on the bad habits and diseases that have been described, because all have had predecessors which have been discarded. Nay, more. Dr. Johnson's view is the pessimist's view ; and the optimist's is equally valid. An impartial survey of English at different periods does not suggest that, taking all in all, it has deteriorated, but rather that there has been, on the whole, a progressive improvement.

The features and tendencies we have been examining, whether they are transitory or are to become permanent characteristics of English, are comparatively superficial. It is time we turned our attention to the very much more important matter of the fundamental structure of our language, to see whether it is undergoing or is likely to undergo changes.

Chapter III

STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT

To obtain a view of the structure of English in order to attempt to discover if any changes in its fundamental lines are possible or likely, it will be necessary to carry the reader far afield, and to retrace some of the paths along which our speech has travelled. He is therefore entreated to restrain the indignation that may be aroused by his reintroduction to grammar, a subject to which he had hoped to bid an everlasting farewell when he left school.

With the ultimate origin of speech we are not concerned; whether it was imitative, or due to innate impulse, or arose in some other way is a mystery we need not try to probe. But the means that primitive speeches instinctively adopted in order to become effective modes of expression, would, if we had sufficient knowledge of them, throw a bright light upon subsequent linguistic developments. Unfortunately for our purpose, the early speech of mankind must for ever remain a subject for speculation, since no written records of it exist. The only kind of evidence that we can obtain in support of theory is such indirect information as can be gained from study of the speeches of savage races now living; and this evidence can be no more than pre-

sumptive, for behind even such speeches as these must lie periods of development of unknown duration.

It appears reasonable to suppose that each original speech (if there was more than one) developed at first in complete irregularity, until the mind, fainting under the burden of the chaos it had itself created, was driven to devise methods of bringing order out of disorder. The prime necessity is to have an efficient means of marking the relations of words to each other and to the whole sentence. Without such a means, no sentence except such simple utterances as "Yes" and "No" can possess significance.

One method of securing this end would be to manipulate the forms of words. If it was desired to associate the meanings of two words, the connection between them could be reached by employing the same prefix or suffix for both words, or by assimilating their internal vowels. For example, two words could be attached to one another and held in the same relation to the rest of the sentence by terminating both with the suffix *-us* in one relation, with *-o* in another, with *-os* in another, as in the Latin *bonus dominus* (nominative case, singular number); *bono domino* (dative singular); *bonos dominos* (accusative plural). This device, or principle, which is known as Concord, has played, and still plays, an enormous part in speech, and is capable of almost infinite variety and indefinite extension. Word-form, moreover, can be used to mark differences of function between words as well as mere attachment. For instance, the noun when subject of the verb can be made to terminate in one way, and in another way when it is the object. And finally, these two formal devices can be employed in combination to build up a complex significant system.

Another useful method would be to join related words to each other by connecting words, such as our modern English prepositions. A third way would be to depend upon the order in which the words are placed in the sentence for the requisite indication of their mutual relations.

All these three modes of indicating verbal relations have been used by languages. Each has its peculiar advantages and disadvantages. All three are to be observed in simultaneous employment in the English of to-day.

So much for *a priori* reflection. Turning from it to our field of indirect evidence, we find a scene of extreme confusion spread before our eyes. The speeches of backward peoples differ from each other in every imaginable way, and it seems that scarcely any statement that would be universally true can be made about them. The most general feature that they possess is a great complexity of structure, compared with the chief civilized speeches of the modern world. It is said, for example, that in the speech of some of the Australian aborigines there is a set of inflexions to indicate the singular number of nouns and adjectives, another for the dual number (that is, when two individuals are implied), another set for the trial number, and another for the plural, which with them indicates any number greater than three. The bushman has also many cases for his nouns, many moods for his verbs, a plentiful supply of genders, each complete with an array of terminations, and so forth.

Another instance of complexity, which will also serve to illustrate the lengths to which concord is capable of being carried, is provided by the language of the Zulus. " In Zulu," says Sweet, " every noun belongs to one of

sixteen classes, each of which has movable prefixes, some having a singular, some a plural meaning, and when a noun is used in a sentence, all the following words having reference to it must begin with the prefix referring back to it." [1]

But the complex clumsiness of his speech does not worry the untutored bushman or the Zulu. He is quite unconscious of it, to all seeming. He is equal to his task. He jabbers fluently at a tender age, as the European does. He is like the bee, concerning which some time ago a scientist calculated that, according to the laws of mechanics, it does not possess sufficient wing surface to enable it to fly. But, commented a certain humorous writer, the bee is not acquainted with the laws of mechanics, and so it just has to go on flying. Similarly, the poor savage, ignorant of the grammatical structure of his tongue, unlearned in the dictionary, unskilled in phonetics, just has to go on speaking his complicated speech in correct form and sound.

How far one speech differs from another in intrinsic difficulty is a nice point. Apparently the Russian child learns to speak Russian as soon and as easily as the Dutch child learns to speak Dutch, and the English child learns to speak English, and the Zulu child to speak Zulu. Indeed, this is what we should expect; for it would be absurd to inquire whether the human mind, savage or civilized, has the energy to overcome the difficulties of that which it has itself created, of that which is merely its own external and audible aspect. Nevertheless, to secure a given end the simplest means is the best, and a simple speech which is also an efficient vehicle of thought and instrument of communication

[1] H. Sweet, *The History of Language*, p. 57.

leaves free the energy that is absorbed by a speech of complicated structure. Such a savage speech as we have described, being but an awkward instrument, is an impediment to racial intellectual development.

. . . . . .

Like the speech of the modern Zulu and bushman the great classical tongues of antiquity, Greek and Latin, were much more complicated than most of the languages of modern Europe, and they bear signs of having been even more elaborate in their early forms. They were still in the inflexional stage of speech, indicating the functions and relations of words mainly by means of terminations. Word-form was the keystone of their structure. Though, like modern English, they already possessed prepositions, and made some use of word-order, they did not put their trust in these new inventions. Thus both of them, in the forms which are recognized as their standard, had reached a point where many relations were indicated by double means ; for instance, in the expression *suaviter in modo*, the ending *-o* of *modo* and the preposition *in* perform the same office, and one or the other is redundant. The nature of their concords can be illustrated by the Greek h*o* kako*s* pai*s* (the bad boy). This became in the plural ho*i* kako*i* paid*es*, each of the three words being changed in form to mark its attachment to the others.

Greek and Latin possessed concords of the verb and its subject in number and person : of three genders : of the relative pronoun and its antecedent : and for attaching the adjective to its noun. Greek was more complicated than Latin. It had a dual number for its nouns, adjectives, and verbs, and a double set of verb terminations, whereas Latin had only one set. Both had several

regular conjugations. Greek verbs had three full finite moods, Indicative, Subjunctive, and Optative, against the Latin Indicative and Subjunctive ; and three voices, Active, Middle, and Passive, against two in Latin. Both, of course, possessed their full share of irregularities and anomalous relics of the past in their commonest words.

Omitting these, and considering regularities only, the Greek noun had seventeen inflections for cases ; it had thirty-three terminations for its adjectives, while modern English has completely divested itself of formal indications of number, gender, and case for adjectives.[1] There were twenty forms for the definite article corresponding to the invariable English *the*. Not counting participles, which had all the terminations of adjectives, the Greek verb had more than five hundred endings, each of which had to be employed according to its proper function and agreement, against the English four. Yet the modern English verb has developed by means of auxiliaries a richer system of tenses than the Greek verb had.

Greek has continued to be spoken throughout the ages, and has rid itself of much of this unwieldy mass. The two classes of verbs have been reduced to one : the optative mood, the middle voice, and the dual number have vanished, and the number of tenses has been much reduced. But modern Greek has not been able to free itself from concord.

A similar story is told by Latin. There were five declensions of Latin nouns, each with six cases in the singular number and six in the plural, and nearly every one of these had its own termination. The adjective had the same numbers and cases, and three genders, with

[1] Except the plurals of *this* and *that*.

a corresponding variety of endings. There were four conjugations of verbs, with one hundred and thirty-three forms, all of which were slightly modified in each of the conjugations. The nouns had thirty-nine different endings, and the adjective had twenty-four case and gender forms.

By 100 B.C., and probably earlier, Classical Latin was beginning to be modified in colloquial speech. In course of time Popular Latin succeeded in pruning the inflexional system. It cut down the number of cases of nouns and adjectives, and reduced the four conjugations of verbs to one. But it did not alter the essential structure of the tongue. Then, in the seventh century of our era, under the shock of barbarian conquests and the influence of the languages of the new lords of Western Europe, Low Latin (as it is generally called) split into dialects which became Italian, Spanish, French, and Rumanian.

All these are simpler than Latin, and make much more use of word-order. But, like modern Greek, they have not had the energy to cast off the burden of the concords that their word-order has rendered superfluous. French adjectives still possess four terminations for number and gender, and must be adapted in every sentence in accordance with the noun to which they are related. For *the* French has to use three forms, not counting contractions. Although French, like English, has developed a system of auxiliary verbs, the French regular verb has thirty-eight forms, against the English four. It retains the subjunctive mood, which English has recently abolished.[1]

The Teutonic languages underwent a like process of simplification. The earliest Teutonic tongue of which

[1] One or two unnecessary vestiges survive.

we have any knowledge is Gothic of the fourth century A.D. It was considerably more complicated than the English of the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, the flowering period of Old English literature. The tenses of its verbs still had forms for the dual number; the verb inflexions were numerous and elaborate; the declension of the adjective had fifteen terminations.

Old English contained many declensions of nouns, which in modern English have been reduced to one. The total number of terminations was large; in modern English there are three (four in written English). The definite article corresponding to *the* had eleven forms. The regular declension of adjectives had different terminations for the three genders, with eight forms. The verb had fifteen endings. It had a subjunctive mood. The concords were similar to those in Latin.

With the exception of English the modern Teutonic tongues, though simpler, have retained a large part of the old inflexional system. For *the* German has to use six forms. It is still oppressed by the concord of gender. The most regular German adjectives have four equivalents for the invariable English adjectives. The regular verb possesses twelve forms, and, as in French and English, employs auxiliary verbs to form tenses. There is still a subjunctive mood.

On the evidence of all these tongues progress has been from the more complex to the less complex. All are working slowly towards a flexionless state. But English has been more thoroughgoing than the others in relying upon new devices. Either because it was endowed with greater internal energy, or because of the English Channel, or because it was the tongue that Freedom loved, or because of the extreme violence of the blows administered

by Danes and Normans, it has thrown away nearly (but not quite) all useless structure. It has eliminated concords, which were rendered unnecessary by the fixed word-order ; adjectival concord has gone, and with it gender has been swept away ; [1] nearly all agreement of subject and verb has gone. It will be shown later that from the disappearance of its terminations English drew a very important practical conclusion which differentiates it from other modern European languages, and has invented many other new devices.[2]

The steady trend of our speech demonstrates with certainty what will be its nature if it changes further. Like Latin it has devised new instruments which have superseded the old ones, but like Latin it has not completely abandoned the old ones. Whether it will do so depends upon future circumstances. That the process of simplification could be carried further there is no doubt ; for though, when it is compared with the Aryan tongues it appears as the simplest and least inflexional of them, when it is compared with Chinese, which, according to Professor Karlgren has gone through a similar development, it appears to be relatively complicated in structure.[3]

Left to itself Standard English does not seem likely to drop the rest of the forms that have become useless and to trust entirely to its new tools. But will it be left

[1] Modern English is, of course, as capable of referring to sexual difference as any other tongue is. It does so by nouns (*man, woman, etc.*), pronouns (*he, she, it*), possessive adjectives (*his, her, its*). This is a matter of the *meaning* of words, and has no resemblance to the gender concords of Greek, Latin, French, Old English, or any other tongue, all of which are matters of the *form* of words. The latter is part of the structure of these tongues, the former belongs to the English dictionary.

[2] See p. 71.

[3] *Sound and Symbol in Chinese*, p. 25.

to itself? If degenerate English overwhelmed standard speech, a great part of the irregularities and some part of the regular structure would disappear. A violent social revolution would inevitably wash them away as completely as the fall of the Roman Empire converted Popular Latin into Italian, Spanish, and French, and as completely as the Norman Conquest levelled the terminations of Old English.

Chapter IV

SURVIVALS

The store of relics which English, like other living tongues, contains it could discard without impairing its capacity to express ideas. Cleared of its irregularities, and denuded of the uniformities that have become useless, it would be as efficient an instrument of thought as it is in its present condition. But it has not been able to defy the force of tradition entirely. There are still some inflections, and one concord still survives—the agreement of the verb with its subject in the third person singular of the present tense. That this is only an ornament (if it is ornamental) is easily proved; for the corresponding person in the past tense has no inflection, and yet the identical form of all the persons of this tense causes no confusion: *he sing*, *he help*, etc., would be as significant as *he sang*, *he helped*.

With queer perversity English, while preserving the personal inflection of the finite verb in this instance and no others, made a gesture of contempt for it by choosing the same *s* (or *z*) to show the plural of nouns (not to mention the possessive case), so that, *e.g. shocks* and *boxes* can be either verbs or nouns. One would have thought that, having decided to continue to show two differences out of a large number that it was abandoning, what Mr. Pearsall Smith calls "the Genius of the Language,"

and Mr. H. L. Mencken "that obscure but powerful spirit," would have fixed upon distinctive signs in order to do so. It would have been compelled to take this course if there had been any real utility in such a distinction. The ease with which the *-s* is omitted by little children learning to speak and by speakers of degenerate English, or, alternatively, is used for all persons (*e.g.* p. 28, "I 'as," "I spends") is notorious. Scholarly speakers and writers of Standard English also break this concord frequently, when the verb is removed a considerable distance from its subject.[1]

It would not be possible to surrender the plural inflection of nouns or the past tense of verbs without damaging the semantic efficiency of English. There is little sign in either Standard or degenerate English of any urge to abandon the plural *-s*, although a number of words do not take it, and although a few have recently dropped it, *e.g. lion* has been used in the plural without inflection (side by side with *lions*) for the last eighty years. But the present tense is used for the future quite frequently in Standard English, and for the past in illiterate English and in popular American, *e.g.* "It is coming on spring in Newark, New Jersey, and one nice afternoon I am standing on Broad Street with a guy from Cleveland, Ohio." (Damon Runyon.)[2] Our inflected past tense performs a useful function, and has, in addition, taken on its shoulders some of the duties of the old subjunctive, and nothing could be more concise. It is to be hoped that it is not doomed to extinction.

We could eliminate *-er* and *-est* from the comparison

[1] "When a writer (*as even the most practised writer so easily may*) weds a singular subject to a plural verb. . . ." (*Times Literary Supplement*, February 4, 1939.)

[2] See pp. 39 and 77.

of adjectives. These terminations have been losing ground before *more* and *most* for some centuries. New adjectives use *more* and *most*. Should it be *commoner* or *more common* ? is a question that puzzles some of the best of us.

The *to* of the infinitive is unnecessary ; it is readily cast off when the whim seizes the nation, as has been shown recently by the speed with which the American habit of omitting *to* after *help* has invaded Britain.

The inflected possessive case of nouns could be entirely replaced by *of*.

These are superseded uniformities ; in general, some proof is needed to show that a uniformity has lost its functional value. Irregularities, on the other hand, are manifestly useless, and could be extinguished.[1]

The chief are :

(*a*) The verbs which form their past tense and past participle by vowel change, as *swim*, *swam*, *swum* ; all these could be assimilated to the regular verbs ; *swimmed*, *breaked*, etc., would do equally well. This levelling would also get rid of the distinction between the past tense and past participle in these verbs, which does not exist in the regular verbs. English did in the past make attempts in this direction. For example, Chaucer wrote :

> This lighte gost ful blisfully *is went*
> Up to the holwnesse of the eighte spere.
> (*Troilus and Criseyde*, 1809–10).

which is paralleled to-day in popular American ; and Shakespeare wrote :

[1] The question whether, in spite of this, their disappearance would be on other grounds undesirable is raised on p. 143.

> At my birth
> The frame and huge foundation of the earth
> *Shaked* like a coward. (1 *Henry IV.*, iii. 1.)

and :

> I will scarce think you *have swam* in a gondola.
> (*As You Like It*, iv. 1. 37.)

and Scott incessantly substituted past participles like *swum* and *sprung* for their past tenses, so that literary purists must class these authors with the people who say, " I seen him " and confuse *did* and *done*.

(*b*) Anomalous verb forms like *am*, *is*, *are*, *was*, *were*. All these could be reduced. *I am*, *you am*, *they am*, or *I is*, etc., are as significant as *I sing*, *you sing*, *they sing*.

(*c*) Our inflected pronouns do not need their objective (and dative) terminations. Our nouns discarded these case-endings long ago. Illiterate speech confuses the nominatives and objectives without any loss except conformity to the standard. The loose hold we have upon them is embarrassingly exhibited whenever anything in the sentence disguises the convention ; in such cases they are frequently forgotten. All educated English people say " between *us*," but not a few of them say " between you and *I*" : owing to the seduction of the verb, the *News Chronicle* writes "none but *they* could handle the business," as did Mrs. Hemans in *Casabianca* (" whence all but *he* had fled ").

(*d*) The irregular plurals. *Foots* and *mouses* for *feet* and *mice* would not lessen our resources.

The subjunctive mood was used in English, as it is still used in German and French, to express remote condition, wish, uncertainty, and hesitation. Though its forms differed in modern English very little from the indicative, it still survived in the eighteenth century ; for instance :

" If a struldbrug *happen* to marry one of his own kind, the marriage is dissolved of course . . . as soon as the younger of the two comes to be fourscore " (*Gulliver's Travels*, 1726) ; and it has left us such relics as " Britannia rule the waves " (generally sung as *rules*). But it is never heard colloquially now, except in the forms " If I (he) *were*," and even these are giving place to " If I (he) *was*." They are, of course, unnecessary, and should go, as the indicative mood in its simple form or with the auxiliary verbs *may*, *might*, and *should*, has taken over all the province of the old subjunctive. We can even express a remote future condition by means of a simple past tense, as in " If I *went* to Paris next year, I should certainly visit the exhibition."

There can be few lovers of our sweet English speech now alive who would not shrink back in horror from the prospect here presented. Most of us would rather perish than breathe an air perpetually disturbed by such forms as " me see," or " he have seed she," or " I been home " instead of the words to which we are accustomed. When we hear them, or similar solecisms, on the lips of the man from Chicago (" Us fellers is ready "), or the man from Somersetshire (" Moi woif 'er do bully oi "), or the man from Hong Kong, we are mildly amused. We should feel very differently if we believed there was a real danger that they would be employed by all our children.

What would be the root of our aversion ? Would it be a mere sentiment of dislike for the new and unfamiliar ? Would it be a realization that such a change in our speech would render the whole of our existing literature archaic ? Perhaps such consideration as we have given to the developing structure of English would per-

suade us to agree that these would be the real causes of our disapproval. But, in the author's opinion, the average man would defend his opposition to these changes on the ground that they are incorrect, that they are, as the saying goes, bad grammar. We will, therefore, in the next place, inquire how far the average man would be justified in taking up this attitude. Whence, apart from habituation or sentimental attachment, does he derive his belief that these survivals are necessary and proper? What is it that has sanctified them, while at the same time ignoring, or belittling, many a new and beautiful device that our speech has invented?

Chapter V

LINGUISTIC ILLUSION

Between the terms "Speech" and "Language," which have hitherto been used in this book as synonymous, many modern writers make a useful distinction, thus :

Normally, when engaged in speaking, we pay no attention to the action itself. It proceeds semi-automatically. We do not at the time think of the machine we are employing, of sounds, or words, or grammatical structure. For this unreflective activity of mind and body the writers referred to employ the word Speech. Strictly, they say, Speech is a concrete thing ; it is the human being engaged in self-expression. Anything said on a particular occasion is an act of speech. "Speech" is a general term comprehending all particular acts of speech.

The word "Language," on the other hand, is reserved by those who make this distinction for the same phenomenon as we know it in contemplation. It is the same activity analysed ; dissected, so to say, by the instruments that reflection and study have put into our hands—by grammar, which is the description of the structure of speech ; by the dictionary, which is the description of the meanings of words ; by phonetics, which is the description of the elements into which, theoretically, speech-sounds can be resolved, and so on. Thus language—our

linguistic knowledge—is a set of abstract ideas derived from speech ; related to the concrete thing just as, for example, the Newtonian conception of space is related to the real thing, space.

Speech, in its real nature, is almost as elusive as space, and in some respects it is even more difficult to describe. For while space was conceived by Newton as uniform and constant, the same from everlasting to everlasting, each part of it resembling each other part in all respects, speech is neither uniform nor constant. Each speech changes from age to age, and the various speeches of the world differ from each other, even those that historically are most closely related, and those whose structures have most in common.

It follows that language, being nothing but our description and interpretation of speech, should be adapted in accordance with changes and differences of speech ; its categories cannot be indiscriminately applied to all the speeches of all the peoples of the earth, or to the same speech at all periods of its history.

It is because speech is to a large extent subconscious that it is elusive. The grown man and woman, and even the child after he has learned to speak, have forgotten and no longer feel the muscular efforts and adjustments involved in uttering sounds, because in speaking they concentrate exclusively upon their aim, which is the conveyance of their ideas and feelings.

That is the natural mystery in which speech is involved, a mystery which the human race took a very long time to penetrate. But there may also be an acquired obscurity surrounding speech. A great deal of educational work consists of linguistic study, and as a result our language environment has become so potent

that we cannot obliterate its effects from our minds. We are hypnotized by it. We have great difficulty in getting back to the position of the savage and the child with respect to speech. When we look at it we see what we look for. When we try to gaze at speech we discern only language. Speech is a series of complicated but continuous movements of mind and voice in complete union with one another. Owing to study, and familiarity with the printed page, we perceive it as consisting of sound and meaning, of words, of grammatical structures, of vowels and consonants. These are conceptions, not perceptions; the necessary weapons that ages of study have elaborated, results achieved by the human intellect working upon speech, not speech itself. We cannot study or describe the activity without making use of them, but we should not mistake them for the activity, as we are prone to do.

When speech changes, as we have seen that English speech has done, we ought to readjust our linguistic conceptions; but this we have great difficulty in doing, because we see the conceptions themselves as real things, and our speech eludes us. We see it as it once was, not as it has become. So superstitions arise; we discern in English features that existed, but exist no longer, and we fail to discern many new and important developments. We exaggerate the value of features that were once mainstays of the structure, but are now relics that have lost nearly all their utility, and we underrate the significance of recent growths that have succeeded in forcing themselves upon our notice.

Linguistic study in Europe was first pursued by the Greeks, who as early as the fourth century before Christ had already elaborated it to a considerable extent. The

distinction between the noun and the verb was known to Aristotle (384 to 322 B.C.) and his contemporaries, and they had some knowledge of inflections. They were followed by the Alexandrian scholars, who worked out a complete system of Greek grammar during the next two centuries. Dionysius the Thracian, born about 100 B.C., is important in this connection. He taught in Rome, and composed for the Romans a Greek grammar that enumerates, among other matters, the eight kinds of words (the so-called parts of speech) found in Greek, and describes their inflections. As the structure of Latin was very similar to that of Greek, the Greek grammatical scheme was easily transferred, without any alteration in principle, to Latin. Donatus, who flourished about A.D. 350, wrote an *Ars Grammatica* (still extant) which became the school grammar of mediæval Europe. Happy Donatus ! Prince of schoolmasters ! who wrote a textbook that was in almost universal use for more than a thousand years !

It was in the reign of Queen Elizabeth that English first began to be studied. Even at that early date the inadequacy of the alphabet to represent the sounds of English speech had been observed, and a number of men, notably Sir William Smith, a Secretary of State, John Hart, a herald (who wrote " An orthographie, conteyning the due order and reason how to write or painte thimage of mannes voice, most like to the life or nature " in 1569), and William Bullokar, a London lawyer, schoolmaster, and soldier, attacked the problem, and so laid the foundation of the science of phonetics in England.

In this direction the Elizabethans had a clear field. In grammar, unfortunately, they had not. Blinded by the linguistic tradition in which they had been brought

up, they applied the ideas and system of Latin grammar to English speech, and since, as we saw in a preceding chapter, inflection and concord were the essential parts of the structure of Latin, they regarded inflection and concord with unnatural reverence, magnified their importance where they found them in English, and found them where they did not exist; and they paid no attention to the instruments of expression that English speech had manufactured in the centuries that had elapsed since it ceased to be an inflectional tongue. As an instance, chosen at random, may be taken John Hewes' Grammar, published in 1624, the title of which runs: "A perfect survey of the English tongue, *taken according to the use and analogy of the Latin*." Hewes begins by enumerating three concords, namely, the nominative case and its verb, the substantive and its adjective, and the relative pronoun and its antecedent, and thereafter relentlessly describes English as if it was a Latin body in a new dress. Most of the books were of this kind. Whenever an unusually acute grammarian perceived that some part of the Latin structure was inapplicable to English and cast it out, it was sure to be reinstated before long, owing to the stupid pedantry of his successors. Thus Alexander Gil, High Master of St. Paul's, who wrote in 1619, omitted gender; but not many years later Ben Jonson the dramatist wrote in his book, *The English Grammar, made by Ben Jonson for the benefit of all strangers, out of his observations* [!] *of the English language now spoken and in use*: "The accidents of the noun are gender, case, declension. Of the genders there are six" [!!]. Ben Jonson "observed" two declensions of English nouns, and four conjugations of English verbs, all on the Latin model.

For the next three hundred years, English grammar, which had thus been poisoned at the root, lay numbed and motionless while our speech continued to develop. Horne Tooke protested in his *Diversions of Purley* (1786): "With us, the relations of words to each other are denoted by the place or by prepositions: which denotation (in Latin) usually made a part of the words themselves, and was shown by cases or terminations." And William Hazlitt the essayist, comprehending the futility of trying to explain a speech that is uninflected by means of ideas derived from inflected tongues, wrote in the preface to his grammar (1808): "It is a circumstance that may excite some surprise that there has hitherto been no real English grammar. . . . The following is an attempt to explain the principles of the English language as it really is. We have endeavoured to admit no distinctions which but for our acquaintance with other tongues we should never have suspected to exist. . . . We might refer particularly to the accounts given in the most approved and popular grammars of the genders and objective case of English nouns." But, for all the effect that they produced upon the gentlemen who wrote the most approved and popular grammars, Alexander Gil and Horne Tooke and William Hazlitt might never have lived. In grammar, the English schoolboy and the average Englishman of the nineteenth century were, in very truth, the heirs of all the ages; for they owed their grammatical ideas to Dionysius the Thracian and Aelius Donatus, and the structure of their own speech was unknown to them.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century a great deal of out-of-date linguistic apparatus has been scrapped. That is good; but the constructive work that should

follow is not yet satisfactory. English is a speech of simple structure, and the description of it in abstract terms should be simple. Unhappily, some of the modern scholars who did invaluable work in clearing away the piles of obsolete rubbish have gone astray by emulating the old grammarians and indulging in an orgy of classification. For example, the three volumes of Poutsma's *A Grammar of Late Modern English* contain 2,259 pages. The author says that he is fully alive to the necessity of confining himself to current terms, but "has felt obliged to coin some new ones." "Some" is an understatement; and they are of the type "sham non-prepositional object" (for *it* in "Give it him hot") and "reversed predicative adnominal adjunct" (*e.g.* "*All bloodless* lay the untrodden snow").[1]

[1] Professor Jespersen's *Essentials of English Grammar* (1933) is the best grammar of contemporary English.

Chapter VI

MODERN DEVICES

The first purpose of this chapter is to endeavour to indicate some of the grammatical principles that have in historical times become, and are likely to remain, fundamental in our tongue, and of which our knowledge of traditional grammar has caused us to be ignorant, or, if we perceived them, to be insufficiently appreciative. This description is followed by short accounts of several other striking but less radical developments that have appeared in modern English.

The strongest girders that uphold the English structure are the division of its words into two great classes, and the order in which the words occur in the sentences. English depends upon these more than on any other support for its capacity to express meaning and the manner in which it does so. Both existed in Latin and Greek, but were much less important, and so received little notice from the Latin and Greek (and English) grammarians.

English words may be classified into what are known as "full" and "empty" words. Full words are the names that possess substantive meaning—all nouns, verbs like *burn*, adjectives like *beautiful*, adverbs like *beautifully*. Empty words are those which do not possess such a substantive meaning—such words as *and* and *but*; *there* in "There is"; *it* in "It rains,"

and " Give it him hot " ; *do* in " Do you like him ? " ; *are* in " Are you going ? " ; *of* in " A giant of a man." They include prepositions and conjunctions, adverbs like *very*, *more*, and *most*, adjectives like *a* and *the*, auxiliary verbs, and pronouns.

So far as the distinction between these two classes is one of meaning, it is also one of degree, those which have been cited being extreme cases. Most, perhaps all, empty words were originally full words whose substantive meaning has grown faint, *e.g.* *there* was an adverb of place, and *with* carried notions of movement and resistance, as in *withstand*, *withdraw*, and the verb *wither*, whose root idea was " to go back." Many, like *do* and *have*, can be used as both full and empty words. Some, when empty, are so devoid of substantive meaning that it seems as if only convention had determined their choice. We all say " fond of books," but apparently " fond at " or " fond with " or " fond about " or " fond for " would have done just as well, if habit had run in one of these directions. Sometimes there are several forms. We can act " *upon* compulsion " or " *under* compulsion " ; we can " slow *up* " or " slow *down*," and go *up* or *down* the street (if it is horizontal) with precisely the same effect in action.

A curious instance of this sort is found in the expression " had rather." This arose from " would rather," which in speech was shortened to *e.g.* " she'd rather " or " she 'ad rather." But " she'd " coincided with the speech shortening of " she had," and as *would* and *had* are empty words, 'd in " she'd rather," when written, was expanded in the wrong way. This has been readjusted in recent times, although the historically wrong form is still seen sometimes.

Owing to the nature of empty words, different forms for the same use are springing up in different localities in the far-flung empire of English speech, as " That's all there is *in* it " and its American cousin " That's all there is *to* it." Also, the forms easily change without apparent reason. We now employ " acquaint *with*," but in the eighteenth century it was " acquaint *of*," just as we still " inform of."

The most significant difference between full and empty words does not, however, lie in their possession of substantive meaning or lack of it, but in the fact that the latter are used for structural purposes, on which account they are sometimes called grammatical words. They supply the connective tissue for the words of substantive meaning. Some merely separate full words and have no function except to preserve an appearance of the normal structure, as in " the city *of* London," " John Smith, *the* novelist " ; others, like the pronouns, and the verbs *am* and *do* in " Do you like him ? Yes, I *do* " and " Are you coming ? Yes, I *am* " are substitutes for full words. Others provide the necessary connections between full words or phrases or sentences. Others, namely the prepositions and auxiliary verbs, perform some of the functions that inflections perform in synthetic tongues.

Empty words are very numerous in English owing to its non-inflectional character ; that is to say, though they are small in number in comparison with the total of full words, there are more of them than most tongues possess, and they are very frequently used. In a leader in the *Times Literary Supplement* consisting of 690 words, 391 were empty.[1] Their

[1] A passage of Tacitus of equal length contained 256 empty words.

number is slowly increasing, as is their frequency; *e.g. more* and *most* are displacing *-er* and *-est*.

Word-position is the other great principle upon which the English sentence relies. A normal order of words (subject, verb, object, extensions) established itself early, as happened in other European languages. Since the disappearance of our inflections it has acquired binding force: it has become more and more rigid, and is now almost uniformly followed in speech. In writing, an author adheres to it except when he feels that he must break the monotony, or wishes to secure a smooth connection with what precedes. Even in writing, over ninety per cent. of modern English prose sentences are in the conventional order, against forty per cent. in King Alfred's prose, according to Professor Jespersen; and most of the variations are slight, being made by extracting a short phrase and placing it at the commencement of the sentence, the rest of which conforms to the usual order, as in the first clause of this sentence. In our modern speech and writing sentences like "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" are very uncommon, and are likely to become still rarer.

The possession of a rigid word-order brings weapons to the armoury of the speaker and writer; for the contrast between the convention and any deliberate alteration of it can be utilized. Since in English the normal station of the attributive adjective is before its noun, to place it after the noun is a means of changing its sense or function, as in "an off day" and "a day off" (sense), and "to strike a dead man" and "to strike a man dead" (function). In the same way special types of sentence can be produced. A sentence that contains

no interrogative word, such as *who* or *how*, is made into a question by moving the subject out of its usual position and placing it after the verb.

Consequently, subsidiary devices are needed when it is desired to employ the order of a special type and yet to convey an idea that requires the normal order. When the verb comes first the hearer has learned by experience to expect a question, and automatically assumes the appropriate attitude of reception. Therefore, when we want to invert subject and verb without asking a question, we put an empty word in the place vacated by the subject, as in "*There* is a green hill far away," and "*It* is a matter of surprise that no one has thought of this before." Similarly, we have supplied dummy subjects for our self-contained verbs, *e.g.* "It rains," "It is snowing." These phenomena, which cannot be accounted for on any principles derived from inflectional grammar, are now essential and permanent characteristics of English.

Our significant word-order requires that associated ideas shall be represented by adjacent words and phrases. Hence we instinctively seek to protect words that are in danger of seeming to transfer their allegiance elsewhere. This is the explanation of the so-called split infinitive (*e.g. to seriously consider*) which, during the last three centuries, has made repeated attempts to establish itself, and has been repulsed again and again by the pedants, who point out that the *to* was originally a preposition and the infinitive originally its noun. There is no doubt that the split infinitive will in the end succeed, because of its superiority to any other arrangement of the words in many sentences. There is, indeed, no valid argument against it. Though a great fuss is made about it, in

actual fact it causes us less difficulty than the attachment of pairs of attributes to a single noun, as in "a dog-eared policeman's notebook," and the employment of words like *just*, *only*, and *nearly*, which wander aimlessly about looking for a suitable home, and frequently failing to find it, as in "Yesterday morning I nearly saw the peace-time establishment of His Majesty's armed forces reduced by two" (*News Chronicle*, 1939), where the writer meant "nearly reduced." Light-hearted persons extract a good deal of amusement from these and other results of our rigid word-order, but real ambiguity rarely occurs.

English possesses a third girder almost or quite as important as the use of word-order and of empty words for structural purposes, and this had no parallel in the classical tongues, and therefore no mention in their grammatical systems. As it abandoned the system of indicating the meaning of sentences by concord and word-inflections, the nature of its full words was transformed. The "parts of speech" are psychological processes, fundamental modes of thought, to which the words of different languages are related in different ways. Greek and Latin, by means of fixed terminations, had determined the function of the great majority of their words. But in a language in which terminations have ceased to be significant, a word can and will vary its function according to its position in the sentence. Thus *war* can act as a noun (French *guerre*), or as a verb (for which the French is *faire la guerre*) or as an adjective, as in *war material* and *war minister* (French *matériel de guerre*, *ministre de la guerre*). In Chinese, where every word is invariable, every word can vary its function in this way ;

there are no nouns, or verbs, or adjectives, or other " parts of speech " ; each word can be a noun, verb, or adjective, and so on, according to the context. English has not quite reached that position, but variable function is now one of the fundamental characteristics of our speech. Although even in old English times a certain degree of power of this kind had been obtained, it was in the Middle Ages that it really developed. *Laugh* had been confined to the verb-function while it retained its ending *-an* (it was *hliehhan*) : now it became a noun also. The nouns *sentence*, *gossip*, *witness*, conversely, took over the verb-function. *Ornament* is known as a noun from the thirteenth century, as a verb from the eighteenth. *Kill*, as might be expected, was brought as a verb to England by the Danes : a nineteenth-century big-game hunter was the first to find that it satisfied a want as a noun (which also might have been surmised). *Find* as a verb belongs to primitive Teutonic, as a noun its earliest recorded use is in 1825. The old noun *harbour* became a verb in the sixteenth century. *Referee*, known from 1621, became a verb also in 1889. The Elizabethans in their pride rejoiced in this liberty, as in Shakespeare's " The *region* cloud hath masked him from me now " ; *nonplus*, made from Latin as a noun about 1580, became a verb in ten years.

The vigorous use that Modern English makes of its power to vary the function of words is one of the most encouraging proofs of the vitality of our speech. These are a few recent instances, culled at random :

" Britain's Biggest *Buy*." (Newspaper poster, 1938.)

" I have been able to keep the groups with which I *contacted* quiet and law-abiding." (*Illustrated London News*, 1938.)

"We need to preserve the beautiful varieties of our language, not to *steamroller* them into a dull uniformity." (*Daily News.*)

"No novelist has *headmastered* his countrymen as frequently as Mr. H. G. Wells." (*Daily News.*)

"Away back in the seventies he was *shanghaied* in San Francisco." (*News Chronicle*, 1938.)

"I *gooseflesh* one day, but another day I do not, at the same passage." (L. Abercrombie, *The Theory of Poetry*, p. 18.)

The effect of this upon our daily lives can scarcely be exaggerated. By it any full word can be added to the name of a thing to qualify it (the reader can call the added word an adjective, or an adnominal adjunct, or a noun attributive, or anything else he wishes; if he calls it an adjective he will offend one school of grammarians, who urge that the true test of an adjective is that it shall be capable of degrees of comparison; if he calls it anything else he will enrage another school). Such phrases easily coalesce into formless compounds, as *war loan*, of which we are making immense numbers. Perusal of two pages of the *Times Literary Supplement* yielded *term catalogue*, *autograph letter*, *Landor material*, *football match*, *gold prospector*, *frost bite*, *cigar ash*, *murder case*, *country police*, *London suburb*, *root cause*, *eighteenth-century Adam*, *parish magazine*, *publicity campaign*, *present-day conditions*, *middle-class family*, *society man*, *woman psychiatrist*.

The brevity of modern English is here obvious; the absence of formal terminations, besides making our speech more wieldy, saves an immense amount of our time.[1] The newspaper man in England and America,

[1] See pp. 133 and 134.

with his urgent need for short headlines, has not been slow to seize upon the opportunities provided in this way, and has extended the method enormously, as in: *Tube Station Bomb-Scare; Labour Shortage Chaos; Spain Peace Talk Moves; Seaside Drinks Battle; Wood Murder Charge Court Scene.* Mr. Stephen Leacock has even unearthed *Steamboat Company Dock Agents' Life Insurance Department*, of which he remarks that "no Anglo-Saxon could have said that; a Roman would have taken a page to say it, and a Greek would be talking yet." A Frenchman would take quite a long time. Mr. Strauman (*Newspaper Headlines*) points out that the French for "Death-Sentence Demanded on Uncle Killer" is "La peine capitale est requise contre l'homme qui tua son oncle."

One result of these habits will be that many adjectives and verbs will be pushed into disuse by the new and simpler forms: *surface* will usurp the place occupied by *superficial*, and *eye* will oust *ocular*. Already persons have been heard to say "hot it" instead of "heat it," just as *to cool* gradually displaced the old verb *to keel*; and already we see on the posters the expression "The England team."

English has even taken fright at its own enfranchisement, and is busily engaged in introducing a new kind of formal difference. It is making little attempt to manipulate monosyllables, although *that* is ðæt when it is a demonstrative pronoun and ðət when relative, and old distinctions of sound are maintained in such words as *use* (juːs when noun, juːz when verb); *thief* and *thieve*; and *grease* (griːs, noun; griːz, verb). But in words of more than one syllable our tongue is availing itself of its very strong accent, which it moves to mark a change of function, and by so doing is producing other changes

in their pronunciation. Examples are *object*, *increase*, *record*, and *invalid* (nouns) ; *object*, *increase*, *record* (verbs), and *invalid* (adjective). In *separate* the accent keeps its place, but the sounds are changed, thus : sepəreit (verb), seprət (adjective)

We are growing dissatisfied with our pronouns, which is not surprising. We have had trouble with them before, and we shall have trouble again. All who write feel the necessity of a double set of personal pronouns, one to refer to the subject of the sentence, and one to the immediately preceding antecedent. It was this deficiency that allowed the translators of the Bible to write " And when they arose in the morning behold they were all dead corpses." The modern author, putting, as he ought, meaning before style, tends to explain his pronoun, or to repeat his noun, as in " when the whole length of film is inside *the file*, *the file* may be put under pressure " (*The Amateur Photographer*). How the future will solve this difficulty it is impossible to say ; no sign of a real solution has yet appeared.

In another direction, however, we are clearly making pronoun-history at present. In the Victorian age, when woman's sphere was woman's sphere, *he* was used to embrace *she*. But after woman had acquired the right to vote at parliamentary elections, we became aware of the inconvenience of not having a common-sex pronoun. So, for " Every one according to *his* taste," there is now an urge to say and write " Every one according to *his* or *her* taste." This is cumbrous, and felt to be cumbrous, and consequently other means are being explored. These

have been found in the practical identity of the old grammatical ideas of distribution and plurality. *Every one*, though traditionally singular, means, in practice, the same as *all*. So the plural is called in to help, and we now hear "Every one according to *their* taste," which leads with ease to "Everybody began speaking together," "Nobody prevents you, do *they*?" "There was somebody in dark clothes leaning over him with *their* hands on his shoulders" (*News Chronicle*, 1938); "If this is anybody's idea of a soft job, *they* can have it" (The American Ambassador, 1938). What the spirit of English speech will do with the new instrument it has fashioned, whether in the unknown to-morrow it will cast it away or decide to adopt it as one of its permanent possessions, no one can say. It is to be hoped that this particular tool will be replaced by a better, because it is quite inconsistent with the legitimate and useful plural use of *they* and *their*, and will bring a new set of inconveniences in its train.

When the claims of meaning and form conflict English has generally sacrificed the latter. It did so when, on the decay of concord, it adapted its masculine *his* and feminine *her* to new uses, breaking their formal agreement with the noun to which they were attached, making them refer to the sex of an antecedent, and inventing the new word *its*. A conspicuous instance of this practical capacity of our speech is found in our treatment of collective nouns. As a collective noun denotes a group of individuals, either of its qualities may be dominant in a sentence: that is, the mind may be thinking of the units composing the group, or of the group as a single entity. German and French and most

languages require such a word to be always treated grammatically as singular, but English allows it to be employed as either singular or plural. We can say, for example, "The family *was* in a merry mood" and "The whole family *were* knocked down by a motor van" (*News Chronicle*, 1939). In the same way we can treat even a specified number as a single thing, as in "*Forty yards is* a good distance" (Sheridan); "*Nine years is* a long time" (title of a recent novel). In "38 sewing machines have been supplied and *a further 18 are* being supplied in the near future," the writer has shown an even more complete disregard of form. This last sentence is interesting as showing another way in which our speech abandons needless forms. In this case, because the idea of futurity is indicated sufficiently by other words, the present form is used instead of the future *will be supplied*, as it is in such common phrases as "I sail for Australia in July."

This very incomplete sketch of some of the ways in which the structure of English speech is developing may be fitly concluded by a reference to our passive continuous tenses. In the active voice English has long had two sets of tenses, one consisting of the simple verb, as *I build*, *I built*, and the other made with the verb *to be* and the present participle as *I am building*, *I was building*. For the former there were corresponding passive forms, as in "the house is built," but the latter had to do duty for both active and passive. The reason for this was that the same auxiliary, *be*, was used for both purposes. Hence, till recent times we were confined to such forms as "Some exertions are at present *making* to procure the abolition of capital punishment" (*Observer*, Dec. 6, 1829); "a room is *fitting* up" (*Evelina*, 1778); "the

French language for these last fifty years hath been *polishing* as much as it will bear" (*Swift*, 1711). But in the nineteenth century the logical impulse conquered, and produced the passive continuous tenses, so far as they could be made without *be* and *being* occurring in juxtaposition. Such a tense as "a room is *being fitted* up" is now standard. The clumsier forms, exemplified by "a room *will be being fitted* up next week" are on the tips of our tongues; they are occasionally seen and heard, but have not yet come into the open.

Chapter VII

CHANGES IN VOCABULARY

Here we leave the rather austere plains we have been traversing and enter a very different region, a forest of Amazonian vastness, where decay and rapid growth in many forms are to be seen side by side. New words are always coming into being, some to supplant old words, others to express new ideas. Rare words become popular, and popular words become rare. New methods of making words are invented, and methods that found favour in the past are abandoned. And, though the greater part of our vocabulary was made or borrowed long ago, the meanings of words are liable to incessant change.

As soon as the explorer begins to advance, a difficulty confronts him. The habits of writers and printers are not consistent: for instance, *handbag* is sometimes printed so, sometimes *hand-bag*, sometimes *hand bag*. Again, is *to love* one word, or two? It is always printed as two, and admittedly it was once two. But, according to the behaviourist definition of a word as a linguistic unit functioning in a sentence, it is one; and there are many other groups, besides compound nouns and infinitives, concerning which the printed page conflicts with the definition. On the other hand, to reject the definition is to be in opposition to the whole conception

of the structure of English that is now establishing itself.

Accepting it, we must conclude that English is making compound verbs in immense numbers. Some originated in sentences where a simple verb was followed by a noun joined to it by a preposition that later adhered to the verb; for example, "It is hard to see through a brick wall" is soon turned into "a brick wall is hard to *see through*." Others have been formed, directly, on the same pattern. Not infrequently, when a verb is followed by two nouns linked by a preposition, as in "I have *got rid of the dog*," the verb, first noun, and preposition are being cemented in a similar way, *e.g.* "The dog has been *got rid of*" and "After enduring tortured nerves for a week they have the thing *put an end to*" (Robert Lynd in the *News Chronicle*). We do not object to compounds containing two or more particles, as in "You will not live to see the Means Test *done away with*" (The Minister of Labour); "Wines and spirits *sent out for*." All these phrases behave exactly as simple verbs do; they can be turned into past participles and used with *be* to form a passive, as in "The most desperate measures *were had recourse to*."

The habit, though it is not new, is in its proportions a recent growth, and it is working a great change in the character of English. For one thing, the compounds are turning upon their parents, unless these are followed by a bodyguard. Nowadays the recruit does not *join*; he *joins up*; he can still join the army, however, which shows that some of these particles are empty words which owe their places to the same cause as put *it* in "it rains." Even a university professor of English language (Professor Wyld) must write "To begin *with*, the spelling of words is very different in different ages"; and, owing to the

power of analogy, we are threatened with "to end with"; it has already been broadcast across land and sea by a B.B.C. announcer. America is industriously seconding us (or firsting—Mr. H. L. Mencken avers that they are better at it than we on this side of the Atlantic are) in this enterprise. We don't like their products, such as *check up on*, but that is mere insular prejudice; they are as good as our own, and some of them will be our own very soon.[1]

We have not been slow to seize the metaphorical opportunities presented by these new alliances of simple verbs that are so much more vivid, so much better loaded with image-power, than the exact Latinisms that pleased our fathers. Therefore we no longer attend a departing friend; we *see* him *off* (or *out*). Nor do we escape being deceived by a trick; we *see through* it. In like manner, *see to*, *see about*, *see after*, *see over*, etc.

Naturally, through the power of functional variation that English possesses, many of these words have already acquired the noun use, *e.g.* a *try on*, a *frame-up*,[2] a *get-up*, a *breakaway*, a *knockout*. Some even own derivatives, like *standoffishness*.

There are other means besides the functional test by which to decide which are, and which are not, single words. One is the common definition of a word as a sound conveying a single idea or image, which is gener-

[1] As Mr. A. P. Herbert says (*What a Word!* p. 151), "I am sure that in the Great War you constantly fell in. You are tired out, you wake up, you get up, and you sit down. But when you hear that North Americans are beating up, or shooting up, or trying out, you shiver."

[2] Patience, good reader: much depends on the point of view. Note this from a court case reported in *The Kentish Times*, 1939: Witness stated "Defendant said 'It's a poke-up.' That was a new one on me, but I think it's *a slang expression for a frame-up*."

ally employed in dealing with the compounds consisting of two full words that English is now manufacturing with splendid and impressive vigour. This seems beautifully logical, but it has to be used with caution, because a word is not a unit of sound ; it is true that it is physically possible to sound any word in isolation, but in actual speech words form part of breath-groups, as can be shown experimentally. Also, if two persons take different sides, one asserting that *handbag* conveys but a single image to himself, while the other is equally convinced that the same sound conveys a pair of images to him, a further test has to be applied before either can be contradicted. This test is found in the behaviour of the accent. As soon as the two images fuse, the resultant word is accented as one whole, whereas before that event the components are accented as separate ; that is to say, after the fusion the accent on the first is preserved and the accent on the second is weakened. By this test *handbag* is a single word, and so is *George Street* (name of a highway), but *George Street* (name of a man) is not. The same token shows that the following modern formations, and many others like them, are new compounds, and as such are probably to be part of the speech of the future : *gasproof*, *brainwave*, *roadhog*, *foxtrot*, *backfire*, *mankilling*, *once-over*, *he-man*, *breakdown*, *fan-mail*, *footwear*, *heartfelt*, and *dashboard*.

The meanings of words will change in the future. Though the future fortunes of particular words are quite uncertain, words will behave as they have done in the past ; that is to say, the meanings will expand and contract, and shift. Many will be used in metaphorical senses, and some will doubtless lose their original

meanings altogether, as *torpedo* has done. This word appeared in English from Latin in the early part of the fourteenth century with the meaning of "numbness," and was later applied to the electric ray, which causes numbness; about 1775 it was given as a name to a new kind of submarine weapon, which we now call a *mine*; a hundred years later functional variation occurred, and it began to be used as a verb. The politicians and journalists then seized it, *e.g.* "Hitler has *torpedoed* the Munich agreement." Association will continue to play a great part in shifting meaning, as it did with *boor*, a peasant; a contemporary writer on the battle of Blenheim says that the French soldiers who swam the Danube to escape capture were murdered by "the boors of the country." Feeling will produce very curious effects, as it has done with *occupy*. Natural compunction impels us to refer to indecent or unpleasant topics, when we are under the necessity of doing so, by fixing upon some innocent word instead of employing the descriptive term. Inevitably, in due course, the innocent becomes the guilty, and passes out of polite use in its turn. *Occupy* is known in English from about Chaucer's time. A hundred years later its perfect respectability recommended it as a substitute for a sexual word, and it quickly went underground. Shakespeare said of it (2 *Henry IV.*, ii., 4, 16) that it was "an excellent good word before it was ill-sorted," *i.e.* fell into bad company. For the next two centuries it was never used in literature or polite speech. In due course its indecent meaning was also forgotten, and it was able to return in the nineteenth century, and now moves once more in the most exclusive verbal society. Such a fate may overtake any word; *offices* is at present in great danger.

This subject of Meaning is one of great importance. English words possess a remarkably large number of meanings: for example, to *give* the *New English Dictionary* ascribes 64 distinct senses, to *take* 63 senses, and to *clear* 25 adjectival senses; the corresponding numbers in *Larousse* are 25 for the French *donner*, 41 for *prendre*, and 11 for *clair*. • It is almost as if the Englishman had attempted to do with as narrow a personal share of the national vocabulary as he could confine himself to. Whether that has been so or not, the consequences have been far-reaching. We now have a speech that permits us to distinguish very fine shades of meaning, and its flexibility has naturally fostered in us the habit of using it to make nice distinctions; for *sermo generatur ab intellectu et generat intellectum.* This has happened because the meanings of our words overlap in all directions, so that we possess a great number of partial synonyms, the profusion of which has rendered our tongue very hard for a foreigner to learn to use as we ourselves do, although a rudimentary command of it is soon acquired, because its structure is simple. Easy and comfortable to us who have spent our lives in threading its intricate paths, our vocabulary is a bewildering labyrinth to the stranger. These facts have a manifest bearing upon the prospects of English spreading in the future.

Although the Englishman has apparently been economical in the use of his private verbal property, the word-stock of English is certainly the most copious that has ever existed; no other tongue can approach it. The enormous size of the vocabulary is due to the hospitality to foreign words that English has shown in

the Middle Ages and modern times. This readiness to proffer hospitality may be one of the chief virtues of English. But it must be confessed that it has enjoyed exceptional opportunities of borrowing, in the early part of its history from the foreign invaders who came to our shores, and then by falling under the civilizing influence of the universal language of the Middle Ages ; and in modern times because it has been carried to all parts of the world by arms and by trade. It seems almost as if it had been singled out by fortune to be enriched from as many sources as possible ; for frequently a foreign speech has acted as a carrier, yielding up to us treasures which it had itself acquired elsewhere and in a far distant past. As a matter of curiosity, the following, originating in speeches with which we could never have had direct contact, may be cited : *elephant* passed from ancient Egyptian into Greek, thence into Latin, thence into French, whence it was acquired by English ; *lion* was probably Egyptian also ; *gorilla* (first used in English in 1853) was probably a Carthaginian word ; *paradise*, and perhaps *tiger*, belonged originally to the ancient Persians.

A complete examination of the gradual growth of our borrowed vocabulary would demonstrate very clearly some of the ways in which English is likely to develop in the immediate future. It appears that French is the tongue that has sent us most words during the last century, and more than we have taken from it at any time since the Middle Ages. Among a host of others that are perhaps not fully acclimatized, the following words that have now made themselves quite at home in English speech are some of those that have entered from French during this period : *barrage*, *chassis*, *chauffeur*,

buffet, *lacrosse* (from Canadian French), *repertoire*, *matinée*, *marguerite*, *menu*, *fiancé*, *flamboyant*, and *coupon*—these appeared during the nineteenth century. Among the twentieth-century arrivals are *revue*, *sabotage*, *garage*, *camouflage*, and *pension*.

But, actually, the date at which a word enters a language is less important than the date at which it becomes popular. Words behave very differently in this respect. Some, like the Turkish *bosh* (1834), are taken up immediately; others remain rare for a long period before they catch the popular fancy and are heard everywhere. The Arabic *mattress* is known in English from the thirteenth century, but did not become current till modern times, and the same is true of the seventeenth-century Hindustani importations *cot* and *bungalow*. *Chit* dates from the same speech and time as these last, but had to wait for the 1914–1918 war to be heard on the lips of the ordinary Englishman.

The following are among the French aliens long resident in English that have recently taken out papers of naturalization: *table d'hôte*, *coiffure*, *ménage*, *bourgeois* (all of the seventeenth century); *billet doux*, *café*, *carte blanche*, *connoisseur*, *débris*, *détour*, *encore*, *passé*, *restaurant*, *sangfroid*, *manœuvre*, *beret*, besides such expressions as *savoir faire*, *en masse*, *au revoir*, and *en route*.

Although the structure of modern English is quite different from the structure of Latin, any one who looked at the vocabulary only might well consider English to be a descendant of Latin; for the Latin importations actually outnumber the native stock. The Saxons brought some with them from the Continent, and they have been coming in throughout the whole period of the history of English from the time of the Roman

conquest. After the end of the eighteenth century, however, we evidently considered that we had drunk almost enough from this source, and though we have in recent times taken *sanatorium*, *aquarium*, *moratorium*, *referendum*, *consensus*, *bacillus*, *vitamin*, and *agenda*, it does not seem likely that we shall in the future make large demands upon Latin. On the other hand, the number of Latin words and phrases that remained quiescent in English for a long time, and have recently become current, is remarkably large. A few are *quota*, *bonus*, *locum*, *verbatim*, *per*, *onus*, *via*, *re*, *ignoramus*, *interim*, *infra dig*, *status quo*, *a priori*, *pro tem.*, *quid pro quo*, and *non sequitur*. *Pro tem.*, *locum*, and *verbatim* date from the fifteenth century ; none of the others reached us later than 1800, but all have gained colloquial currency in the last fifty years. Some are very popular. Every clerk in a business house uses *per* ; every doctor has been a *locum* ; every foreign newspaper correspondent writes a *verbatim* translation ; every committee presents an *interim* report ; and every railway porter reads *via* on a hundred luggage labels a day. It appears likely, therefore, that future English-speakers will use more words of this kind.

While Latin has given a larger number of words to the English vocabulary than any other foreign tongue, and while French has sent us more than any other during the last century, at the present moment Ancient Greek easily heads the list of our contributors. For the great developments in industry, science, and speculative thought that have occurred in modern times the Teutonic stock in English is unfitted, and, as we have just seen, the springs of Latin were beginning to dry up when the nineteenth century dawned. In these circumstances we turned to a quarry we had already opened in

Ancient Greek. From it we have since drawn large supplies of material, most of which we have used for manufacturing words that would have been a source of wonder to the Greeks. The connotation of such a word as *thermometer* they would easily have understood, but to imagine the actual instrument would have been quite beyond their power. English, of course, was perfectly able to provide us with the compound *heat-measurer*, which is self-explanatory, but would have been unsuitable because it lacks precision. It might cover other objects, while the word *thermometer* can be restricted to a single type of apparatus.

Most of the words thus made have been technical terms. Their number is colossal.[1] Certain of them, making a group of large size, have already entered colloquial speech, and many more will do so, so that there is little doubt that English in the future is going to be increasingly affected by Greek, from which it will make many words like *aeroplane* (1866), *aerodrome* (1897), *telephone* (1835), *television* (Greek and Latin) (1909), *photograph* (1839), *eugenics* (1883), and *cinematograph* (1897); there are already twelve common English words made with *tele-*, and more than a thousand technical terms. Not a few of the Greek manufactures have completely adopted English habits, *e.g. cine*, *phioto*, and *televise*.

We have never taken as kindly to German as to French words. But since 1850 German has sent us quite

[1] The Editor of Dr. J. C. Smock's *The Greek Element in English Words* (New York, 1931) says, "The register presents a *selective* list of about 130,000 English words. It does not purport to present all the English words hitherto derived or constructed from Greek. Botany, medicine, etc., swell the total to upward of a *million* words. And even if all these were recorded, the rate of new coinage must soon render any list incomplete." (Our italics.)

a number, among them *kindergarten*, *seminar*, and *rucksack*, of which the last two have been popularized quite lately. The great spate of musical and artistic words that flowed into English from Italian in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries slackened at the beginning of the nineteenth. *Scenario* is, however, a notable recent addition to our stock. *Tempo* is a word of Italian origin (it was borrowed in 1724), which is at present making a new use for itself in English. Originally a musical term, it is now being applied generally, *e.g.* "The *tempo* of a drive for a new peace front must increase" (*News Chronicle*, 1939). Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish gave us numerous words in the past, but few are coming to us from them now. Spanish, however, has recently presented us with *dago* and *vamoose* (from *vamos*, let us go), *tango*, and *cafeteria*; actually, *vamoose* is from Mexican through American. Russian, as might be expected, has let us have some political words, such as *bolshevik* (*-ist*).

It is from the sixteenth century, when Englishmen began to visit a great many countries in all parts of the world, and the foundations of the British Empire were laid, that the steady increase which has occurred in our vocabulary borrowed from non-European sources is to be dated. To-day there is scarcely a language spoken on earth that is not represented in English, and it is in touch with more foreign speeches than any other tongue is or ever has been. The period of greatest activity was between 1600 and 1800, but we have by no means ceased borrowing, and a great many of the loans thus obtained are only now coming into general use. We shall therefore expect the Persian *khedive* and *khaki* to be followed by others from the same tongue,

the Japanese *jujitsu* and the Malay *raffia* to be joined by many of their compatriots. These words are new; there are many older words from the same sources. The tongues of India are, of course, giving us many terms. The older Hindustani words *chit*, *bungalow*, and *cot* have already been mentioned; more recent immigrants from that tongue into English are *pyjamas*, *gymkhana*, *polo*, and *swastika*.

It will not have escaped the notice of the reader that all the loans that have been cited are full words. Nearly all our empty words are native, and English will not change in this respect unless some extraordinary catastrophe overtakes it. One variety of English, however, can enlarge the use of an empty word and subsequently transfer it, as American is at present doing with *on* (in "It's a new one on me"), and *for* (in "I don't stand for it").

Besides importing words from foreign tongues, changing meaning, and manufacturing compounds, we are creating absolutely new words, and enthusiastically modifying existing words by means of the ample store of prefixes and suffixes we possess, and no doubt we shall continue to do so. A few of the particles we are using, and shall use, are old, but most of them are new to English, being Latin and Greek forms that entered our tongue in loanwords, and subsequently became so familiar that we are now able to detach and reapply them. They have almost ousted the native particles, and are working a profound change in English.

The only Old English prefix that has survived is *un-*, as in *uncrushable* (1873); generally we prefer the Latin *non-* (*noncombine*, *nonskid*, *nonstop*). The native suffixes,

on the other hand, still form a compact little group. The chief are *-er* (*thriller*, *gasper*, *transformer*) ; *-dom* (*boredom*, 1864) ; *-ish* (*amateurish*) ; *-wise* (*clockwise*) ; *-ness* (*airmindedness*) ; *-ship* (*professorship*) and *-y* (*panicky*, *catty*). There is one ending of unknown origin, seen in *doggo*, *blotto* ; the purist will stigmatize these as slang ; he is right, but *-o* may have a splendid future before it.

Two suffixes of French birth are now living in England —*ee* and *ette* (*e.g. employee*, *payee*, *evacuee*, and *suffragette*).

The number of words being constructed with the Greek and Latin particles is truly amazing. Every one seems to be able to use *re-*, *de-*, *-ism*, *-ist*, and *-ize* at will. The majority of the words so made are unnoticed : a minority establish themselves. Here is a selection showing the use of these affixes : *reapply*, *remarriage*, *recondition*, *rebore* ; *decontrol*, *defrost*, *decarbonize*, *debag*, and *debunk* (*rebunk* has been heard) ; *cubism*, *escapism*, *communism*, *anti-semitism* ; *publicist*, *faddist*, *terrorist*, *purist*, *alarmist*, *futurist*, *stockist*, *canoeist*, and *pacifist*. *-Ism*, *-ist*, and *-ize* are a correlative series ; all three were introduced long ago, and were used sparingly till the latter half of the eighteenth century. *Pasteurize*, *bowdlerize*, *minimize*, and *Europeanize* are four modern words containing *-ize* ; *mechanized* is an old word that has had sudden popularity thrust upon it in the twentieth century.

Of the prefixes the Greek *anti-* and the Latin *pro-* are now the most popular correlatives, *e.g. anti-gas*, *anti-red*, and *pro-German*. *Pro-* is half English, for the meaning we attach to it has no authority in Latin. *Pro-* and *anti-* have also become independent words in English : we can speak of the *pros* and the *antis*. Other classical prefixes in constant use are *ex-* (*ex-officer*, *ex-wife*) ;

multi- (*multi-millionaire*, *multi-lingual*) ; *hyper-* (*hyper-sensitive*) ; *inter-* (*interdepartmental*, *intercity*) ; *sub-* (*sub-conscious*, *subnormal*) ; *post-* (*post-war*, *post-impressionism*) ; *pre-* (*pre-war*, *precondition*) ; *ante-* (*antenatal*) ; *dis-* (*dis-gruntled*) ; *trans-* (*transatlantic*, *transcontinental*, *trans-ship*). The suffixes and the words made with them are quite as numerous. *-able* is one that is often badly used ; *lootable* (*Daily News*, 1927) is correct, but *knowledgeable*, *fashion-able*, and *peaceable* are degenerate. *Scaremonger* is a new word made with a Latin suffix brought by Hengist and Horsa. *-ite* is seen in *Hitlerite*, *-alism* in *sensationalism*, *-istic* in *sadistic* and *fatalistic*.[1]

Most curious and interesting of all our new words are the original creations, nearly all of which enter the standard speech from slang, although a few nouns, like *robot* (an international word made by Karl Capek), are the result of deliberate manufacture. The stream has never failed throughout the whole history of English, it is now flowing as steadily as ever, and it is certain that it will always continue to do so. Slang gave us *boy* and *girl* in the thirteenth century, *grin* in the fourteenth, *queer* in the fifteenth, *jump* and *squander* in the sixteenth, *slump* and *sham* in the seventeenth, *donkey*, *funk*, and *humbug* in the eighteenth. The later nineteenth- and the twentieth-century words of this kind are still too young for many of them to have acquired standard status, but a number, such as *swank*, *dud*, *wangle*, *gadget*, *scrounge*, *blurb*, *jazz*, and *O.K.* are swaggering about with an air of confidence. In calling these words original creations, one must not be understood to exclude the possibility of indefinite suggestions from other words, and some-

[1] A fuller accouut of prefixes and suffixes is to be found in the author's *Modern English*, pp. 108–112, published by the University of London Press.

times the influence is fairly clear. *Swank*, for instance, seems to be allied with *swagger*, just as the latter is related to *sway*; *grouse* reminds us of *grumble*. In " the jitters " the sound echoes the sense. To slang, of course, we owe many words of normal formation, such as *eyewash* and *gasper*.[1]

Also, in view of the well-known tendency of slang towards shortening, the possibility exists that any of these words of unknown origin may be a derivative of that kind. This seems, indeed, to be the most suitable place to mention shortenings, since many of them, like *bus* (*omnibus*), were originally slang. Modern examples are *bunk*, from *bunkum*, from Buncombe in South Carolina, *pro*(*fessional*), *photo*, *phone*, *plane* (*aeroplane*), *flu*, *vet*, the *flicks*, *fan*(*atic*), *vamp*(*ire*), *cushy*, *perm*(*anent wave*), and *mutt*(*onhead*). It is evident that the habit of clipping off the ends of words will be as prominent in the years to come as it was in the past.

By such methods we are transforming the colloquial and profoundly modifying the standard vocabulary. The ease with which new terms of all sorts can be created nowadays, and the freedom with which vivid, image-carrying words are elbowing their way into English are remarkable. We are all engaged in making and admitting them. In a single novel by Mr. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, occur the following coinages, *hypnopaedia*, *sexophonist*, *sing* in the sense of " concert," *singery* (place for singing), and *feelies* (on the analogy of *movies*). The present-day fecundity of English seems to be greater than ever before, and it has always been great.

Should there not, then, be some authority like the French Academy, either self-controlled or set up by law,

[1] See p. 23.

to regularize English? Among those who are alarmed at the alterations in speech and writing taking place around them, there have always been some people who have wished for such a power of censorship, either over the vocabulary or over grammatical constructions as well. Nobody has yet been so hardy as to suggest how the sounds could be stabilized, and it would be obviously very difficult, if not impossible, to exercise any sort of control over the gradual changes in meaning that are always occurring; for both change of sound and change of meaning take place imperceptibly, to a large extent.

Dean Swift had no doubt that the vocabulary could be brought to order; and, true to his character of pamphleteer, he put forth definite proposals for action. In 1711 he addressed a letter to the Lord High Treasurer containing "A Proposal for correcting, improving, and ascertaining the English tongue." In the previous year he had written in the *Tatler* on slang innovations, mentioning *bamboozle* and *kidney*, and also long abstract terms. "I have done my utmost for some years," he wrote, "to stop the progress of *mobb* and *banter*, but have been plainly borne down by numbers." In his "Proposal" he says: "My lord, I do here, in the name of all the learned and polite persons of the nation, complain to your lordship, as first minister, that our language is extremely imperfect; that its daily improvements are by no means in proportion to its daily corruptions." His proposal is that "a . . . choice should be made of such persons as are best qualified for such a work. . . . These should fix on rules by which they design to proceed. . . . They will find many words that deserve to be utterly thrown out of our language. But what I have most at heart is that some method should be thought

on for ascertaining and fixing our language for ever. . . . For I am of opinion it is better a language should not be wholly perfect than that it should be perpetually changing." At this distance of more than two hundred years we can measure the inutility of the proposal. The English of the age of Queen Anne would be quite unequal to the task of expressing many of the ideas of the present day, besides lacking innumerable words denoting common things of our life which had no existence then.

The mantle of Swift has now descended, with discriminating appropriateness, upon the shoulders of Mr. A. P. Herbert, who has sounded a call to arms in his very amusing and patriotic book, *What a Word!* "Piratical, ruffianly, masked, braggart, and ill-bred words invade our language every day," he says. It is true. Here are a few of the queer monsters that Mr. Herbert has collected: *endorsation*, *redecontamination*, *dehumidify*, *deratization* (rat-killing), *slenderize*, *essentialize*, *to service*, *beautician*, *deinsectization*, *marketability*, *dedirting*, *foot-consciousness* and *to feature*. From his own collection the author can add *braces-conscious*, *picturize*, *to process*, *manœuvrability*, *shamateur*, *leftism* (Mr. H. G. Wells), *ostrichism* (Mr. Douglas Reed). We bristle when we come upon one of these. Many of them, academically considered, are extremely objectionable; their shapes are contrary to nature—at any rate, to any nature that we have knowledge of. But let us preserve our equanimity. Some invaders that we have in the past surrendered to are no better; *shamateur* is formed on the same principle as *culprit* is, by running two words together; *picturize* as *jeopardize*; *to service* as *to sentence*; *leftism* as *jingoism* and *colloquialism*. Further, many of the

new formations will perish as hundreds before them did. Here is a choice little cabinet collected in Elizabethan drama — *superfantial*, *moechal*, *mundification*, *vulnerate*, *trifulk*, and *neutrize*—these are from serious passages ; the diction of some of the comic passages reads like an etymologist's nightmare. All these died a speedy death, and so will *beautician*, *deratization*, and most of their fellows, whether we take up arms against them or leave them to die of inanition.

We should remember that, measured by the standards of the past, every feature of modern English is incorrect, and yet it is a comely speech. We should consider that, uncouth as these creatures seem, they are evidence of energy and of determination to meet new needs. We should set our teeth and grin and bear it, because new battalions are marching behind those that already confront us. Worse might happen to us :

> For all that here on earth we dreadful hold
> Be but as bugs to fearen babes withal
> Compared to the creätures in the sea's entrall.

It is better, for instance, that a tradesman should call himself a " fruitician " than a " fruiterer of distinction," and to speak and write " rabbitization " (*Sunday Dispatch*) than " the dissemination of these edible rodents."

Chapter VIII

DIALOGUE ON SPELLING

Mechanistes *Philologus*

M. English spelling is in a shocking mess ; it ought to be reformed.

P. Why, Mechanistes ? Do you find it hard to read ?

M. Oh, no. I rather pride myself on being a rapid reader. I can easily read two hundred words a minute.

P. And do you understand what you read ?

M. Certainly I do.

P. Then have you some difficulty in spelling correctly ? Please forgive me for mentioning so elementary a point. I should not have suspected it.

M. No. I am never at a loss for the spelling of a word, if I have seen it once. My reason for criticizing our system is not personal. I have been looking into the subject recently. As English speech to-day contains about 23 consonant sounds, and 18 vowel sounds, it is manifest that our alphabet of 26 signs would be inadequate to represent our sounds even if used regularly. In fact, however, it is used with complete irregularity. Again, syllabic stress or accent is a very conspicuous feature of our speech, yet we don't mark the accents in our words. For instance, *quandary* and *vagary* are accented differently,

but the spelling doesn't show it. I could easily demonstrate to you how absurd and irrational our spelling system is, but I should only bore you.

P. On the contrary, I am very interested. I wish you would do so. But, first, please tell me what you mean by saying the spelling (or writing) system—for, I suppose, they are the same thing—is irrational. They *are* the same thing, aren't they ?

M. Yes, spelling, writing, and print are different forms of the same art, of course.

P. Well, in what sense are they irrational ?

M. Surely, in a rational system each symbol would consistently represent the same sound.

P. Oh, I see. Certainly, our spelling does not do that. I have noticed that myself. I wish I had your knowledge of detail, Mechanistes ; for I suppose you have examined the subject elaborately.

M. Yes, I have. Consider, for example—since you desire details—the word *changed* ; if you remove the *c* the whole of the word is altered : the vowel, the *n*, and the *g*—all have new values.

P. Indeed, they have. Pray proceed, Mechanistes.

M. The whole thing is as chaotic as the most perverted ingenuity could make it, if some one were to set out to construct a completely self-contradictory puzzle. The signs vary in phonetic value : for instance, *ea* in *treat*, *heart*, *weather*, *great*, *earth*, *real*, and *delineate*. All, or nearly all, the sounds are represented in more than one way, many of them in several ways : for instance, *be*, *been*, *clean*, *key*, *quay*, *yield*, *receive*, *people*, *police*. In consequence, the spelling of these words is quite useless as an indication of their pronunciation.

P. Yes, it does seem absurd, looked at in that light.

M. And that is by no means all. There are letters that have no value, as the *c* in *scent*, the *k* in *know*, the *l* in *palm*, the *t* in *listen*, and the *r* in *cart*.

P. Go on, please.

M. Sometimes there are unrepresented sounds, as you can see by comparing *sing* and *single*. Also, a single sound may be represented by a combination of signs, as in *ph*antom, *sh*op, and bo*ugh*t; and most of our doubled letters, just as the two *l*'s in *shall*, represent a single sound. On the other hand, a single sign can represent two sounds: the letter *j* always stands for *d* + *zh*: and in *luxury*, *examine*, and *exercise*, *x* stands for three different pairs of sounds. But there's no need for me to continue to illustrate what is so obvious.

P. No, indeed, my dear Mechanistes; you have quite convinced me. I agree that, regarded as a means of representing vowel and consonant sounds, English spelling is as bad as it could be. But why do you want to change it? Do you think that if it was reformed, and made perfectly consistent, it would be easier to read and write? You said a few minutes ago that you experience no difficulty in performing these acts.

M. No, I don't think I should read a phonetic script with greater facility than our present unphonetic one. I acknowledge that it doesn't matter a scrap to an accomplished reader like myself whether his native language is spelt phonetically or not. I am thinking of others. English children waste an immense amount of time in learning to read and to spell, time that could be put to a useful purpose; and the teachers' time is wasted too.

P. That is very serious. I suppose you have gone into these questions too, and have made comparisons. I believe that German spelling and Italian spelling, though

not perfectly phonetic, are much more consistent than ours. Do German and Italian children learn to spell at an earlier age than English children ? Have you looked into that ?

M. Yes, I have. As far as I can discover, the problem has never been thoroughly investigated. But some rough comparisons have been made, and it is very strange that these tend to the conclusion that it takes German children about as long to learn to spell and read German words, and Italian children to learn to spell and read Italian, as it does English children to learn to spell and read English.

P. And do the ages at which they attain corresponding degrees of competence in reading tally in the same way ?

M. Yes, so far as can be ascertained. That is another strange thing. I can't understand it at all.

P. At any rate, it seems that the belief that English children have to spend a longer time than other children in learning to spell and read because English spelling is irregular is unsupported by proof as yet. And so when I hear, as I often do, some one who wants to rearrange our spelling according to his ideas of what it ought to be, asserting that English children waste their time because of it, I should be equally justified in asserting that they do not waste any time, eh, Mechanistes ?

M. Yes, I suppose so.

P. I think I can offer an explanation, Mechanistes, of the fact—if it is a fact—that English, Italian, and German children exhibit approximately the same degree of competence in reading and spelling at corresponding ages. I offer my explanation for what it is worth, and I am afraid that you, with your knowledge of the subject, will laugh at me when you hear it.

M. Go on, Philologus.

P. Well, it seems to me that the conclusion we are bound to draw is that in learning to spell children do not use their reason in the way that people who want to reform the spelling suppose. I think that they depend entirely upon memory for the spelling of each word as a whole, so that it doesn't matter to them whether the system is consistent or not. It is not till they are older that they acquire the analytic power required for the use of phonetic symbols.

M. It may be so. But, even then, it would be as easy for them to learn a consistent system as our inconsistent one, and there is another strong reason why we should reform our spelling. Even if children cannot associate a letter with a sound, I mean with a vowel or consonant, adults can do so; and it would be much easier for a foreigner to learn English if our spelling was consistent. Our irregular spelling is a terrible stumbling block to foreigners.

P. Yes, I must concede that point to you, Mechanistes. I have heard that Professor Zacchrisson, of the University of Upsala, has even gone so far as to invent a rationalized English spelling, which he calls *Anglic*, for the use of foreigners. He believes that in that way he can help English to become a universal second language. He would leave us our own spelling, but foreigners would use Anglic spelling.

M. We ought to reform our own spelling. But, as far as it goes, I think Professor Zacchrisson's is a splendid plan, because our present spelling is preventing English from spreading as a universal tongue.

P. I am not sure of that, Mechanistes. It seems to me that speech spreads by being spoken rather than by being studied in schools and universities. Those who acquire

a second tongue by deliberate study are, I think, a special class ; for them, of course, a consistent phonetic script would be a great boon.

M. Well, let that pass. But you must also allow that it would be an advantage to us to be able to pronounce at sight every English word we come across that is new to us, instead of having to look for its pronunciation in a dictionary. What is the good of any spelling that doesn't represent the sounds ? That is what it is for.

P. You go so fast, Mechanistes, that I can't keep up with you. I allow that it would be grand if we could pronounce every word at first sight. But did I understand you to say that the purpose of spelling—or writing (you remember you agreed they were the same thing)—is to represent sounds ?

M. Yes. What else could it be ? I regard that as axiomatic.

P. Forgive me if I am stupid. It seems to me that the purpose of writing is the same as the purpose of audible speech ; that is to say, it is used to convey the author's (or the speaker's) meaning to other people.

M. You have caught me out this time, Philologus. But what better method of doing that can there be than by representing the sounds of the vowels and consonants by letters ?

P. Please slacken speed, dear Mechanistes. It may be that I shall agree with you that there is no better method. All I am trying to do just now is to straighten the matter out. I think it would help us if we had a clear idea of the ways in which ideas can be conveyed by means of written symbols from one person's mind to another's. As I see it, the meaning is the aim, and the representation of the sounds is the means. If we can agree upon that,

it will be no small gain ; for no good can come of mistaking the means for the end.

M. I agree with you, Philologus.

P. I am glad of that, because the conclusion we have reached will have a bearing on our future considerations ; for it seems to me that we ought to probe more deeply into the subject than we have yet done.

M. I am ready, Philologus.

P. You have shown that our spelling is quite irregular, Mechanistes, in a way that excites my admiration ; and that is the same thing as showing that it does not represent the sounds, isn't it ?

M. On consideration, I should prefer to say that it tries to represent the sounds and fails to do so ; for originally it was intended to represent sounds.

P. I accept your correction. But we agreed, did we not, that the aim of all writing is to convey meaning, and that the representation of the sounds is merely the means to that end ?

M. We did.

P. And we can all read English writing ?

M. Yes.

P. Very well, then : it follows—does it not ?—that our writing has now dispensed with the means, and proceeds straight to its purpose. It is a direct representation of meaning ; for, if it were not, we could not read it, seeing that it fails to represent sounds.

M. I suppose so. But still, the spelling of each word represents the sound of the whole word.

P. Now you are shifting your ground, Mechanistes. It was the vowels and consonants that I was referring to, by means of which you yourself so clearly demonstrated how worthless our spelling is. Whether in reading and

thinking the mind can dispense entirely with the memory-image of the sound of each whole word is a psychological problem that doesn't affect our present argument.

M. Go on, Philologus. I don't perceive what you are driving at.

P. It is this. You asked me a moment ago whether there could be a better method of writing than representation of the sounds of speech. Now I think I can see certain advantages in a system of spelling that represents meaning directly. In English there are many pairs of words which have the same sound but are spelt differently : for example, *missed*, *mist* ; *allowed*, *aloud* ; *symbol*, *cymbal* ; *weak*, *week* ; *know*, *no* ; *gambol*, *gamble* ; *one*, *won*. If you reformed our spelling in the way you propose, all these would look alike as well as sound alike, and that would be a disadvantage, wouldn't it ?

M. It would, I agree. But we already have a great many pairs that are spelt and sounded alike ; for instance, we have three *mains* of different origin and meaning, two words *kennel*, and two *beetles*. They very rarely cause confusion, and I don't think it would be a great disadvantage if we added to their number. The reformed spelling would, at any rate, be no worse off than audible speech is now, in this respect.

P. My point is that, in this respect, our present spelling, which you called a shocking mess, is better than our speech. And I have noticed, too, that other languages have availed themselves of differences in their writing which do not occur in their speech. In French, for instance, most plurals are sounded as the corresponding singulars, but spelt differently, *e.g. maison*, *maisons* ; and the same is true of the verb endings, such as *ai*, *-ais*, *-ait*, *-aient* ; *-ons*, *-ont*. Each of these has its own special significance.

M. Nevertheless, I think that the advantages that would be gained by reforming the spelling would outweigh the loss that would be sustained.

P. Let me try again, then. It frequently happens that when a word is made from another by the addition of a suffix, or when a word is used in different functions, the pronunciation is altered: for example, *severe* and *severity*, *nation* and *national*, and *refuse* as noun and verb. At present we can perceive the connections between such words: if they were spelt according to sound, we should be unable to do so.

M. Yes, that is true. Still, I am not sure that it would be a serious drawback. Even now we are ignorant of the etymological connections of many words that are related to each other. Who, except a student of language, is worse off for not realizing that *rummage* is a derivative of *room*; that *wet* and *water* are connected; and that *fang*, *finger*, and *new-fangled* come from the same root? These grounds are not sufficient for refusing to accept so great a reform, I consider.

P. How exact your logic is, Mechanistes. You measure everything by balancing utility, don't you? And I own that in this case you are right. I see I must give in to you, unless I can find practical difficulties in the way of phonetic spelling. I think I see one, but I expect you would be able to deal with it.

M. What is it?

P. I wonder if you have noticed that we vary the pronunciation of many of our commonest monosyllabic words according as they are stressed or not. For instance, we pronounce *am* in one way when it is stressed, and in another way when it is unstressed, and we do the same with *he* and *him* (dropping the *h* when the word is

unstressed) and with *are* and *was*, and *can* and *shall*, and *that*, and many others. Would you spell the stressed forms in one way and the unstressed forms in another ?

M. Yes, I think we should have to do that.

P. Then people would have to spell according to ear, wouldn't they ? We could not reform the spelling by publishing a list of standard spellings.

M. It was my idea that we should publish such a list, Philologus. So, on reflection, I retract what I have just said about spelling the same word in two ways, according as it is stressed or unstressed.

P. Then, after all, your system would not be perfectly phonetic and consistent, would it ?

M. No, I confess it would not. But these words that you speak of are not so very numerous, after all. I think that a slight imperfection in the reformed system should be overlooked.

P. How tenacious you are, my friend. But aren't there many other delicate shades and nuances of speech that your phonetic system of spelling would fail to indicate ?—intonation, for example, and the personal quality that each voice is endowed with ? Is it not, in fact, impossible to make a visible representation of sound that is perfectly adequate ?

M. Perhaps so, Philologus. I am not interested in that. I think that regular spelling is better than irregular spelling, and there are many who think as I do.

P. Indeed there are. And do they not go about creating the impression that a regular spelling system would be an absolute representation of the sounds of English ? Do not they themselves, or many of them, believe that such a thing is possible, and that what they are advocating is ideally perfect ?

M. Maybe, Philologus. But, as you say, I take my stand upon utility. I think a regular system would be better than our irregular system, and so I want to introduce one.

P. Tell me, then, my friend—whose speech would you model your list of spellings upon ?

M. I should take some one who speaks Received Standard ; one of the B.B.C. announcers would furnish a good model.

P. I daresay you could not choose better. But there are a great many people who do not speak Received Standard. Would they all spell in the same way ?

M. Certainly, as I said before ; I would have the spelling established by law.

P. I think you would have to do that, Mechanistes. For if such a reform as you propose should be effected, all our past literature would become in a generation unreadable to all except specially trained scholars, just as Chaucer's poems are. A number of vested interests would strongly resist your proposals, too.

M. Such opposition has always been the lot of the reformer, hasn't it ?

P. Yes, and I do not advise you to desist on that account. But to return. You say that you would take Received Standard as your type of speech. In that case, those who do not speak Received Standard, who number many millions, would not be spelling the sounds of their own speech, would they ? And, in consequence, the spelling would to some extent still be inconsistent and conventional, as far as they would be concerned ? That is, it would be partly ideographic, as it is now.

M. I agree with what you say. But their new spelling

would be far less irregular and irrational than our present spelling.

P. Would it, Mechanistes? I think that would depend on who they are, and how they speak. Would you extend your new system to the United States, or confine it to the British Commonwealth?

M. I should extend it over the whole English-speaking world.

P. Then I think you would meet with strenuous resistance, for the speakers of Received Standard English are a small fraction of all those who speak English. And, if the Government of the United States agreed to reform its spelling, it would certainly take a different line. If the two Governments agreed to take average English speech as their model, I am sure they would have difficulty in deciding who is a speaker of average English. If, on the other hand, one of the two great divisions of the English-speaking world reformed its spelling and the other did not, or if they both reformed it, each in its own way, they would be taking a great step forward in the direction of splitting English into two dialects. That would be very unfortunate, would it not?

M. Dear me, Philologus, I hadn't thought of that. It would certainly be a great disaster. I regard it as important above all things that English should remain one speech, and, indeed, I hope that it will become more uniform than it is now. Nevertheless, I think it is absurd that our system of writing, which is ostensibly a system of sound symbols, should have no relation to the sounds of our speech. The two parted company centuries ago.

P. I am glad you have brought the point up, my dear

friend. I was going to do so myself. I think, however, you are rather hard on our spelling in saying that it has no relation to our speech.

M. What do you mean, Philologus ?

P. Do you remember that, at the beginning of our discussion, you referred to some instances in which letters did not correspond to sounds, as in *listen* and *cart*.

M. I do.

P. Well, at the time, I could not help thinking that there were instances of an opposite nature. I did not want to interrupt the flow of your discourse ; otherwise I should have told you then about them.

M. Tell me now, Philologus.

P. Well, you know, I believe that we owe the present pronunciation of a considerable number of words to our spelling. Probably, but for the *w* we should now be saying *uman* instead of *woman* ; it was a polite pronunciation once, although it sank into vulgarity, and has now almost disappeared even from degenerate speech. *Parfit*, *yaller*, *weskit*, and many others have been altered by the influence of the spelling. *Bust* and *cuss* have become *burst* and *curse*, and *forred* has become *forehead*. For more than a century, in fact, there has been a tendency to regard approximation to the spelling as a sign of correct speech.[1]

M. But is it not broadly true that our spelling is based upon the pronunciation of the fifteenth century or earlier ?

P. Yes, broadly, but not exactly. I have recently been reading *The Annual Register* for 1758, and Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, which was published in 1778, and I found the following that have been changed : *publick*, *center*, *her's*, *chearful*, *incroach*, *desart*, *croud*, *compleat*, *faulter*, *choak*, *chuse*,

[1] See also p. 40.

strole, *gulph*, *teize*, and *cloaths*. In 1789 the *Morning Post* spelt *kangaroo* "cangarew," and its plural of *monkey* was "monkies."

M. These are exceptional cases, and do not lessen the force of my contention, because the changes were not made for phonetic reasons. Our spelling is professedly phonetic: the letters pretend to represent sounds, and they do not represent sounds. Once they did represent sounds fairly closely, did they not?

P. Yes, about the year A.D. 600 they did, my dear Mechanistes, when English began to be written. At that time the scribes spelt phonetically, and people went on spelling phonetically, as well as they could, for hundreds of years. Spelling was free: there was no thought of a standard until printing was introduced into England. Then literary scribes were replaced by compositors, that is to say, by artisans who had to work according to rule, and so a standard spelling became necessary. Writers and private persons still went on spelling freely, with what skill each of them possessed, for two hundred years longer, until gradually the standard spelling of the printers became universal, and any spelling that differed from this standard came to be regarded as a mistake, and as a sign of imperfect education. I regret that there is no time for us to trace the whole history in detail. For it is very curious. The lesson to be drawn from it is plain, however.

M. And what is that lesson, Philologus?

P. That the nation discovered that printing necessitates the use of a standard or conventional spelling, and so it abandoned its habit of spelling the sounds: for if people do that there can be no uniformity. Your proposal to make the spelling phonetic is therefore a retrograde step.

M. I told you a few minutes ago that I thought there should be a standard. That is the first consideration, more important than any other. Don't you think, as the new standard would be more consistent than the present spelling, that it would have an effect on speech, just as our present spelling has, as you yourself have shown?

P. You have made a good point there.

M. And don't you think that speech is likely to become more uniform in the future, so that some of the difficulties in the way of establishing a new standard will be less formidable than they are now?

P. Bravo! Mechanistes. Another hit for you. But, come. You are a practical man, and I know you look upon me, with my intangible ideas, as unpractical. Do you think that the nation would face the tremendous upheaval that would be caused by re-spelling English phonetically, unless you could convince it that great practical benefits would accrue? You agreed, you remember, that people would not be able to read more rapidly if the spelling was phonetic, and I pointed out that there is no proof that children learn to read a phonetic spelling faster than an unphonetic spelling.

The change would completely upset us. All the printers' type would become useless, because, as you said, our alphabet is inadequate. We should have to adopt a new set of signs, such as those of The International Phonetic Association.

M. I agree with you. We must keep to the alphabet we have. Accordingly, I have joined The Simplified Spelling Society. This Society does not recommend any new signs; it merely proposes to respell English, using the existing alphabet.

P. Is the result a phonetic spelling ?

M. No, of course not, because we have only 26 signs, and English possesses about 40 vowels and consonants.

P. Then the dictionary would still be the authority for spelling and pronunciation for everybody, wouldn't it ? And the foreigner would still have to learn the spelling of each word, as he does now, wouldn't he ?

M. Yes.

P. That is to say, you would have thrown away the advantages our present spelling possesses, and would have gained nothing in exchange.

M. I don't agree that we should have gained nothing. The spelling, though not consistent, would be less inconsistent than it is now.

P. I have scrutinized the proposals of your Society, and have often wondered what are the principles behind the changes they would like to make. For instance, I find *flew*, *but*, and *to* are spelt *flu*, *but*, and *tu*. These are three different vowels spelt differently in ordinary script but alike by the Society. On the other hand, *leathern* and *girdle* are spelt *lethern*, *gurdle* : here the same vowel is spelt in two ways by the Society ; and so for *horse* and *all*, which are spelt *hors* and *aul*, although the vowels are identical in sound.[1] I could give you plenty of other instances. In fact, the spelling system of the Society is really arbitrary. It could be improved ; but any attempt to use our current symbols must rest upon arbitrary decisions, seeing that there are more sounds than symbols.

M. I suppose you are right, Philologus.

P. Tell me, how long has your Society been in existence ?

[1] All these are taken from *Simplified Spelling : An Appeal to Common Sense*, issued by the Simplified Spelling Society.

M. Thirty-one years. It was founded in 1908.

P. And how many people use its script ? I've never met one. Do you know one ?

M. No.

P. Perhaps the Society is not well known.

M. Oh dear, yes. We have had many advertising campaigns. You see, from time to time people have left quite a lot of money to the Society in their wills. But the English are an exceedingly conservative race, and until a new system has been established by law one is practically forced to conform to the old.

P. I don't think the English have been conservative in their speech, Mechanistes. English has developed quite as rapidly as any tongue spoken in Western Europe. I do not think that conservatism is the enemy your Society is faced with.

M. What is our enemy, then, Philologus ?

P. The enemy that killed the two Simplified Spelling Boards that were founded in America, Mechanistes—total lack of interest on the part of the public, a lack of interest founded on sound practical sense, on an instinctive recognition of the fact that the proposals, if applied, would confer no advantage.

PART II

WORLD ENGLISH

Chapter IX

THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSAL SPEECH

The conflict of tongues was a mystery to the writer of Genesis, who was aware of only a small portion of the globe. What would he have thought of the world as we know it to-day, with its hundreds of tribes and nations speaking mutually unintelligible tongues? Besides the great national languages, English, Russian, French, German, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, there is a multitude of speeches ranging from Tamil, Swahili, and the like down to obscure dialects operating over only a small area. There are said to be 1500 in all —230 in India alone, and 700 in Africa, and there is a surprising variety of American Indian tongues; and the great majority of their speakers are cut off from direct communication with their fellow men of other races.

In ancient times such isolation in national groups was consistent with material conditions. Travel was slow and dangerous. Communication was difficult. Trade was circumscribed. Learning and science were the property of a small class. But the contrast between the linguistic chaos of the modern world and its growing unification in many other directions is tragic. Knowledge has become international. The principles of medicine and sanitation transcend political boundaries.

Nations meet in sport, and the police of all civilized countries act in concert. Written communications are flashed instantaneously from land to land, and the human voice can be broadcast round the whole earth. All the principal towns of the world are connected by telephone. The hotel-keeper and the waiter, degenerate descendants of the robber baron and the highwayman, may impede and discourage the traveller, but do not stop him. Even the useless and ridiculous nuisance of the passport system does not stop him. By motor car, railway, and steamship, men travel incessantly and swiftly from continent to continent and ocean to ocean. It is easier now to charter an aeroplane to Timbuctu or Melbourne or Hawaii or San Francisco than it was two centuries ago to engage a boat to sail from London to Antwerp or Stockholm, and the traveller who does so will arrive at his destination in as brief a time.

There can be no doubt, therefore, that one of the greatest needs of the world at the present day is a universal speech. For purposes of communication between nations, for international conferences, for writings on science and philosophy and all learned matters, for purposes of trade, for travel, for international broadcasting, and for such amusements and recreations as stage-plays, operatic performances, and talking pictures, some kind of debabelizing is overdue. In short, physical unity has been achieved, but the universal consciousness that should be its parallel has not been achieved, because of the obstacles created by differences of speech.

Not a universal consciousness only; a universal conscience also. Since nations speaking different tongues are with respect to each other in a position analogous to that occupied by individuals who cannot comprehend

each other, until mankind has attained a universal speech it will not be able to frame the universal ideals that will enable it to press forward as a single whole towards a freer, wider life of the spirit. The curse is still upon us. The unfortunate incident that happened in Babylon some few millenia ago is one of the predisposing conditions leading to war, and perhaps the chief of them. A universal speech would go far towards lifting the burden of preparing for and against aggression, and the fear of war. It is impossible to subscribe to the belief of those who argue that the use of a common speech would totally abolish war,[1] for civil wars are not unknown ; but it is certain that it would enormously reduce the frequency of war, and by so doing increase the sense of its obscene wickedness. All wars would then be regarded as similar to civil wars, and civil war is felt, even by those who are not revolted by the idea of foreign war, to be an unnatural crime, like the murder of a brother by a brother.

Until the Renaissance learned men expected that Latin would in time and by natural processes supersede the vernaculars of Europe. In the hope of securing wide currency and perpetuity, Sir Thomas More wrote *Utopia* in Latin, Bacon had his *Novum Organum* translated into Latin, Sir Isaac Newton's *Principia* was in Latin, and Milton feared that *Paradise Lost* might be ephemeral because it was not in Latin. But the Reformation, the growth of the idea of nationality, and the wonderful flowering of national literatures made it clear that the belief in universal Latin had become a dream.

Hence has arisen in modern times in sanguine and speculative minds the notion of a universal auxiliary

[1] *e.g.* Mr. C. W. Alderson in the book quoted on p. 192.

language, which nations could learn and use for international communications while retaining their own national speech. Concerning this notion several observations are to be made.

In the first place, it has an air of artificiality; it smacks of the professor and the classroom; it does not fit in with the rough-and-tumble of everyday life. Any one who is to acquire and retain the use of a speech so that he can communicate readily with other speakers of it must constantly speak and hear it. If he is in contact with those who speak it he has at hand the means of doing that, and if the ordinary man finds it expedient to take the means he will do so. But if these means are not at hand, and if he has no immediate need for the new speech, the ordinary man will not submit to the labour of learning it, and to the practice that is necessary to retain it. It is only a minority, a special class, who are willing to take the trouble to acquire by study a speech which they do not need in their business of gaining a livelihood.

In the second place, while such an auxiliary speech, if it became universal, would serve the purpose of international communication, and would remove the many great and expensive obstacles that now stand in the way of such communication, it would not create a common consciousness, and unite the nations in a common aspiration. For a second tongue is not, as our native tongue is, part of our self; it is one of our intellectual possessions, and can be put to practical uses, but we do not think in it, except temporarily and by deliberate volition; and we do not, if the expression may be used, feel in it. There is a radical distinction between the idea of all mankind speaking one tongue, and the idea of a

universal second speech. It is necessary to be clear that the two ideas are quite dissimilar, because the difference between them is often ignored or unperceived by the advocates of an auxiliary language.

The downfall of Latin and the recognition that no national speech would be universally acceptable, either as a first speech or a second speech, produced another and most remarkable result. This was the idea of a universal artificial language. No such invention is known prior to the beginning of the seventeenth century. Since that date about a hundred have been devised.[1]

[1] There is a list of them in A. L. Guérard's *A Short History of the International Language Movement*, pp. 216–218.

Chapter X

ENGLISH IN COMPETITION

The most important event in the history of mankind during the last two centuries has been the growth and diffusion of the English tongue. As a world speech it has already left its competitors behind. It is the speech of two of the most populous states and powerful governments in the world. It is the most widely distributed of all tongues, and is the universal speech of two continents. It is spoken as their native language by about 200 million persons—more than one-tenth of the human race—and as a second speech by millions more.

This leadership has been achieved in the modern period, and in the latter part of the modern period. Until the time of Queen Elizabeth English was of no account beyond the shores of Britain. There were, perhaps, two million speakers of Old English and four of Middle English. Even as late as 1800 there were only about 20 million speakers of English, and more persons spoke Russian, Hindustani, German, French, Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese than English. Now English has outstripped them all except Chinese ; and Chinese, though it is one written language, is two speeches, each with many dialects differing so greatly in sound that they themselves are almost different languages. About 400 million

persons speak Chinese, 120 million Russian, 87 million German, 70 million Japanese, 65 million Spanish, and 45 million French. In the last hundred and fifty years the numbers of those who speak Russian have increased five-fold, of German three-fold ; the Spanish speakers have more than doubled, the French speakers have nearly doubled. But the number of English speakers has increased ten-fold. Any one, therefore, who should look exclusively at these figures would have good reason to take a rosy view of the future prospects of English. If its speakers were to continue to multiply at the same speed, in no long time English, it seems, would become universal. Indeed, one enthusiastic American writer was moved in 1908 to predict that by the year 2000 English will be spoken by more than 1,000 million persons.

But this expansion in numbers must be analysed if its true future significance is to be plain. During the century and a half in which the number of English speakers has increased from 20 to 200 million, the English-speaking population of the United States has grown from 4 to 125 million ; so that, if the United States are left out of account, the remainder of the increase—that is to say, the increase in the British Empire—has been from 16 to 75 million, a rate which is below that given for Russian, although it surpasses the other figures quoted above. This increase, like those of the other countries mentioned, has been almost entirely due to the natural growth of population. The increase in the United States, on the other hand, has been due partly to the natural increase of the 4 million, and partly to the influx of immigrants who have adopted the speech of the country to which they came. How many immigrants have gone from Europe to the United States in this period

it is difficult to say, nor would the figure, if known, convey all that we want to know. At the present time, one quarter of America's population is either foreign-born, native-born with both parents foreign-born, or native-born with one parent foreign-born. Very probably, if no immigrants except English, Scots, Welsh, and Irish had entered since 1800, the population of the United States would not have been more than one-third of its actual total—say, 43 million. In that case the total number of English speakers in the world would have reached about 120 million by now, and this figure should be kept in mind, as well as the total of 200 million, in drawing comparisons with the number of speakers of Russian, German, Spanish, and the other tongues that ought to be considered; for the history of the United States in the nineteenth century is a story of unexampled growth that will not be repeated. It is true that immigration is still going on; but its volume has now greatly lessened, owing to legal restrictions and other causes. We may expect, therefore, the trend of population in the United States in the future to conform to, or to exceed only slightly, the trend in other civilized countries.

The trend of population, however, is changing everywhere. The nineteenth century was exceptional. Contemporary vital statistics show that decline in fertility is general throughout the civilized world, and not least among the English-speaking nations. To rely, therefore, upon the increase in the population of English-speakers that has taken place as a certain indication that it will continue to take place at anything like the same rate would be extremely unsafe. All that we can expect from this cause is that English will continue to maintain

the relative position it has attained. If it is to improve its relative position it will have to do so at the expense of the speakers of other tongues, either of the great civilized tongues that are now in competition with it, or of the semi-civilized and uncivilized tongues of the globe.

There are good reasons for believing that it will encroach upon the latter. Its political position is most fortunate. Besides being the native and official speech of the United States, it is the official speech of the whole of the British Empire, which includes 430 million speakers of other tongues. It is thus the language of government and administration of one-third of mankind, and all history indicates that where the governing class have maintained contact with their country of origin, as the English do now more easily than ever before, their speech has ultimately prevailed over that of the people they govern.

The forces which have caused the expansion of languages have been association with political and military power, commercial convenience, and cultural and literary supremacy; and of these, association with political and military power has generally been the deciding factor. It was this that caused the descendants of the Latin-speaking inhabitants of the towns in Britain to adopt in the course of time the speech of the Saxon invaders after the withdrawal of the Roman legions. It is mainly commercial convenience that has made English the *lingua franca* of the East; but if power deserted the English-speaking nations there is no doubt that their speech would wither rapidly on the sea coasts of southern Asia.

Before the 1914–1918 war, French and German were

the modern foreign languages most widely studied in schools throughout the world. Since the war English has been adopted as a second language in many foreign countries. It is now taught in the schools of France and Germany ; with French it has displaced German in Russian schools. In 1934 it was made the first foreign language in Latvian schools, although Germany and Russia are Latvia's neighbours. It is taught in all schools in Jugoslavia. In Japan it is the first foreign language in schools. Recently Sweden has decided to supersede German by English in twenty-six secondary schools, and a Royal Commission has recommended its universal adoption in them. Investigation showed that in Stockholm one person in four could speak English.

But a political as well as a social change is coming over the world. The post-war years are an era that is past. The prestige of the English-speaking nations, and the kind of life for which they stand, are being challenged. It is a commonplace to-day that the sentiment of nationality has developed greatly since the Middle Ages, and since the beginning of the nineteenth century it has been fostered by European governments by all the means in their power. In any case, when a language has spread at the expense of others it has done so insensibly. It would have been quixotic ever to believe that the great nations, the French, the Germans, the Italians, the Russians, would deliberately abandon their native tongues and speak English, although at times they have all been willing to learn English as a second speech. Now the tide is setting in the other direction. In the present deepening sense of nationality, fanned by the ignorant or disingenuous nonsense of designing politicians about

the Aryan race, Nordics, and so forth, we are not unlikely to witness a weeding out of foreign words from the speech of peoples organized in powerful states where the spirit of nationalism is fervently cultivated. And if the world should in the end divide itself into two camps, democratic and totalitarian, English, which is the life-breath of democracy, will become anathema in the totalitarian countries. But then its prestige will be correspondingly enhanced wherever the flag of freedom flies.

If some sort of world order, or European order, some kind of federation, emerges from the present condition of things—and it is becoming increasingly clear that it will inevitably come, either by peaceful means or after a period of horror and slaughter[1]—then either English will be the international medium of that order, with all the advantages attaching to that position, or, outside the continent of North America, it will have reversed its present direction of movement, and will have succumbed before one of its competitors attached to the totalitarian idea. That will happen if, and only if, the democratic idea goes down in the struggle.

Meanwhile, according to rumour,[2] when the foreign ministers of Germany and Italy (Herr von Ribbentrop and Count Ciano) meet, they find it most convenient to speak to one another in English.

Meanwhile, also, civilized nations of small population, such as the Norwegians, are impelled to learn a second

[1] This book was written amid the gathering shadows of war, the apprehension of which coloured these words. If the darkness had descended before it went to press, this passage and some others would have been cast differently. Upon reflection, however, the author has decided to leave them in their original state.

[2] The *Daily Express*, May 8, 1939.

language in order to carry on trade, and choose English because of its wide currency as well as because of its political standing. For the same reasons people who live on all the coasts of the world learn to speak English, either by oral practice or by study. The spread of European methods of education, the use of the radio, and the establishment of picture houses, where the majority of the films shown are accompanied by English (American) dialogue, have greatly increased the facilities for doing so. It is now a commonplace among English tourists and business men that they do not need a knowledge of any tongue except their own, and often hear no speech but English during extensive travels abroad. Even before the world war Mr. A. M. Thompson could write (in *Japan for a week: Britain for Ever*, 1910), "It was only on reaching Italy that I began fully to realize the wonderful thing that, for nearly six weeks, on a German ship, in a journey of nearly 10,000 miles we had heard little of any language but English. . . . In Japan most of the tradespeople spoke English. At Shanghai, at Hongkong, at Singapore, at Penang, at Colombo, at Suez, at Port Said, all the way home, the language of the ship's traffic was English. The Chinese man-of-war's men who conveyed the Chinese prince on board at Shanghai received and exchanged commands with our German sailors in English. The Chinese mandarins in their conversations with the ship's officers invariably spoke English. To talk to our Japanese passengers they had to speak English. That, it seems to me, is a bigger fact than the British Empire. If, as some aver, the greatest hindrances to peaceful international intercourse are the misunderstandings due to diversity of tongues, the wide prevalence of the English tongue must be the greatest

unifying bond the world has ever known." Since the world war, the causes that have led to the increased study of English in schools as the first foreign language, have, of course, operated with equal force among those who learn it for commercial purposes. On the results we may call Mr. Bruce Lockhart as a witness. In *Return to Malaya* (1936), he says, " I remembered with poignant vividness my first arrival at the hotel (the Raffles Hotel, Singapore) twenty-seven years before. Then my ignorance of a single word of Malay left me in a state of irritating helplessness. Now that I knew the language it was of little use to me. Every Tamil clerk and even the youngest Chinese boy not only knew English, but used it with an insistence which defeated all my efforts to break it down. The population of Singapore is now 550,000. It includes a vast diversity of races, of whom over 400,000 are Chinese. There are fewer than 70,000 Malays, and only 9,000 Europeans. Yet to-day there are Singapore-born Chinese who speak English as their first language." Educated Chinese from North and South China, being unable to understand each other's native Chinese speech, are said to communicate with each other in the English they have learnt in order to deal with Europeans.

The general advantages to English, and through it to us, of its wide geographical distribution are too obvious and well-known to require emphasis.

. . . .

English possesses many attributes which fit it to be the universal tongue of mankind, and explain the ease with which it spreads. Before passing, however, from the advantageous position it has attained to its intrinsic excellences, there is one point to be mentioned which

may be the most important of all. This is the literature of the English, which has inspired and strengthened and shaped our speech age after age, and will continue to do so. It is the one art in which the English are supreme ; our achievements in music, painting, and sculpture are equalled or surpassed by those of other nations, but our literature, and particularly the purest form of literature, our poetry, has no equal. For this reason English will always be studied by foreign scholars who are free to study it. During the Renaissance and the Middle Ages Latin was studied because of its imaginative literature and its cultural content, and in consequence a great part of German, French, English, and other European tongues derives from Latin. In scientific and philosophical content English is not superior to these tongues : they have equal resources, and do not borrow from it for cultural purposes of these kinds. But for literary inspiration they will come more and more to English.

Literature and language are two mirrors for the soul of a people. That English literature would not have been what it is if the English language had not been what it is, is a truism. Our literary genius could not have produced its masterpieces with words less noble in themselves. Conversely, the imagination that works in our literature works in everyday speech. At the same time, English pays conspicuous attention to practical requirements. On this we are so fortunate as to have the testimony of foreigners. Professor Jespersen, who may be called without fear of contradiction the most distinguished philologist now alive, says of it, "It is more manly than any language that I know. . . . Judged by the standard of logic, apart from Chinese there is no

language in the civilized world that stands so high as English. But where the logic of facts is at war with the logic of grammar, English is free from the pedantry which in most languages sacrifices the former to the latter." (*Growth and Structure of the English Language*, p. 2.)

Dr. G. J. Renier in his lively book, *The English, are they Human?* shows himself a flattering critic of the English tongue. "With a language like theirs," he writes (p. 100), "the English would be criminal if they did not use it to good effect. . . . They have at their disposal a wonderfully balanced and adequate instrument, not only harmonious and full of sonority, but supremely polished, precise, exacting, and definite. In the course of my experience as a translator I have been surprised to find that, unlike the German and the Dutch, the English language is impatient of approximation, of prolixity. . . . Still more striking is the absolute logic of the English language. Clearness, preciseness, directness, explicitness, so frequently supposed to be the exclusive prerogatives of the French language, are to a higher degree necessary in English."

It has already been shown that English has carried further than any of the other European tongues the process in which they are all engaged of simplifying structure and discarding obsolete grammatical devices, and of inventing new and simpler means of expression. There is one tongue, Chinese, that has carried the process further still, and Chinese, by reason of the number of people who speak it, might be a rival to English. But Chinese is confined, or almost confined, to one part of the globe. It consists of many dialects greatly differing

in sound. The majority of the people who speak it are backward. It has not yet developed a vocabulary of terms for modern knowledge comparable to that possessed by English and other European tongues. It has, also, characteristics of a very peculiar kind. It consists entirely of monosyllables and compounds made from monosyllables, exactly as *home-thrust* is made from *home* and *thrust*. But, by some malign fate, in a distant past Chinese imposed a self-denying ordinance upon itself, and reduced the number of its monosyllables to an incredible extent, so that it is a language of homophones. In the principal dialect of Chinese, the Mandarin dialect of Peking, there are only 420 different syllables. It is as if the English had carried the process of assimilation seen in *flu*, *flew*, and *flue* through the whole of their speech. Thus, says Professor Karlgren,[1] there are in Mandarin sixty-nine words that are pronounced *i*, fifty-nine *shi*, twenty-nine *ku*, and so forth, and the average number of words for each syllable is ten. To retain any power of expression in such a state of phonetic poverty Chinese has been forced to invent its own means of variation, the chief of which is that it pronounces each word in a different tone or musical note. This system makes it excessively difficult for a foreigner to learn; and the structure of the Chinese sentence interposes other difficulties scarcely less serious, so that the language is hopelessly unfitted for universal use.

. . . . .

English, although it has produced at least a thousand pairs of homophones, is richer, as we have shown, than any other speech in the number of its words, and by reason of its assimilative powers has already become the

[1] *Sound and Symbol in Chinese*, p. 29.

most cosmopolitan of all languages. But it would have to go far before it could be said to be an amalgam of the words of other tongues, and in arriving at this state, if such a thing were possible, it would, of course, completely lose its present character, even if it retained its structure unchanged.

Though English has a larger verbal capital than any other tongue, it neither imposes nor encourages a correspondingly lavish expenditure. It is not a diffuse speech. On the contrary, it can pack into a given quantity of sound a greater quantity of meaning than most languages are able to do. This statement requires proof, and fortunately is capable of exact proof.

To ascertain the relative conciseness of two languages, all that is necessary is to compare the number of units of sound, that is to say, syllables, that each has to use to render the same meaning, taking, of course, sufficiently large blocks of matter to secure a reliable result. The number of syllables is very nearly proportionate to the total quantity of sound, and therefore to the length of time required to utter it. For example, in R. L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* there are about 77,000 words and 94,000 syllables,[1] but the Italian translation of it by Novaro has 88,000 words and 212,000 syllables. Italian requires one-seventh more words and more than twice as many syllables as the original English, on this evidence.

How important is the economy of time effected by the conciseness of English may be realized by reflecting that to read the Italian translation of *Treasure Island* aloud or silently, one would take more than twice as long as to read the original; and that if a course of lectures were planned in Italian the students would have to

[1] Approximations correct to within 1,000.

attend more than twice as often as students following the corresponding English course.

The average number of syllables in a word in *Treasure Island* is 1.25, and 2.4 in the Italian version. In a treatise on an abstruse subject the average length of word is greater in both languages, but the relation between them remains unaltered.

Similar results will be found on examining other tongues. In the Latin New Testament there are 130,000 words and 310,000 syllables; in the English New Testament there are 180,000 words but only 250,000 syllables. The average number of syllables per word in the Latin is 2.4; in the English 1.4. In the German Testament there are 180,000 words and 280,000 syllables.[1]

The main explanation of the conciseness of English is found in the absence of inflectional endings.[2] Brevity is one of the benefits conferred by the free development of our language. To some extent it is due to the strong English accent, which eliminates unaccented vowels.[3] It is, in fact, an acquired, not an original characteristic; Middle English was much less concise than modern English.

. . . .

The question of euphony is difficult ground; for to each man the music of his home is the sweetest of all. It is hard to see why one elementary sound should be more beautiful than another, but many people dislike gutturals, and many consider that, *e.g.* the beauty of French is marred by its nasals. Italian is justly regarded as a musical tongue, and perhaps the best we can do in this connection is to compare Italian and English sounds.

[1] Approximations correct to within 5,000.
[2] See also p. 73. [3] See p. 40.

Italian consonants are sounded more cleanly than English consonants; less breath is attached to them. The vowels are more clearly enunciated; diphthongs are rarer; owing to the relative weakness of the Italian accent, the unaccented vowels within the word are not reduced to the indeterminate vowel or slurred as they are in English. The consonants *s* and *z* are excessively common in English.

But the Italian range of sound cannot compare with the English; in Italian there are about twenty-nine elementary sounds; there are about forty in English. English being so rich in vowels and consonants, its music is varied, while Italian, sonorous though it is, is rather strikingly monotonous.

Both languages consist of a stream of sound composed of vowels and consonants in alternation, as all speech does. But the effect of Italian is smoother because, since the great majority of Italian words (about ninety per cent.) end in a vowel, and the majority of English words (about seventy per cent.) end in a consonant, in English large groups of consonants are formed, but not in Italian. Such a group as *blstr* in " unsta*ble* *str*agglers " is unknown in Italian. Moreover, Italian avoids large consonant groups within the word. The result is that the relative proportion of consonant sound to vowel sound is greater in English than in Italian, being respectively about fifty-eight per cent. and fifty per cent. of the total volume. Moreover, the liquid consonants *m*, *n*, and *l* are commoner in Italian than in English.

Dean Swift considered, with some justification, that vowels are the female part of speech and consonants the male. The vowels give to Italian softness as well as smoothness, and the preponderance of consonants in

English, while responsible for its comparative roughness, endows it with majesty and strength.

. . . .

The last qualification for universality that we shall mention in this brief survey is that English is easier to learn than any of its competitors, Russian, Chinese, German, Spanish, and French. It has already been seen that intrinsic difficulty is hard to estimate, and that all races have shown themselves capable, generation by generation, of mastering their own speech, and that that is natural. But to learn a second speech is quite a different matter.

Any one who learns a second speech has five kinds of difficulty to overcome. He has to acquire command of a new structure, of new sounds, of a new vocabulary, of new idiomatic expressions, and of the irregularities of the new tongue.

Although English contains no greater share of irregularities than most other tongues, it is highly idiomatic, and possesses a wealth of terse phrases and picturesque expressions. Complete mastery of our idioms, and of the huge English vocabulary, and of the many meanings of our words, would be the work of a lifetime. But complete mastery is not in question at the moment, when we are merely discussing the facility with which English can and does spread, a facility that is universally acknowledged.

The difficulties, then, that face every beginner are sounds, structure, and vocabulary. New sounds are very hard to make : a new structure has to be comprehended, and also, if the language to be learnt is inflectional, puts a burden on the memory ; acquisition of vocabulary is entirely a memory task. Idioms and

irregularities apart, when the structure and the sounds are known, learning the new tongue consists in adding to one's stock of words.

Of the possible rivals to English, Chinese has already been dealt with. The remainder are all inflected tongues. Before a foreigner can understand any one speaking them, or make himself understood, he has to spend a long time and much energy over their inflections and concords. The result is that the man who learns his new speech in the market-place, by hearing and speaking it, makes slow progress. He is brought up at once by a formidable obstacle. English, on the other hand, interposes no such hindrance : the learner proceeds at once to acquire vocabulary, and if he dispenses with our few inflections is still understood. People, like the Chinese, who are used to speech without inflections, of course find English easier than any inflectional tongue. Those who are used to inflections, although the lack of English inflections troubles them, enjoy the compensation that they have not to burden their memory with a new set, as they must do when they learn a new inflectional tongue. This appears to be the reason why English is learnt more rapidly and easily by illiterate and semi-literate speakers than German, French, Russian, and Spanish. Taking it all in all, English is the easiest possible speech for the largest possible number.

The sounds of English are not more difficult than the average. *th* and *dh* are commonly mispronounced by Germans and Italians because those sounds do not exist in German and Italian, but present no difficulty to a Spaniard, because Spanish contains *th*. For a similar reason a Chinaman replaces *r* by *l*. The strong accent, with the consequent reduction of unaccented vowels, is

baffling to any one, such as a Frenchman or a Japanese, whose native tongue has a weak accent, with the consequent preservation of unaccented vowels; just as a weakly accented tongue is baffling to an Englishman.

. . . . . .

The acquisition of an exact and scholarly knowledge of literary English stands on another footing. The problem of teaching our tongue to foreigners who wish to learn it by study is one that has never been approached properly, and one which it is in our national interest to solve. Hitherto such teaching has been left to unco-ordinated private initiative. There is no system of sending abroad and to the colonies English specialists technically equipped to teach English to those to whom it is a foreign tongue, and to demonstrate the right methods of teaching. Few well-qualified English specialists go out for those purposes, because they know that when they return they will find themselves at a disadvantage compared with their colleagues who have stayed at home. No official recognition is accorded to them; they are not fitted into the English educational system at the place they would have attained had they remained in Britain. Nowhere does there exist an institution for teaching English comparable to that which France has in the *Institut Français*, the staff of which are seconded from the state educational system for work in England, and lose nothing in seniority or in pension rights or in salary rights by teaching in London.

The result of our remissness is that, although a certain amount of interesting and valuable pioneer work is being done by persons working independently, there is much need for improvement in the methods of teaching English to foreigners. Teachers who are not well

acquainted with English but are employed because they can speak the tongue of those whom they teach ; or who know English only and are ignorant of the difficulties it presents, which vary according to the nationality of the pupils ; or who are innocent of phonetic knowledge ; or who spend their time endeavouring to instil the ancient and obsolete principles derived from Latin grammar under the delusion that they are explaining the structure of modern English—all these can produce untold confusion and discouragement in the minds of their students, and do untold harm to a cause whose greatness may be realized too late. Professor Ifor Evans wrote recently, "I have watched English lessons in Egypt, India, China, Japan, and Singapore, and it is only by direct observation that one can come to credit some of the dull and futile work that is being done. . . . The number of hours of mere wasted labour spent in English for foreigners must have reached astronomical figures." [1] Not long afterwards he was followed by a Chinese correspondent in the *Times* with a plea for the application of real pedagogical science in the teaching of "the many foreigners who are only too anxious to speak English well."

. .

Enough of this discordant strain. Our notes should be notes of exultation, seeing that the prospects of English becoming the universal tongue of mankind, or of forming the principal element in a synthesis of tongues, exceed those of any other language. Alexander Gil had the confidence to write, "Since the whole earth had one written and spoken language, it is surely much to be desired that one speech . . . should become

[1] *English*, November 1938.

common to all nations. If to do this were within human capacity, assuredly no tongue could be found more suitable for the purpose than the English."[1] When those words were penned English had no currency abroad. The *Mayflower* did not sail till the following year. Australia was unknown, India unconquered, South Africa scarce visited. Now, three centuries later, when English has been carried to the ends of the earth, when there is no speech nor language where its voice is not heard also, when its speakers have multiplied more than a hundredfold, one cannot do better than repeat the boast of the Elizabethan, with the additions that the excellences of English are even more eminent than they were in his day, that its vitality is unimpaired, and that it is marching steadily towards the position for which he declared it to be fitted.

[1] Preface to *Logonomia Anglica*, 1619.

Chapter XI

ESPERANTO AND BASIC ENGLISH

"Language is not an artificial product contained in books, and governed by the strict rules of impersonal grammarians. It is the living expression of the mind and spirit of a people, ever changing and shifting. . . ." (A. H. Sayce, *Introduction to the Science of Language*, Vol. II., p. 333.)

". . . The children of every land will have to learn, besides their own traditional language, some kind of horrible universal lingo begotten on Volapük by a congress of the world's worst pedants." (Sir Max Beerbohm.)

. . . .

Besides competing with other tongues, English has to meet the theoretical claims of artificial languages to be the universal speech—the theoretical claims only, for no artificial construction has ever offered any real or effective opposition to the spread of English.

The hundred or more artificial languages that have been invented have been of various kinds. Some have been made out of new material; there are about thirty of these. Others have been constructed with material taken from one or more of the existing speeches of mankind. There are more than fifty of this class. The best known are Esperanto, which was produced in 1887, and Basic English, which dates from about 1930. A third species partakes of the characteristics of both the first two classes, consisting partly of elements taken from existing languages, and partly of new material. There are about a dozen of this type. Volapük (1880) was one

which was much heard of before Esperanto. Although since the publication of Esperanto some new artificial languages have been devised, and improvements have been made upon Esperanto itself and called by other names, it and Basic English are the only two that have obtained any real vogue.

Between every artificial language and every natural speech there are striking and radical differences. An artificial language is made by an individual, or by a committee ; a real speech is the creation of a nation. An artificial language must be made on principles, while real speech is not made by the conscious application of principles. An artificial language is a manufactured article ; a real speech is a natural growth. As speech is a concrete thing, and language is a description of speech in abstract terms, never completely adequate to its subject, an artificial language, being necessarily made on linguistic principles, is a surrogate or speech-substitute ; it is not, and cannot be, real speech. Possibly, if babies were taught an artificial language and never heard or used any other, they would in due course endow it with the qualities of living speech.

It is usual for the inventors of artificial languages to claim for them that they are perfectly logical, and here lies another difference between natural speech and artificial language. For no real speech is entirely logical; every speech combines rational and irrational elements. The man who defined speech as applied logic was a logician, not a philologist, and made the same kind of mistake as Sir James Jeans did when he said that God is a mathematician. Speech might just as well be defined as applied unreason, applied feeling, applied imagination, applied prejudice, applied superstition, as applied logic.

Throughout this book the utilitarian view of speech has been taken, and literary and æsthetic considerations have been generally avoided. But it is impossible to ignore their existence altogether. Man takes pleasure in speech as he does in his other creations and activities. He finds a subconscious satisfaction in his tongue, in its rhythms, the alternations of its sounds, and all its formal features. The people of England, it would be easy to show, are and have always been extremely fond of the repetition of consonant sounds. We have given up alliteration as the essential quality in our prosody, but we still use it in the titles of novels, and as an ornament in poetry, and employ it unawares in our most ordinary utterances.

Now, one of the requirements of logic is regularity : the ideal of every artificial language is, and must be, to be perfectly regular. No living speech is perfectly regular. Every living speech is a tradition in which the logical spirit is engaged, more or less actively, in rebuilding that which process of change has superseded and rendered illogical, never ceasing, never completing its task. Hence, other things being equal, an artificial language is easier to learn, and takes less time to learn, than real speech.

On the other hand, this same irregularity satisfies a need of our nature. The cultivated and orderly park has its pleasures, from which we escape with relief to the woods and the mountains. The daily routine repeated with absolute sameness, the perfectly safe job, however attractive at first, wear us out at last. Life under an artificial language would be as rational, and as drab, as life in More's Utopia.

Another characteristic of nearly all artificial languages

may be expressed as " one word, one meaning." This, which is often urged as an advantage possessed by artificial languages, is in reality a necessity presented as a virtue ; for it is impossible to see how an artificial language—except one, like Basic, that takes all its words from a single real speech—could be otherwise constructed. But the words of a living speech are not mathematical symbols, mutually exclusive and unchanging in meaning ; and, as has been seen, of no speech is this truer than of English. The substitute is irrevocably and infinitely inferior to the real in this respect, since by this difference it loses the capacity to express the finest distinctions of meaning, and lacks flexibility. Idiom is also missing in artificial language, and it is idiom that gives its individuality and its colour to every real speech. Both absence of idiom and isolation of meanings, it is obvious, make artificial language easier to learn than real speech.

Artificial language being constructed on rational principles, its most appropriate fields are the unemotional ones of bald narrative, bald description, and abstract exposition. It is not suitable for original and creative literature. The translations that have been made into Esperanto, instead of supporting, conclusively refute its claim to be a fit medium for literary expression. Out of its own mouth it is condemned. In creative literature, above all in poetry, words are used for their emotional and suggestive value as well as their meaning. Their potential is partly derived from their form, but chiefly from the lifelong associations that they have gathered in the minds of the speaker and writer, and hearer and reader, and from the complex feelings they arouse in their souls. It is these that make language suggestive,

and confer vividness upon imagery. It was these that set on fire the spirits of all those who have bequeathed themselves to us in their words, so that when they wrote :

> There wanted not who walked in the glare and the glow,
> Presences plain in the place. . . .
> What never had been was now ; what was, as it shall be anon.

Artificial language has no such power, nor ever will have.

It may therefore be concluded that, since artificial language lacks the essential ingredients of living speech, and is no more than a dress that can be wrapped round thought, no language that is constructed by conscious ingenuity will ever displace a national speech or become the universal speech of the world. The achievement of uniformity, should it ever be attained, will come about either by the triumph of one speech over the rest, or by elements from a number of existing speeches combining by a natural process in one new and universal form. The utmost that the framers of any artificial language could hope for would be that in a world where national speeches flourish their invention should be deliberately adopted as the means of intercommunication.

It would then have all the limitations of a second speech ; that is to say, it would not establish a common consciousness and common ideals. It would have the advantage over any existing speech that, if its structure had been determined with impartiality, its adoption would not disturb national susceptibilities, as the universal establishment of any national speech by government action would certainly do. But, though it would be easy to learn, it would have, in comparison with any speech that should spread by contact, the disadvantage

that it would have to be studied deliberately by all mankind; and the universal practical man, the universal man in the street, is not likely to do that—for a very long time to come, at any rate.

. . . . .

It is now fifty-two years since Esperanto saw the light. Those who have signified their theoretical adherence to it number, it has been calculated, at least 40,000. It has an international society and journals; it has been used at congresses; it has been blessed at various times, from good nature or weariness, by chambers of commerce and government departments and the League of Nations; it has been proclaimed and pushed by colossal advertisement campaigns. Yet, as far as can be discovered, there is not at the present day a single business house in London that makes use of Esperanto in its dealings abroad. No community has shown any desire to adopt it. Nor is it in the least likely, as Professor Zacchrisson says, that the American and British governments would ever recommend the use of Esperanto, or any other artificial language, when Americans and Englishmen speak a tongue that is understood and spoken over a great part of the world.

Esperanto is open to criticism in comparison with English. It is no more international in its form than English is. Although its inventor, Dr. Zamenhof, claimed that he took its roots from the various European tongues, it is definitely a Romance tongue; it looks like Spanish and sounds like Italian.[1] It is, of course,

[1] *e.g.* The Lord's Prayer in Esperanto: Patro nia, kiu estas en la chielo, sankta estu via nomo; venu regeco via: estu volo via, tiel en la chielo, tiel ankau sur la tero. Panon nian chiutagan donu al ni hodian; kaj pardonu al ni shuldojn niajn, kiel ni ankau pardonas al niaj shuldantoj; kaj ne konduku nin en la tenton, sed libergu nin de la malbono.

perfectly regular in structure and in spelling, but its grammar is actually less simple than that of the real speech English. Its structure is inflectional, and so it belongs to a more primitive stage of linguistic development than English. Esperanto, in short, is an anachronism. That members of small nations, or speakers of undeveloped and inflectional and Romance tongues should show an inclination to adopt Esperanto as a second language is comprehensible. That any Englishman or American, possessing a native tongue belonging to a higher order, the most widespread of all tongues, and the one that is expanding fastest, should do so is truly astonishing. One cannot but suspect that addlepated amateurs (to borrow Professor Greig's disrespectful term [1] and to distinguish them from the hard-headed majority) form a very large part of the members of the British Esperanto Association, and that amiable uncritical acquiescence is responsible for the adherence of the remainder.

As no two tongues could be more unlike than Esperanto and Basic English, our inclusion of the latter among the artificial languages, and in the same class as the former, may have caused the reader a shock of surprise. Yet Basic, like Esperanto, was constructed on *a priori* principles, and indeed is in some respects even more artificial than Esperanto.[2] It was designed to be an international auxiliary language in science, commerce, and travel, for all who do not already speak English. Its author differs, however, from Dr. Zamenhof in entertaining (or, if he no longer does so, in having

[1] In *Breaking Priscian's Head.*

[2] Mr. Ogden himself, of course, is quite aware that it is artificial.

originally entertained) the laudable hope that by means of its use the chances of real English will be improved. Indeed, his second purpose was to further the use of the living speech from which it was made.

At first sight a passage in Basic English looks like one in natural English. All the words are English words, the spelling has not been simplified, the pronunciation has not been altered, and several of the inflections remain. But closer examination, and study of the books in which the system is expounded, quickly reveal that there are radical differences between the two. The name Basic is, in fact, deceptive; for it leads to the belief that the language it designates is natural English reduced to its fundamentals. Nothing could be further from the truth. The vocabulary of Basic has been selected from English in a highly artificial manner, and in Basic the structure of English has been basically altered.

The power to vary the functions of its words, which is an essential part of the grammatical structure of English, and a power that has increased in modern times, and is still increasing, has been restricted in Basic. *Push*, for example, can be used in English as a verb, a noun, or an adjective. In Basic it is confined to the two latter functions. Basic does not say, "I pushed him," but, "I gave him a push." The cause of thus going against the natural tendency of English and other non-inflectional tongues is that the ingenious artist who devised Basic decided to abolish the verbal function, in order to thrust out a number of anomalous forms, and at the same time to reduce the vocabulary. Mr. Ogden could not eliminate verbs altogether, but he greatly diminished their number. There are only eighteen verbs in Basic. All other ideas of action and states of existence are ex-

pressed by means of these eighteen combined with Basic nouns. There are, in fact, eighteen periphrastic conjugations such as are found in Basque, where one does not say the equivalent of "I see it," but of "I have it in sight."

In Basic the noble vocabulary of English has been ruthlessly cut down; all the fair capital which, during ages of thought and work, the philosopher, statesman, poet, merchant, and day labourer have created and accumulated is reduced to a pittance. Its vocabulary was made up as follows: 600 names of things (nouns); 150 names of qualities (adjectives); 18 names of actions and states (verbs), and about 80 other necessary words, such as *and* and *though* (particles).

The contention of the author of Basic is that these 850, together with a number of others which he calls international words, such as *sir*, *theatre*, and *tea*, and the names of numerals, coins, measurements, days of the week and months of the year, provide all the material that is ordinarily necessary; and that after the addition of, on the average, 150 occupational words each speaker will be able to communicate all his ideas. The Basic words retain the meanings that are attached to them in real English, and compounds made from any of the 850, such as *mankind*, are permitted.

The 850 fortunate survivors of the slaughter are not the words most frequently used. They were selected for preservation by Mr. Ogden on certain philosophical principles that he laid down for himself. Tested by the most reliable information we at present possess on word-frequency,[1] only about 454 of the 850 commonest words in modern written English are to be found among them.

[1] Faucett and Maki, *A Study of English Word Values Statistically Determined.*

No fewer than about 396 [1] of the 850 Basic words are outside the range of the 850 commonest words of the written English of to-day ; and though no such exact information is available concerning audible speech, the result could not be very different with respect to it.

Thus Basic is not a merely simplified form of English in which the natural structure and natural vocabulary are pruned, without other manipulation. Basic is a true artificial speech, owing its construction to preconceived notions of what speech ought to be, in respect of both grammatical structure and stock of words.

Illuminating illustrations of the artificial nature of the Basic vocabulary can be found by examining its resources for naming personal relationships and parts of the human body.

There is no distinction, for instance, between *husband* and *man*, or *wife* and *woman*. A wife must write " My dear married man " or " My dear man." *Uncle*, *aunt*, *nephew*, and *niece* do not exist in Basic, though *son* and *daughter* are included.

As regards parts of the body, *forehead*, *eyebrow*, *cheek*, *shoulder*, *wrist*, *joint*, *limb*, *vein*, *lung*, *hip*, *thigh*, and *ankle* do not exist in Basic. The writer cannot use " He hurt his forehead " ; he must express the idea by such periphrastic phraseology as " He did damage to the front of his head." For " He raised his eyebrows " he must write " He put up the arch of hair over his eyes " ; for " One shoulder is larger than the other " he is confined to " The top of one arm is of greater size than the other " ; for " He has sprained his wrist " to " He has twisted the join of his hand and arm."

[1] It is necessary to say " about," because different opinions on what constitutes a single word would slightly affect these figures.

There are several observations that could be made on these expressions, which are due partly to the limitation of the vocabulary, partly to the artificiality of the selection, and partly to the practical abolition of the verb. One is that they are less exact than the corresponding expressions in real English. "He cut the side of his face" is not as precise as "He scratched his cheek"; for a cut may be deep or shallow and a scratch is only skin deep, and also the face extends a little above and below the cheek. So also, the shoulder is not the top of the arm.

A second observation is that such paraphrases are necessarily more diffuse than the single terms that they replace. In consequence, Basic is not as concise as real English. In his book *Debabelization*, Mr. Ogden translated into Basic a speech by Signor Mussolini which was made in English in 1931. Two paragraphs of the real English contain 134 words. In Basic they contain 171 words; *i.e.* twenty-eight per cent. more; the Basic translation of Mr. Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* is also twenty-eight per cent. longer than the original; and there is no doubt that this would hold good generally. The brevity of real English, which is one of its principal excellences, is absent from Basic.

Mr. Ogden pointed to the size of the English vocabulary as an obstacle in the way of the foreigner, and rightly considered that there is no need for him to know the whole of it. But, if the vocabulary of a tongue is reduced to a number of words smaller than the requirements of intercourse, reason has to step in and supply the deficiency by making phrases, and that is what happens in Basic. Mr. Ogden shifted the burden from the memory to the intellect, and he did so in no half-hearted manner; for 850 names are far too few for

practical requirements. Basic, in consequence, is a bow for Achilles, far beyond the strength of a child. Experiment with English words arranged in their frequency-order will soon convince any one who cares to try that a vocabulary of less than about 1,500 or 2,000 words will incessantly tax his ingenuity even for ordinary communications.

English reduced by mere limitation of vocabulary, without any manipulation according to a theory of language, can be expanded ; for, though limited, it is still real English. Basic, on the other hand, having been produced by alteration as well as contraction, cannot be expanded into real English. Any foreigner who learns it, and then passes on to real English has to modify the notions of structure he has gained, and will make discoveries that surprise him. Even so, Basic offers a means of international communication, and it has met, deservedly, with more success than any other artificial language. It is studied in various European countries, and still more in the East. Experiments have been made in teaching it in China and Japan, and it is employed in the instruction of recruits for the Indian army. Nevertheless, however great its intrinsic merits, it owes its success primarily to the fact that it is tacked on to real English, which many who do not speak it have a desire or a need to speak.

An Englishman addressed in Basic would easily understand what is put to him. It would not be difficult for him to express himself in written Basic, as a writer can pause to reflect and restrict. But Basic speech he would have to practise assiduously, to prevent himself from trespassing beyond its bounds and employing the words and forms he has been acquainted with from infancy.

He would feel like a man going upstairs in the dark and perpetually coming to the step that isn't there.

Confined to its proper purposes Basic may have a useful function to perform in promoting the expansion of real English. But quite lately Mr. Ogden has changed his attitude, and has added a third purpose to his original two. Swollen with success he has waxed fat and kicked; he has actually put forward the preposterous proposal that Basic should be taught to English children in English schools. "By using Basic as a key" he (or some one for him) wrote in the *Times* for June 9, 1939, "our young men and women will be able to come more quickly and with greater pleasure to the inner secrets of Shakespeare and Milton. By using it as a measure they will be able to give a picture of their thoughts and feelings *clearer and truer than has so far been possible*." It is impossible to imagine a more egregious instance of presumption than to advance such a claim on behalf of a substitute-language of 850 words, a number smaller than is possessed by the rudest of savage tongues.

Chapter XII

THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEOPLES

In Chapter I. it was argued that the English of Britain, assuming no external forces played upon it, would in the future become more uniform than it is now. Are we able to draw a similar conclusion for English as a whole, or is the English of the English-speaking peoples likely to disintegrate?

One possibility is that English will develop a literary and a colloquial form, as Latin and other tongues did. Should that occur, the colloquial form would be more than likely to divide into a number of languages, each with its own literature. In that case it might vanish altogether. Where are now the speeches of the ancient Egyptians, the Sumerians, the Hittites? Where is the speech of Babylon, which stood for a thousand years? Something of their writings survives, but scarcely the faintest echo from them can be detected in any modern speech. The Roman dominion in Britain lasted for a longer period than has elapsed since the first British colony was founded, yet a score of words embedded in modern English are all that remains in it as a sign of the speech that the soldiers, officials, and townspeople of Roman Britain spoke. The tongue of the Aryans separated in the course of five or six thousand years into speeches that only the trained philologist can discern to be descended from a single stock. Even the primitive

Teutonic, once a dialect of Aryan, has during two or three thousand years been differentiated into speeches so unlike that Scandinavians, Dutchmen, Germans, and Englishmen cannot understand each other.

Aryan and Teutonic, however, were tongues spoken by uncivilized or semi-civilized races. The Aryans appear to have separated into tribes that wandered away from their original home before they were accustomed to count in thousands. The early Teutons had no written language. It could be urged, therefore, that there is no real parallel between them and modern English, and that the history of Greek, Latin, and Arabic, which spread widely and replaced the tongues of other peoples, is more instructive.

All these three were spread by conquest. Greek had become the speech of a large part of Asia Minor, of Sicily, and of Southern Italy by the end of the sixth century before Christ. The conquests of Alexander made it the general speech of the near East. Classical Greek was regarded by cultured Romans in the second century B.C. much as the Europeans regarded French in the eighteenth century. But meanwhile the popular Greek of Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt was becoming simpler in construction, and absorbing foreign words. At the same time Latin was following the Roman dominion everywhere in the West, and soon assumed a position alongside Greek as a language of culture. Before long it began to pursue a similar course, altering and dividing into a number of distinct languages. Arabic accompanied the Moslems to Persia, Syria, Asia Minor, Northern Africa, and Spain. It now exists in a classical form no longer spoken and in spoken dialects that differ in pronunciation and vocabulary.

Culture and the possession of a great literature were not of sufficient force to preserve the purity of Greek or Latin when divorced from political and military power. Both followed the same path as that trodden by Teutonic, and by the Aryan tongue of three thousand years before, and by Arabic after them. The history of all these speeches tells the same tale, which is that it is the fate of a spreading and conquering tongue to split into varieties, even if, as in the case of the more recent languages, it develops a classical form that is perpetuated in a literature. Is English going to follow the same course, or will the new conditions of the modern world save it?

Although the nature of the forces that cause speech to change may not be wholly explained, there is no mystery about the conditions in which those forces can operate. Aryan, Greek, Latin, Teutonic, divided because their speakers lost contact with each other. If, in the present and future, sufficient contact is maintained among the various parts of the English world, dialects will not arise.

Any kind of barrier that separates a linguistic group into parts will upset the balance of tendencies. An artificial political boundary that separated people of the same speech as effectually as an ocean or a mountain range would, of course, allow similar changes to occur. But in considering the future of English in Britain, Australia, and South Africa the geographical factor is the only one that is of material consequence; and, although the United States are politically separate from the British Commonwealth of Nations, the same is true of American English.

The modern conditions—some of them, at any rate—which render debabelization supremely desirable also

favour the expansion of English, and a greater degree of uniformity. Of these the increase in the habit of travelling is, perhaps, the most important ; many more Americans and colonials visit Britain than ever before, and many more British people visit America and the colonies. The overseas post was an important development of the nineteenth century. The years since the beginning of the twentieth have seen the advent of the talking picture, a standardizing invention of wide and powerful effect ; indeed, a portent which has no parallel in the past. Finally, the wireless has come, and carries the speech of London in an instant to hearers in the uttermost parts of the earth. To-day, from all these causes, London, Toronto, New York, Los Angeles, Cape Town, Sydney, and Auckland have drawn linguistically nearer to each other than were Bristol and London, or York and Edinburgh, in the time of Chaucer.

The gramophone and the overseas telephone, though not yet, perhaps, of the first importance in this connection, may in time become two of the chief means of unifying speech. Arrangements like the universal charge for postage may greatly increase the use of the latter. As for the gramophone, libraries of records are already being formed for the use of blind persons, and no one can predict the future scope of the talking book. It may be that inventions will cheapen and improve it until it takes its place side by side with the printed book. If it ever does so, audible speech will come back into its own, and another weapon of conservation and unification will be added to the armoury we already possess.

Just as the degree of contact in Britain was not great enough before the seventeenth century to permit Standard English to spread over the island, there was not until

recently sufficient communication between the inhabitants of the United States and Britain, or between Britain and the colonies, to maintain a uniform speech. American English, there is no doubt, was less like the English of Britain in 1850 than it had been a hundred years before. But, as will be seen, since the middle of the nineteenth century, American and English have been influencing one another more and more. The much slighter differences between colonial and English (or British) English are being affected in the same way. It is possible, with some hesitation, to entertain the belief, and with the utmost fervency the hope, that the process of disintegration has been arrested, and that throughout the English-speaking world our tongue will in the future be more uniform than it is now.

On that assumption, what may we expect the features of the common form to be? If English is going to consolidate itself, which variety of English is likely to prevail? It is evident that the variety which is now spoken by the largest number will have no small chance of assimilating the others.

The largest group of English-speakers inhabits North America. Two-thirds of all the persons who speak English as their native tongue live on that continent. The population of the United States and of Canada (which speaks the same speech as the rest of the continent) is three times that of Great Britain, and far more than three times as many as speak good Standard English. If numbers were to be the sole determinant, uniformity would be attained by the absorption of all other varieties of English by the American form.

Numbers will not be the sole determinant. Though the best American is as excellent as the best Standard

English, the educated speech of London still possesses, for historical reasons if for no other, a greater general prestige than any other form of English, and is imitated by some people everywhere in the English-speaking world, and will have its share in the final account. The uniform English of the future will be a fusion of English as now spoken in Britain and English as now spoken in America. If Standard English could add to its present prestige the reputation of being a model worthy of imitation in all respects, that is to say, linguistic as well as social and historical, its influence would be more powerful than it is. As yet it has not acquired that reputation, because, on the whole, the English have not deliberately cultivated their speech for its own sake.

To scrutinize in detail the differences between Australian and English, and between the speech of South Africa and the speech of Britain, would be an interesting and lengthy inquiry, for which there is no space in this book. Luckily, there is less need for embarking upon it than for examining the relations of American English and English English ; for in pursuing this line we shall be discussing the case of extremest difference, as well as the relations between the two largest groups of English-speakers.

Chapter XIII

ENGLISH AND AMERICAN [1]

American locutions can now be observed invading English, and one hears of Americans who imitate characteristics of English speech. That is most satisfactory. One also observes prejudices in Britain against Americanisms and American, and one hears of prejudices in America against English speech. These prejudices are to be deplored. It is to the interest of each side that it should draw closer to the other. Instead of inveighing against the cinema and the music hall we should thank them for coming to the rescue; whatever we may think of the gifts they bring, their influence is lessening the danger of American and English separating. Instead of parodying the r-less Englishman, the Americans would do well to respect him and thank the gods for him, because, though he sounds funny, he is helping to build a new world.

It is vitally important to English speech, and therefore to the future of the English-speaking peoples, that the barriers of prejudice should be shaken down, and that every effort should be made on both sides of the Atlantic to aid American and English to coalesce. The beauty and dignity of English are almost priceless, but they are

[1] In this chapter the more correct terms English English and American English are abandoned, because they are cumbrous.

not worth the sacrifice of its unity, because the disintegration of English would in the end be followed by their disappearance. If the free and universal adoption of American slang were the only means of preserving that unity, it would be imprudent of us to hesitate for a moment to welcome even the most jazzy of its highly coloured innovations.

Not a little of the prejudice is ill-informed. Those who wish to keep pure the well of English should remind themselves how much of what has come to Britain in the modern liner (*e.g. flapjack*, *opine*, and *slick*, *i.e. sleek*) crossed the Atlantic in the reverse direction in the *Mayflower*, and that many words which already seem to us to have sprung from English soil are in reality plants of American growth—for instance, *belittle*, *lengthy*, *talented*, *influential*, *to engineer*, *co-education*, *excursionist*, *requirement*, and perhaps *scientist*. The gentlemen who in the nineteenth century wrote letters to the *Times* about *reliable* (which they believed to be American), on the ground that English already possessed what they called the good old English word *trustworthy* may be excused, seeing that they had not *The New English Dictionary* to inform them that the former word is known in English nearly two centuries earlier than the latter.[1] Very often, in the case of a tendency common to American and English, we love our own and loathe the American exemplifications of it.[2]

It is very easy to score a cheap and momentary

[1] Dr. Edward Lyttleton, therefore, cannot be excused for: "I suggest that the objection to *reliable* is that it is an exact synonym for the fine old word *trustworthy*, which in obedience to some sinister influence seems to be yielding ground to the American. Is not this a pity?" (English Association Pamphlet, *The Claim of our Mother Tongue*, p. 7, 1934).

[2] See p. 81.

triumph by contrasting Popular American with Standard English. Not very long ago Lord Plender made some remarks at a speech day, during the course of which he said, " The pollution of our language is seen daily in the Press. Only this week I saw as the heading of a leading article in a widely-read newspaper ' M. Blum Passes the Buck.' That is, apparently, an Americanism for ' resign.' " Thereupon another widely-read newspaper, seizing the cue thus presented, translated Lord Plender as follows, " Lamp any of the scandal sheets and see what I mean. This week one of the big-timers cracks, ' M. Blum Passes the Buck.' The mug who done that ought to go wipe his chin off. What he means is ' M. Blum Snatches his Time.' Yes, sir, am I burning ? "

This passage, however, was deliberately written to illustrate the peculiarities of a certain type of American journalese, and does not represent American speech of any kind. Many American writers excel in depicting the popular speech realistically, not least among them Mr. Sinclair Lewis, from whose novel *Elmer Gantry* the following sentences, spoken by a young man studying for the church, are taken :

" What they picking on that fella that's talking for ? They better let him alone ! Here you ! Let the fellow speak ! Give him a chance. Whyn't you pick on somebody of your own size, you big stiff ? "

" Come on, we'll kill them guys."

" Maybe, I ain't a preacher. Maybe I'm not even a good Christian ! Maybe I've done a whole lot of things I hadn't ought to of done."

" We better get outa here quick."

Any implication that either of these two forms is

parallel to Standard English and that therefore English as a whole is superior to American is mischievous in the extreme. If the true bases of comparison are adopted, if, for example, the sentences quoted from *Elmer Gantry* are compared with the extract on page 28, an honest critic will be hard pressed to prove that the American product is not at least as respectable as the English. Mr. H. L. Mencken has written a book to try to prove that Popular American is better than Standard, and far better than degenerate, English.

Although Popular American in any of its varieties is very different in its idioms, sounds, and vocabulary from any variety of degenerate English, and although both are equally distant from the best English and the best American speech, between literary American and literary English there is scarcely any difference. Differences of spelling apart, the discrepancies are almost entirely accounted for by the different environments of the writers. That this is true of the older writers is well known ; Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic* might have been composed, and Lincoln's Speech at Gettysburg might have been uttered, by Englishmen in England, so far as their vocabulary and style are concerned. But it is equally or almost equally true of many contemporary writers. Mr. Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, for instance, is couched in the purest English.

As might be expected, if we descend from literature to journalism, a number of distinctively American forms are found. Two pages of *The New York Times* for November 22, 1938, yielded : *downtown section* (suburb) ; *style scouts* (fashion reporters) ; *first degree* (manslaughter) ; *washed up* (ruined) ; *thought up* (thought out) ; *a half-hour's* (half an hour's) ; *utterly* (entirely) ; *uptown* ;

trucking (use of a road by lorries) ; *censurers* ; *sidewalk* ; *kind of a tie* (kind of tie) ; *loft buildings* ; *realty* ; *check with* (tally with) ; *the poor are out* (have no chance) ; *son-in-law Ciano*. This is the complete list. The rest of the text an English journalist might have written.

. . . . . .

The majority of the earliest settlers seem to have gone to America from Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex, speaking Southern English or East Anglian dialect. After 1650 emigration slackened ; so that in 1800 most of the colonists were the descendants of people who had emigrated more than a century before, and spoke with little modification, except that which lapse of time had allowed to develop, the speech of their English ancestors. Until the War of Independence the English of southern England was assumed by Americans to be correct, and the writings of Americans are identical in language-form with the writings of Englishmen. The Revolution, naturally, produced a different attitude. Noah Webster, in 1789, prophesied that in course of time, owing to the gradual changes that were going on in both speeches, and to their having little contact with one another, they would gradually become different tongues. This expectation soon became a hope. In 1813 Jefferson expressed the desire that an American language should be formed.

Time and the world have falsified the prophecy and defeated the wish. Though it is true that during the intervening century and a half new words and new phrases have been called forth by the circumstances of the Americans, and though it is true that old words have been transferred to new objects, and that there have been changes in pronunciation in both countries,

and changes in the meaning of words, the best American and the best English are still one. Neither Noah Webster nor Thomas Jefferson could foresee how close to one another improved means of transport and communication would bring the two countries.

The case of the popular speech is different. We have already seen reason to believe that Standard English is the most permanent element in our speech, and that modern colloquial English is partly a replacement of older types. Something of the same kind, and for similar reasons, has happened in America. But, in addition, the circumstances and character of the colonists have had a profound influence upon the Popular American of to-day. Most of the men who went early to America were men of action, pioneers engaged in an unceasing struggle with nature and an intermittent struggle with a savage enemy. Books were few; newspapers did not exist for several generations. The log cabin and the character of its vigorous inhabitants were unfavourable to literary culture, and favourable to the development of terse vivid speech. Then, about the year 1800, the vast tide of European emigrants set towards America.

The languages spoken by these new-comers have not submerged English; on the contrary, English has overwhelmed them. If all these people had sprung from the same area in Europe, or if the members of each race had formed local settlements, they would, there can be no doubt, have profoundly modified American in the direction of their own original tongues. But they have been of many nations, Germans, Danes, Poles, Russians, Yiddish-speaking Jews, Finns, Czechs, Italians, Greeks, Rumanians, Frenchmen, and Spaniards, as well as

English, Scots, and Irish, and they have dispersed themselves throughout every one of the forty-eight States ; and, in consequence, their linguistic impulses have cancelled each other in most respects.

In most respects, not in all respects. In the first place, as most of the later immigrants were men like the old pioneers, manual workers, energetic, semi-literate or illiterate, they reinforced the inherent tendencies of the popular speech, and made it a more formidable competitor of Standard American than the colloquial speech of an old and settled country could be. They have thrown the weight of their millions into the scale. Hence Popular American is, as Mr. H. L. Mencken argues in his brilliant, erudite, and vehement book *The American Language*, a force to which greater weight must be allowed in considering the future of Standard American than need be attributed to colloquial English in considering the future of Standard English.

Secondly, the plain emigrant, struggling with the alien speech of the society in which he found himself, inevitably simplified it in his efforts to express his ideas, and though the differences between the various simplifications were flattened out in a generation, there has been a general tendency to simplify, and especially to abolish the parts of the structure of the new tongue that have lost their functional value. In Popular American the past tenses and past participles of verbs, and the nominative and objective cases of pronouns, are assimilated even more readily than they are by illiterate speakers in England.

. . . . .

Educated American, of course, admits these simplifications and solecisms no more than Standard English.

The extent to which the best American speech is identical with the best English speech far exceeds the degree of dissimilarity. But there is an all-pervasive difference, a constant variation of vocabulary and of the meaning of words, and a distinguishing quality in the sounds, that are unmistakable and yet hard to define. Many consecutive sentences of American may be uttered that apart from sound coincide exactly with English, and then an idiom will occur that is quite un-English. There is a story of an English journalist who prided himself on being perfect in American that illustrates the reverse experience. He went into a shop in Washington and asked the girl behind the counter, "Do you keep stationery?" "Yes," she replied, "I can, for a while. But after a time I get restless."

Seeing that Britain is old and America young, it is not unnatural to ascribe the well-known peculiarities of American pronunciation to developments in the American form. Actually, American has been, on the whole, more conservative than English in phonology. Changes that have occurred in recent times in English—in Southern English especially—are responsible for a good deal of the different effect that the two varieties now produce upon the ear.

It is undeniable that many American voices seem to have a nasal quality, which may or may not have been derived from a Puritan ancestry or the East Anglian dialect. But the principal element in the apparent nasal twang is, in reality, a drawl—as, indeed, it is often described—that is to say, a more regular level of syllables in American than in English. American shares the strong accent of English, and like English tends to throw the accent towards the beginnings of words, as in *rómance* and

defect, for *romance* and *defect*, but neither the strength nor the tendency is as marked in American as in English.

This cause, small as it seems, accounts for many of the most striking differences in English and American pronunciation. In polysyllables an accent on the first syllable produces a secondary accent later in the word. Thus Latin *secundarius* gave rise to English and American *secondary*. The English accent, however, presses more heavily on unaccented vowels, as in *labrətri* from *laboratɔ̀ri*. Hence English *secndri* and American *secəndæ̀ri*. The rule is not absolute ; indeed, instances of the opposite are not rare. American has crushed out unaccented vowels in *poim* and *dimʌnd*, which English has preserved in *poem* and *diamond*.[1]

In the seventeenth century the English *oi* (as in *boy*) became *ai* (as in *die*), and subsequently changed back again owing to the influence of the spelling, save in *riled*. It remains in Popular American in *pizn* (*poison*), *ile* (*oil*), *jine* (*join*), and other words, but has changed in Standard American, either because of the spelling or because of English influence.

By 1750 the Southern English *r*-sounds between a vowel and a consonant, as in *part* and *lord*, had weakened or disappeared, as had final *r*, *e.g.* in *butter*, *prefer*. These sounds have been preserved to a considerable extent in American, which in this respect is intermediate between Lowland Scots and Standard English.[2]

About the same time, or rather later, as has been seen,[3] Southern English æ changed to aɪ in all but the

[1] See also p. 40. [2] See pp. 16 and 17. [3] See p. 29.

commonest words. This has been imitated, but much less completely, in Northern English and American. Hence English *haɪf* (*half*), American *hæf*; Southern English *aɪsk*, *graɪss*, *daɪns*, Northern English and American *æsk*, *græss*, *dæns* (*ask*, *grass*, *dance*). More recently Southern English *oɪ* has become *ou*, as in *stoun*, *lou* (*stone*, *low*), and *eɪ* has become *ei*, as in *dei*, *rein* (*day*, *rain*). Neither of these changes has taken place in American or in Northern English. Another that is more widespread in all varieties of English is the development of a j after uɪ in many words, such as *revenue*, *new*, *duty*, and *stupid* (*revenjuɪ*, *njuɪ*, *djuɪti*, *stjuɪpid*), which have remained *revenuɪ*, *nuɪ*, *duɪti*, *stuɪpid*, in American. Many English uɪs have, of course, remained, as in *rude*.

The combined effect of these changes in English vowels has been to make American speech, as far as its vowels are concerned, more like Northern than Southern English, which fact has a very definite bearing on speculations about the future of our tongue. There is, however, one vowel change which American shares with Southern English, though not always in the same words, that has not occurred in Northern. This is the lengthening of ɔ to ɔɪ, *e.g.* American *gɔɪn*, English *gɔn* (*gone*); *Bɔɪstən* for *Bɔstən* (*Boston*); Southern English *ɔɪf*, American and Northern English *ɔf* (*off*), etc.

There are also anomalous differences, such as American *luɪtnænt*, and *skedl*, English *leftenənt* and *ʃedjuɪl* (*lieutenant* and *schedule*). On the other hand, the close relationship between the two speeches is seen in the identical course pursued by many words in Popular American and degenerate English, *e.g.* *goverment*, *pitcher* (picture), *libery* (library), *Febuary*, *tempery* (temporary), *swaller*

(swallow), *yeller*, *mischievious*, *fillum* (film) (American and Lowland Scots), *skuse me*, *ast* (asked).

. . . . . .

A list was given earlier of words that English has taken from American. Many others are coming, and English is repaying the loan in similar coinage ; for example, *headmaster* and *week-end*. *Railway* appears to be displacing *railroad*, and a struggle is going on between *lift* and *elevator*, in which the English form will probably be victorious. The more exchanges of this sort that occur the better, because through imperfect contact pairs of words like *jam* and *preserve*, *fall* and *autumn*, *shop* and *store* have taken different courses in English and American, and drifted apart. New industrial, social, or scientific developments have also called forth differences in word-making. The English *tube* or *underground* is the American *subway*. English *to post* is American *to mail*, *maidservant* is *help* or *hired girl*, and so on.

With a few exceptions, which are noted, each of the following lists is confined to words that have been taken by English from American, and should be regarded as a list of samples, indicating what we may expect to receive in the future from the ample stores that American possesses.

Environmental words like *rattlesnake* are, naturally, numerous. Some of them are words borrowed from the languages of the Indians, like *moccasin*, *wigwam*, *maize*, and *mugwump*. *Maize* afterwards gave way to *corn* in American, and this word has produced *cornflour* for us. The Americans have also made words on the model of Indian words, or have taken them from American-speaking Indians ; *warpath* is an instance. And from other tongues they have taken a considerable number,

of which not a few have passed into English, *e.g. boss* (from Dutch). But here we have reached the vast, intricate, and exciting subject of American slang.

In no way is the fact that Popular American has been a more powerful factor in American than colloquial and degenerate English have been in English better illustrated than in the number of slang creations, slang uses, and slang metaphors that have pushed their way from it into the general American speech and writing. Many of them have affected English slang, and a large number are already established in literary English. Without discriminating between slang and Standard English, we may mention the following :

New coinages : *bogus* (allied to *bogey*) : *wilt*, *hike*, *O.K.*, *boost*, *blizzard*, *to loaf*, *graft*, *skedaddle*, *stunt*, *jazz*, and *phoney* (this last is a new arrival, and may not stay). In part payment we have handed over *dud*, *swagger*, and *wangle*, among others.

. . . . . .

New coinages of known origin : *lynch*, *skunk*, *bunkum*, *hooligan*.

. .

New derivative formations : *rowdy*, *smoker*, *diner*, *sleeper*, *crook* (from *crooked*) : *pep* (pepper), *enthuse*, *cuss* (customer), *tough* (*guy*), *sleuth* (*hound*). We have given American *demob* and *vamp* (from *vampire*; not the musical term).

. . . .

New compounds. Many of these are vivid images of high linguistic value. Examples are *joyride*, *uplift*, *roadhouse*, *cocktail*, *cloudburst*, *round-up*, *lounge lizard*, *backchat*, *gold-digger*, *sobstuff*, *back number*, *yes-man*, *sky-scraper*, *eye-opener*, *down-and-out*, *flat-footed*. The manu-

facture of compound verbs, many with metaphorical meanings, is going on so fast in both American and English that it is often difficult to say in which variety a particular specimen appeared first. A good many, probably, have arisen independently in both speeches, *e.g. rope in, call off, butt in, start up, get away with, fall for, grab at.*[1]

. . . . . .

Metaphorical words and phrases, *e.g. bird, peach*; "to bark up the wrong tree," "to make the fur fly," "to spread oneself," "to have an axe to grind," "to plank down," "to face the music," "to stay put," "to cut no ice," "to deliver the goods," "to do him in"; "boiled shirt," "mass meeting," "bottom dollar," "glad eye"; "up a tree," "all out for," "good and hard," "up to" (it's up to you), "up against it"; "not on your life," "have a heart!" "get me?" We have given American *bus* (aeroplane).

Nice, *get*, and *awful* are excessively used in American as well as English. *Yep*, "oh yeah," and "sez you" have come here for a stay that may not be permanent, and "I don't think" has gone to America on a similar visit. *Some* meaning "a large," as in "This is sure some burg" is used in England, but always with a feeling of its American origin; *through* in the sense of "have finished" seems to have gained a place in English.

Popular American and colloquial English show a remarkable tendency to run parallel in idiom. A conspicuous example is seen in the persistent survival of the double negative; "I never done nothing wrong" is typical of both. This is the very stuff of English. The

[1] See pp. 80 and 81.

repetition was made either to indicate simple negation or for purposes of emphasis, as in Chaucer's :

> He never yet no vileyne ne sayde
> In all his life unto no maner wight.

in which there are four negative words. There are plenty of examples as late as Shakespeare, *e.g.* :

> This England never did nor never shall
> Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror
> But when it first did help to wound itself.
>
> (*King John*, v. 7.)

Other parallels are : use of a plural pronoun to follow *everybody*, *each*, etc. ; omission of the verb when another word implies the sense, *e.g.* " So I up with my fist " [1] and " he wants out " (this is American and Lowland Scots) ; " of " is often written for *have*, owing to their having acquired identical sound when unemphatic, as in " I should of been." Formal difference is abolished between many common adjectives and adverbs ; the use of *sure* for *surely* is certainly and " he done himself proud " probably American ; " I like it fine," " fair flabbergasted," " awful ugly," " filthy dirty," and " mighty fine " seem to be common to American and English.

What does the sum total of the differences between English and American amount to ? When lists of distinctively American sounds, idioms, and words are thus collected they make a formidable show. But their assembling is deceptive ; when dispersed, as they are in natural use, they certainly afford no ground for concluding, as Mr. Mencken has done, that English and

[1] Compare Byron's " On with the dance ! " etc.

American have become two separate tongues. Nor can we agree with him that American is superior to English. He arrives at this conclusion after a demonstration of the vigour of Popular American. His democratic fervour, it may be suggested, has blinded him to the evanescence of many, perhaps most, of the phrases and words of popular speech. That Popular American is a more potent influence than colloquial English we have already conceded. But we cannot accept his deduction, often repeated in his book, that Standard English is languid and devitalized because it does not possess the qualities of colloquial speech. That the English of the future is going to be more American English than English English, may, as is urged in the preceding chapter, be accepted with less reserve ; indeed, there does not seem to be any escape from it. The change will be slow and comparatively painless, and the pain will be a small price to pay for the unity of speech that the people of North America and of the British Empire will thereby preserve and enjoy.

Chapter XIV

UNIVERSAL ENGLISH

Utopian writers have little to say about the speech employed in their imaginary polities. Plato, though he does not mention it, probably took for granted that the speech of the perfect state would be the choicest Attic. More, Bacon, Morris, and the rest also ignored this aspect of the future, finding quite enough on their hands in settling social and political matters.[1] The two exceptions that come to mind are Swift and Mr. H. G. Wells, neither of whom is very explicit. The only remark of the former relevant to our present line of thought is that the speech of Laputa was ever on the flux—a consideration of no little importance for the ideal as it is for the real world. His specimens of Utopian language and some of his Utopian names, such as *Brobdignag*, *Glumdalclitch*, and *Houyhnhnms*, so full of consonants that they are almost unpronounceable, are uncouth enough to warrant a preference for the world that we have, with its wars and alarms, if perpetual peace and prosperity can only be secured at the price of such ugliness.

Mr. Wells in *The World Set Free* rather airily endows his Utopia with universal English "shorn of a number of grammatical peculiarities . . . its spelling was system-

[1] Renaissance writers would probably assume that Latin would be the speech of the perfect state; see before.

atized . . . and a process of incorporating foreign nouns and verbs commenced that speedily reached enormous proportions."

This is altogether too easy. Mr. Wells may be right ; but it is impossible, in order to see into the future, to leap over obstacles in that manner. It is necessary to stop to devote some attention to the modifications to which the various tongues of men would be compelled to submit before they could unite in one. The only open avenues seem to be amalgamation or absorption ; for, although a world state could ordain that all its citizens should speak the same speech, political world unity is as likely to be achieved after linguistic world unity has been attained as before that consummation. The circle is indeed a vicious one ; since, as has already been mentioned, the more clearly the great states perceive that their separate existence depends upon their languages, the less likely are they, in their present frame of mind, to abandon them voluntarily.

In Chapter IX. the point was made that for many purposes a universal language is needed, and that without it a common consciousness and conscience will not be attained ; and we have also found reason for believing that the English of the present English-speaking peoples is likely to become more uniform, on account of increased and increasing communication. But a like degree of contact has not been established universally. Social and political as well as linguistic barriers separate nations and classes, and a large portion of the population of the globe is still uncivilized or semi-civilized. If some power could cast a curtain of oblivion over the whole earth and replace all the tongues of men by a single language, it would at once begin to divide into dialects.

The progress towards a universal speech must proceed with the unification of the world in other ways.

In the process of achieving a world speech, then, the various existing tongues must either fuse step by step into a new product, or be insensibly eliminated by a single dominant and widespread medium.

The idea of a synthetic speech, formed by the fusion of a number of others, is one that has hitherto been toyed with rather than examined critically. When writers have spoken of a synthesis of tongues, they seem to have conceived vaguely of a complete fusion of sounds, vocabulary, grammatical structure, and idiom. Facts give small warrant to such a notion. Tongues do not combine in such a manner that each partakes of the final result in the same way. In general, tongues that have been in contact have transferred words to each other. Idioms can be transferred; sounds can be transferred, and, indeed, when men adopt a new tongue a phonetic carry-over is usually to be observed; it is even possible to combine the structure of one tongue with a vocabulary drawn from another; but structure does not fuse with structure. Nor is it possible to imagine how unlike structures could be combined; for it is in their structures that the fundamental differences of languages reside. To strike such an average on, say, English, French, and Russian would be harder than squaring the circle.

The whole history of English is an illustration of this. Although the modern English vocabulary of full words is a synthesis, nearly all our empty words are native, and the rest of our grammatical machinery is entirely Teutonic. Norman French and Anglo-French modified the structure of English by wearing it down, or, at any rate, hastened the process of simplification, but did not

succeed in grafting anything of their own upon it; in respect of structure English is no more like French now than it was in the days of King Alfred—indeed, it is less like it. In contrast with the great number of Latin words and prefixes and suffixes that have entered English, there is only one structural feature, the rule of contradictory negatives, that can be ascribed to the study of Latin, and even that is maintained by the force of the academic tradition. Englishmen, Welshmen, and Gaels have subsisted in close linguistic contact in the same island for fifteen centuries. English has taken words like *flannel* and *claymore* from Welsh and Gaelic, and they have taken words like *pwll* (O.E. *pōl*, a pool) and *mod* (O.E. *mōt*, a meeting) from English. But no element in the grammatical structure of Welsh or Gaelic has penetrated into English.

Fusion of the structure of one tongue with the vocabulary of another, on the other hand, can occur; English and Chinese provide in Pidgin English a remarkably complete example by which the reader can estimate the probable value of such a synthesis, should this be the outcome of the present trend of languages. There is another, Beach-la-Mar, spoken in the South Sea Islands; but Beach-la-Mar is less significant than Pidgin English, because it is more English, owing to the fact that the Polynesians, living in small scattered communities, and possessing something of the temperament of children, easily abandoned their own speech. It is, perhaps, best described as English reduced to its lowest terms of vocabulary and inflection, with the addition of certain Polynesian features, such as a tendency to make the endings of words vocalic, omission of articles, and the use of a pronoun before every verb, and of conventional

qualifying words, as in, " Bimeby one day Eve she come along Adam, and she speak, ' More good you me two fella we eat'm this fella apple.' Adam he speak no, and Eve she speak, 'God He no savee look along us two fella all'm time. God big fella marster He gammon along you ' " [1]

Pidgin English, however, is a real combination of the form of the Chinese sentence and a vocabulary taken from English. For instance, one of the characteristics of Chinese is that it has developed a set of words called Classifiers. The commonest of these is *Ko*, which means " piece," and indicates that the following word denotes a concrete object ; and so *piece* is similarly employed in Pidgin English. Also, English sounds that do not exist in Chinese have been replaced, *e.g. s* for *sh*, as in *sine* for *shine*, and *l* for *r* as in *lain* for *rain*, and *ki-lin* or *kleen* for *green* ; and words that contain sounds characteristic of Chinese are preferred, *e.g. blong* (belong). In Pidgin English even more completely than in Beach-la-Mar the inflections of English have been abolished, Chinese being a tongue entirely without inflections.

The following is a specimen :

" That number one piecy God-pidgin. Suppose wantchee go topside after kill, then wantchee family make chin-chin joss at glave. Suppose no takee bones, no makee glave, no speakee chin-chin joss, then not blong topside at all after kill, blong hellee." [2]

[1] One day Eve went to Adam and said, " I think we should eat this apple." When Adam refused, Eve said, " God cannot watch us all the time. God is deceiving you." (Churchill, *Beach-la-Mar*.)

[2] Take that right-minded religious Chinaman, for example. If he desires to go to heaven after death, he will wish his family to worship God at his grave. If we did not take his body back to China and bury it there, and perform the proper rites, he would not go to heaven after death, but to hell. (W. F. Dobson, *Pidgin English*, in *Argosy*, 1901.)

Pidgin English is easily learned, and its compass is sufficient for the ordinary affairs of life, and for trade, but sufficient for nothing more. Except for the comparative similarity of the English and Chinese structures it could not have come into being, and yet, in order to make it, the best nine-tenths of both languages have had to be sacrificed. It would require æons of development to become as adequate an instrument for the expression of ideas as each of its two originals is. Though it may be of practical use, and may be a means of propagating English, to connect it with an ideal of language—which we must suppose any tongue fit to be the universal speech of the world would approach—would be ridiculous and grotesque. The universal speech, should it ever come, will be, it may be assumed, superior to any existing tongue.

An ideal language—to describe it tentatively and to the best of our ability—would be completely adequate to express the whole range of human reason, imagination, and feeling, from its highest reaches to its simplest. It would contain words suitable for the most refined abstractions, and for the most ordinary things and actions of everyday life. It would be capable of expressing the finest distinctions of meaning. It would compass these ends with the greatest economy of means, that is to say, with the simplest grammatical apparatus that is possible, and with the minimum of sound. It would have evolved to the furthest point of simplicity combined with efficiency that the intellectual development of humanity permitted. And it would be capable of further evolution to accompany the growth of social and individual intelligence ; receptive ; able to create, with ease and in the simplest way, new devices and new words.

It would be graceful, possessing a sufficient and pleasing variety of vowels and consonants, without excess of either. Its sound would be equally melodious and virile.

Seeing that fusion of structures is impossible, and that such evidence as exists points to the conclusion that a union of the structure of one tongue with the vocabulary of another, far from leading towards the linguistic ideal, involves the almost complete destruction of both elements, we are thrown back upon our other alternative, that is to say, the ultimate predominance of a single tongue. That English is showing more likelihood of becoming universal than its competitors has already been demonstrated. It only remains for us, accordingly, to examine with such information as is at our command the probable future of the English vocabulary, on the assumption that English will spread over the whole earth. Whether in the process of expansion it will be stripped of the parts of its structure that have now become unnecessary, or will retain possession of them, will depend upon the relative force of popular speech on the one hand, and educated tradition on the other.

If all the tongues of the world could transfer words to each other until all possessed the same vocabularies, though still differing in pronunciation and grammar, the final triumph of the English structure would be immensely facilitated. Such a thing can be imagined, but it is very unlikely to happen, because the readiness to borrow words that English has shown since the Middle Ages is not equalled in other tongues. Even English, receptive as it is, does not readily borrow every day words corresponding to those with which it is already stocked; most of the new words of this class come from slang. If

the commonest English words are examined most of them will be found either to be native, or, if foreign, to have been in use in English for a very long time. There are, however, quite a number of words which are almost international, such as the French *chauffeur* and *auto*, the Italian *Fascist*, the Russian *Soviet*, and the German *Nazi*. English words of this kind (not necessarily originally English) are *sir*, *police*, *tea*, *humbug*, *lockout*, *strike*, *boycott*. In general, of course, these conform to the requirements of each tongue, as illustrated by the French verb *lock-outer*, and the nouns *campeur* and *bluffeur*, *krach* (crash), and the Russian *boikottirovatt*. *Meeting*, *club*, *sandwich*, *camping*, and *slogan*, which have been adopted by French, are some that have not been modified.

As regards philosophical, scientific, semi-scientific, and technical terms, a modified degree of universality already exists. Neither the older Latin vocabulary nor the modern practice of making new words of these kinds from Greek which was described in Chapter VII. is peculiar to English. For instance, Newton's terms *centrifugal* and *centripetal force* are *force centrifuge*, *centripète* in French, and *Zentrifugalkraft*, *Zentripetalkraft* in German ; similarly English *orthochromatic*, French *orthochromatique*, German *orthochromatisch*. This habit might in the future be extended until all tongues came to possess a common vocabulary of abstract and technical words, while retaining their homely, domestic, everyday stock. But the necessity of assimilating pronunciation would still have to be overcome ; that *cherry*, *cerise*, and *kirsch*, for example, are different forms of the same word is of interest to etymologists, but has no more bearing upon practical life than the equally real but even less perceptible relationship between the Latin *aqua* and the last syllable

of *Battersea*, or the relationship between *cerulean* and *hollow*.

Some languages, like Japanese and Hindustani, have taken large numbers of words from English ; and since these words are nouns, verbs, and adjectives covering a general field and not confined to particular subjects, their transfer is a genuine case of expansion. But it is easy to fall into error by failing to distinguish between the transfer of words of a special class and the expansion of a tongue. When, for example, Italian gave English many words connected with music and painting like *piano* and *profile*, it was not because Italian was at that time making general headway against English as a medium of expression, but because it was pre-eminent in those arts and had provided itself with the requisite terms, in which English was deficient. For similar reasons, English has sent abroad in recent times groups of political and semi-political terms like *meeting* and *speech*, words connected with industries, especially railways, such as *express*, *wagon*, and *tramway*, and, above all, sporting terms. The following sentence from the *Amsterdam Telegraaf* for January 1, 1939, will show how extraordinarily dependent upon English for this branch of its vocabulary a foreign tongue may be.

" De *testmatch*
" Engeland *scoort* 131 voor 2

" Na een vijstal *overs* moest Davies plaats maken voor Gordon, die *fast medium bowlt* en 300 waar had deze *bowler* success door Hutton, die veel te vrij speilde met een *yorker* op de *legstump* te *bowlen*."

In the same report occur : *boundary*, *wickets*, *toss*, *batten* (to bat), *not outs*, *coverpoint*, *fielders*, *runs*, *stumps*,

batsmen, *extra fielder*, *scoring-bord*, *leg-breaks*, *innings*, *mid-on*, *legtrap*, and *stand*. Yet the general vocabulary of Dutch is not being appreciably affected by English, and the use of these words in a Dutch newspaper does not carry any general implication that English is expanding at its expense.

There is, in short, little evidence that English is penetrating into the other great languages of the world, and none of them is penetrating into it to such an extent as to be modifying the general character of its vocabulary. We must, therefore, envisage its expansion at their expense by the actual substitution of its vocabulary and structure for theirs, just as it now replaces the native speech of immigrants into the United States. It is in the continuation of this process that the future hope of universal English lies.

Jacob Grimm, the founder of scientific philology, who died in 1863, once expressed the opinion that English seemed destined, in future times, to rule in all the corners of the earth. "In richness, sound reason, and flexibility," he wrote, "no modern tongue can be compared with it—not even the German, which must shake off many a weakness before it can enter the lists with the English." Grimm was not an unpatriotic German—as, indeed, this quotation shows. His mighty influence gave a Germanic twist to the science of philology and to its terminology that has scarcely yet been straightened out; for several decades English students venerated Grimm's law of consonant changes, talked of Indo-germanic, and used the terms *umlaut* and *ablaut* to describe such domestic phenomena as the relation of *cat* to *kitten*, of *fang* to *finger*, and of *swim* to *swam*. But he lived in the

urbane days before the fierce passions and rivalries of the modern world had been aroused, and could not foresee the obstacles that nationalism gone mad would in the twentieth century place in humanity's path. It cannot be doubted that, had he lived to-day, even if he had retained his freedom from bias, he would have perceived that other considerations besides a recognition of its intrinsic qualities would have to be taken into account in estimating the chance of English, or of any other national language, becoming universal among mankind.

Till recently events justified the great German scholar's expectation. This was particularly marked in the years immediately after the World War, when the overwhelming political dominance of the British Empire and of the United States seemed to be firmly established. But the motive force behind the spread was not the "richness, sound reason, and flexibility" of English; it was something very different. It could not be better exhibited than in two sentences from a letter received by the Editor of the *Times* in 1935, which ran:

> My dear Editorship,
>
> I am in Poland, and I want English learn. I want this tongue know, which is most popular in the world, the tongue which speak Englishmen, the rulers of two-thirds [!] of the world.

Behind these sentences loom the two questions which must interest every one who has our speech at heart, and which have constantly recurred during the preceding chapters—Who will speak English in the future? and, What form will it take in their mouths? Those who, like us, have attempted to answer these questions regard the conclusions they arrive at according to their

predilections and upbringing. One school is represented very well by Mr. Basil de Sélincourt, who a few years ago put out an elegant trifle called *Pomona, or the Future of English.* In it he wrote, "a . . . horror fills the mind of the humanist when it occurs to him that English may be destined to be the language of the human race. *What* English? he wonders. . . . In plain truth, it is already spoken too generally for its good, and . . . its expansion may yet prove its undoing." Whereupon Professor J. Y. T. Greig, of Armstrong College, Newcastle-on-Tyne, replied to him in a vigorous pamphlet, published in the same series and entitled, *Breaking Priscian's Head, or English as she will be spoke and wrote.* Here is the gist of his opinion, in his own words: "Certain traditions, prejudices, and proclivities must be sacrificed, certain new principles accepted, certain new and far-reaching liberties conceded. It is possible that no conscious efforts by English-speakers will avail to save the language as a whole; that in fifty or a hundred years the American form of it will have broken clean away . . . but another and more desirable event may be conceived of, though whether it is probable none can yet predict. Scotsmen, Irishmen, Welshmen, Englishmen who reject the Public School standard, Canadians, Australians, South Africans, and New Zealanders may come more or less consciously to an agreement with Americans that the English language shall be maintained as an organic whole, despite dialectical differences; and that it shall be helped everywhere to develop freely in accordance with the natural laws of human speech in general, and the peculiar habits and whigmaleeries of English speech in particular."

UNIVERSAL ENGLISH

In speculating on the probable position of English in the world a century hence, the expansion that has occurred during the last hundred years affords us some ground to go upon. But an alteration in the political relations of the English-speaking peoples to each other and to the other peoples of the world would affect the position that English speech will occupy, and any answers that might be suggested in response to questions about that position would be conditional. Future developments that may arise from the momentum of the language itself might seem, perhaps, to be more within the scope of inference. There are processes now occurring in English which must work themselves out. But these phenomena affect each other in ways too numerous to be grasped by the mind as a whole, so that even if we could contemplate English as developing in isolation, every conclusion drawn would have to be tentative. And it will not be allowed to develop in isolation; we and ours will have to reckon with the former habits of speech of people like the film magnate who, no doubt, was not conscious of making a compromise when he remarked, at the time of the invention of the talkies, "Pictures are going from bad to voice," and the Chinaman who, when his lips framed the word "pidgin" in trying to say "business," felt, we may be sure, that he had completely mastered that part of the tongue that Milton wrote and Chatham spoke. Even within Britain similar problems present themselves. At the moment when these words are being penned, an election address is being issued in three languages (English, Modern Greek, and Hebrew) to the electors of the Abbey division of Westminster, the home of modern English and the heart of the Empire. In short, the lines

of inquiry that we have disentangled cannot in reality be separated. The future form of English will depend upon who will speak it, as well as upon tendencies and potentialities embedded in the language itself.

The plain man, when asked to define speech, probably replies that it is a set of sounds by means of which people communicate their ideas to each other. Such a notion is entirely superficial. If that were all, we, the English, should still have an interest in the world speech of the future, if there is to be one. We should wish it to be English, or that English should enter into its composition as largely as possible, because we should thereby be saved from the necessity of learning another speech. But such a ground would be trivial in comparison with the issues actually involved.

Thomas Hobbes, in chapter four of *Leviathan*, wrote, " . . . the most noble and profitable invention of all others was that of *Speech*, consisting of names or appellations, and their connection; whereby men register their thoughts; recall them when they are past; and also declare them one to another for mutual utility and conversation; without which there had been amongst men neither Commonwealth, nor Society, nor Contract, nor Peace, no more than amongst lions, bears, and wolves." Hobbes listed communication of ideas third among the uses of speech, giving the first place to the relation between it and thought. His expression, " whereby men register their thoughts," is perhaps not very clear; a modern author would probably have used " objectify " or " render definite " for " register." Psychology has now gone further, and asserts that speech and thought are one and indivisible, speech being

the outside, the body, of thought, and thought the soul of speech. It follows that the future of English, that is, the form that it will take and its future sway, is no matter of academic theorizing. Speculation about it is far more than an inquiry into the sounds that speakers of English may employ, and the words and sentences they may utter. In it are involved the future lives, and modes of thought, and manners and customs and characters of a great part of the population of the world, and perhaps, ultimately, of the whole world.

The speech of the English people is inextricably bound up with our public and private character. We made and are making it, and it has maintained and is maintaining us. It is us.[1] It would not have been what it is if we had not been a practical race, a race that placed substance before form, a race that had obtained and loved freedom, that believed in the dignity of the common man and the inalienable right of each person to happiness and the means of livelihood: a race that believed in the political and legal equality of all men, and in the sovereignty of the law. It enshrines our ideals of character and conduct, our humanity, our hopes of immortality, our rationality—and irrationality—and all our aspirations—and prejudices—as surely as our literature does. Those who in the future will speak it, whether they are our descendants or from whatever race they come and whatever tongue their ancestors have spoken, will come under its influence, and will acquire the type of mind of which it is, in its spoken and written forms, the outward expression and audible and visible shape.

They will not be all alike, any more than we are all

[1] Variant reading: It is we. But compare "Be thou me, impetuous one," in Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*. Pusillanimous reading, "It is ourselves."

alike. But, on the whole, they will resemble each other more closely than they will resemble men whose native speech is not English. Although, as we know, there is room within the scope of our national character for ten thousand shades of opinion, these are slight compared with the deep differences of mental constitution that separate us from those that speak other tongues. Our incapacity to understand even the Frenchman, our nearest neighbour and closest ally, is notorious, and we are as great a puzzle to him. To literary Europe Byron was the greatest English poet of the nineteenth century ; and where is the Englishman who is wholly sympathetic to French poetry ?

That the adoption of a tongue implies the adoption of a view of life has been recognized by many observers. Writing in 1936 Count Bernstorff (*Memoirs*, English translation, p. 3), who was the ambassador of Germany at Washington till the United States of America declared war upon the Central Powers in 1917, says, " It was my fate during the war to occupy a position that brought me into the sharpest conflict with England, for at Washington the diplomatic duel was almost exclusively between Germany and England. In this struggle England proved victorious. . . . Her victory was facilitated by the predominance of the English language. I fancy it would not be incorrect to say that the English language won the war. Thanks to its wide diffusion, the whole world saw, and still sees, through English spectacles." The last part of his assertion would not, perhaps, be made by Count Bernstorff so confidently at the present time, when political ideals opposed to freedom are being prosperously proclaimed and applied.

The war that devastated Europe between 1914 and

1918 was caused, it may be urged, by the clashing of national aspirations. But what is a nation ? It has been defined as an extensive aggregate of persons, so closely associated with each other by common descent and language as to form a distinct race, usually organized as a separate political state, and occupying a definite territory. This definition contains a number of characteristics, and does not state which is the essential one. It is a fact that nations are usually organized as separate states and occupy definite territory, but they are not invariably so organized. Common physical descent has been put forward in recent times as the true basis of nationality, but how many among us can trace his ancestry with certainty for more than a few generations ? We have only to look around us to see that the Englishmen of to-day are of very varied physical origins. Although those whose forefathers have lived for a considerable time in England regard themselves as pure English, we all know that they have in their veins the blood, perhaps of neolithic man, perhaps of Phenician traders, of Celts, of Roman legionaries who might be drawn from Syria or the Euphrates or Africa or any part of Europe, of Saxons, Scandinavians, and Normans (themselves a highly mixed race). Indeed, according to Mr. Wyndham Lewis, there are no English, but only so many million people living in England and speaking English. Yet a bellicose post-war German professor has said (and said truly) that in the event of a foreign invasion of England the population would rise as one man. The French, the Germans, the Spaniards are equally mixed ; the Americans more mixed. Even the Jews, whose type is famous for its persistence, are—and apparently always were—a mixed race. But each of

these groups is inspired and bound into unity by a sense of common traditions and a common destiny.

The contrary view that this feeling of unity, the possession of which, if it is not the essence, is certainly an invariable and sufficient sign of nationality, is derived entirely from community of speech has been expressed in uncompromising terms by Mr. C. W. Alderson in his book, *The Extinction in Perpetuity of Armaments and War*. To Mr. Alderson physical affinity, flag, customs, creeds, and political and legal institutions are absolutely nothing. To him the separation of the American colonies is an historical illusion. "Any nationality" he says, "can be manufactured at will, simply by controlling the language," and again, "A government is only a puppet; the strings are pulled by language." Somewhat similar ideas are entertained by those who wish to revive the ancient language of Ireland, one of whom recently declared at a meeting in Trinity College, Dublin, that, unless Erse could be substituted for English in the Irish Free State, the efforts that gave the country its present status would have been made in vain.

Such an attitude seems to be extreme. Even though, as was argued a few paragraphs back, the speech is the man, an organized society is more than the individuals of which it is composed. Although Canada and Australia speak the same tongue, we feel that there is a difference between the typical Canadian and the typical Australian. The political and legal institutions of the United States, although originally founded upon those of England, have been modified in the course of years, and have made a difference to the outlook of the average American citizen that can be felt. We cannot, then, give unqualified assent to the proposition that the sentiment

of nationality is based solely upon speech. But, without going so far, we can agree that the boundaries separating the nations are linguistic rather than racial, and that language is the preponderating ingredient in nationality. The government of the United States has shown practical recognition of the truth of the belief by enacting a federal law that no language except English may be taught in the primary schools of any state of the Union, although each state administers its own educational system.

When, therefore, in the first part of this book the structure of English and the manner in which it has developed and may develop have been inspected, and the nature of the English vocabulary and the methods of word-formation likely to prevail in the future have been examined, aspects of the soul of the Englishman have been under contemplation as well as minutiæ of language. And when, in the second part, we proceeded to speculate on the likelihood of English becoming the universal tongue, every favourable conclusion we reached will imply modifications in the mental characteristics of those who will come to speak it.

INDEX

INDEX

INDEX

INDEX

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT
THE PRESS OF THE PUBLISHERS