

ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES OF NORTH AMERICA.

BY EDWARD E. HALE.

I WILL avail myself of the privilege of supplying the semi-annual report of the Council, to present to the younger members of the Society a review of the work which this Society has done in the special department which involves the study of the aboriginal languages of North America. If I repeat some suggestions which I have ventured to make at the previous meetings, it must be that it seems desirable that such work of the Society now for nearly a century should be understood and a record of it made which can be easily referred to.

It is undoubtedly true that as our population advances and the histories of different states of America assert themselves with more vigor, the particular study of the aborigines fills a less important part in American history than it did when the American Antiquarian Society was founded. At that time Isaiah Thomas showed in more ways than one his interest in the native tribes and their history, and special reference is made to the study of those tribes in the papers which belong to the history of the birth of the Society. Our third Librarian, Mr. Baldwin, lost his life by an accident which occurred when he was on a visit in Ohio for the study of the Indian remains in that state then so young. The first volume of the Society's Transactions, published in 1820, reprints Father Hennepin's papers on La Salle's voyage, and makes extracts from other documents referring to studies among the native Indians of what was then still called the West. The principal papers are Mr. Caleb Atwater's and Dr. Mitchill's. True to the reputation thus acquired and to all the traditions

of the Society, the second volume of our *Archæologia*, published in 1836, is devoted almost entirely to Mr. Gallatin's treatise on the Indian tribes and their languages. An obituary notice of Mr. Baldwin, who had recently died, is the only paper in that volume which does not relate entirely to the natives of the country. It is fair to say that this report of our associate, Mr. Gallatin, made a distinct forward step in the pathway which had been opened by Mr. Du Ponceau about twenty years before.

There is a rather curious similarity between the lives of these two great men. Du Ponceau was a Frenchman who left his own country and became an American in that French enthusiasm for America which was typified in the life of Lafayette. He arrived in this country in 1777 and was on the staff of Steuben. Gallatin was a Swiss, and with the same enthusiasm arrived in Machias, Maine, on the fourteenth of July, 1780. Each of them became a citizen of America, and each of them is identified with the earliest philosophical study, excepting John Eliot's, of the languages of the natives. As early as 1819, in a paper of Du Ponceau read before our associates of the Philosophical Society, Du Ponceau discovered to the world for the first time the remarkable character of the aboriginal languages from Greenland to Cape Horn. That paper of his challenged the attention of the philologists of Europe, and gave an importance to the study of dialects of different tribes and to languages absolutely distinct in their vocabulary from each other, which they had never seemed to deserve before. In the meanwhile, Mr. Gallatin, in the duty which he discharged as Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, had taken advantage of that position to collect from different Indian agents and other officers of the government at the West, information with regard to the languages spoken in different parts of the country. When he retired from public office his tastes as a scholar and especially as a philologist

asserted themselves again, and he prepared his remarkable Synopsis of the Indian Tribes. The directors of our Society were glad to assume the publication of this treatise, and from that day to this, it has been the central textbook of students of aboriginal languages. In that synopsis he prints a large map of the United States, and for his purpose divides the native tribes among the Eskimaux, the Athapascas, the Algonquian-Lenape, the Iroquois, the Cherokees, the Creeks, the Choctas and Chicasas, the Sioux, the Black Feet, and the Pawnees,—a classification which has proved sufficiently convenient to maintain its place in discussions on the subject.

The settlement of California and Alaska has shown that neither he nor anyone else apprehended the great number of vocabularies in the American languages. A very curious paper on this subject, by Mr. Horatio Hale, has shown the existence of nearly fifty vocabularies entirely distinct from each other north of Guatemala. Gallatin, however, Du Ponceau, and the other early students knew well that while the grammar of the American languages is the same from the Arctic Ocean to Cape Horn, an entire divergence would be found in the vocabularies. For instance, not a single word of our New England language was intelligible to the Iroquois of New York, nor was one word of their language intelligible to our Narragansetts or Mohegans; and since this observation was made, it has thrown new light on the nomad excursions of Indian tribes and their establishment in regions quite dissimilar to their old homes. Our learned associate Mr. Bartlett, in 1860, found the Apaches of the arid region of western America speaking the language of Athapascas which Richardson had already studied on the Arctic Ocean.

The most interesting single observation, perhaps, brought forward by Mr. Gallatin, was his discovery to the world that the Algonquian language, of which one dialect was spoken in Massachusetts, ranged farther than any

other among the native languages known to him. Indeed, the northwestern range of the Algonquian language is not yet accurately fixed. It is so easy for a family or a clan to emigrate a thousand miles under the simple arrangements of the Indians, that the philologist finds to his surprise a dialect which seems far from its own home. Mr. Gallatin, thus early, found Algonquian languages in Labrador. It had long been known that the language of eastern Virginia and of North Carolina was intelligible to our people in Massachusetts, and his map carries it as far as the headwaters of the Mississippi. It is worth while to say this, because it seems probable that if one gave to the word language a particular range, as for instance, if you class High German and Low German as one language or class, the Languedoc with the Italian language, you would class the Massachusetts Indians and the Indians of Labrador with the Powhatan Indians and the Chippewa Indians.¹

Mr. Wilberforce Eames, of the Lenox Library, prepared what is for us the invaluable bibliography of the Eliot literature. No work of the kind has ever been more carefully done. Mr. Pilling's vocabulary of the Algonquian languages fills more than six hundred pages. Mr. Eames's titles of John Eliot's work alone covers a tenth part of this great volume, and besides this there are contributions right and left to the literature of different sub-departments which really relate to the great central work of Eliot.

It is nearly three hundred years since a few words of the Algonquian language were put into print in the fourth

¹ And in fact, as I believe I have said here before, when I gave to a Chippewa boy, a student at Hampton, a list of thirty words of the Massachusetts language, he brought the list back to me next day after conference with his fellow students, and among them they had given the correct definition to each of our words. In many instances they were antiquated and as unintelligible as some words in Chaucer would be to the children in our grammar schools. But the little club of Indian students had been able to interpret them all. I found our word succotash, for instance, in use among the Ojibwas west of Lake Superior, although they no longer make succotash from corn and beans, but they substitute the buds of the white pine.

volume of Purchas's Pilgrimes.¹ Since that time a considerable literature of the Algonquian has accumulated. Of this we are fortunate in having a very complete account in the valuable volume of Mr. Pilling. It is much the largest bibliography of any of the native languages of North America; and I think no South American language can rival it in extent, certainly, none can in any study of the subject like Mr. Pilling's and Mr. Eames's. It would be difficult to guess even, with any degree of accuracy, what number of people now use it in daily intercourse.² It is nearly certain that no one in Massachusetts, of the native blood, can speak a word of it. The late Mrs. Mitchell and Mrs. Robinson, ladies who were thought to be descendants of King Philip, retained a few words, but it is said that their descendants have none. Till quite lately aged documents in the Gay Head dialect were used in the transfer of estates,—may now be perhaps; and Mr. Barton will show the manuscript correspondence in one or other of the Massachusetts dialects.³

But when we go outside our own jurisdiction, in Nova Scotia, in eastern Maine and in Canada and Wisconsin and Minnesota, there is no lack of people who know no other language. The great Ojibwa tribe, which our school books called Chippeway, extends more than one thousand miles from east to west, and almost as many from north to south. Our learned countryman, Mr. Gilfillan, the author of "The Ojibway," knows his Ojibway as well as any gentleman who hears this report knows English. His friend the late Bishop Whipple said of him, "Gilfillan

¹Curiously enough in the original edition of Rosier the vocabulary does not appear.

²I should say that more than 150,000 people do. But there are men who have a better right to guess than I who would not rate the number so high, while others would rate it higher.

³It is possible that there may be living at Gay Head some Indians who can speak some words of it. There are none at Mashpee and there are none in the Narragansett Country, as I am assured by my neighbors. My summer home is in Narragansett.

dreams in Ojibway." When Mr. Gilfillan read to a body of Ojibwa gentlemen the Lord's Prayer from Eliot's Bible, they did not at the first moment understand what he was reading. But then some familiar phrase caught their attention, they unravelled, so to speak, the "archaisms" and changes of pronunciation, and recognized every word in one form or another.

When, therefore, it is carelessly said sometimes that Eliot's Bible is a wretched monument of the waste of uniting industry and learning, the remark simply implies that the speaker does not know what he is talking about. Eliot's Bible is the most important book in the literature of a great race, now almost extinct, and, if you please to think so, to be extinct in another century. But it is a perfect example of a system of grammar which proves to be more complete in detail than any of the grammars of any language known in Europe. Its study indeed involves considerations in philological science, the value of which is not yet comprehended. As a vehicle only for the study of language, therefore, Eliot's Bible is a central book of the first importance.

It is with the greatest pleasure that the Council is able to announce the appointment by the Directors of the Carnegie Institution of Mr. William Jones, to the special duty of studying the Algonquian language, and we may hope that before long we may have at hand the results of his studies and investigations. Mr. Gilfillan has taken up his residence in Washington, and as may be hoped will be able to publish the results of his life-long intimacy with the Ojibwas. Rev. Mr. Wright, known familiarly as "Indian Wright" at the College at Oberlin, to distinguish him from another eminent professor of the same name, will be able to favor the philologist with the results of his studies of forty years. We will not then regard Mr. Trumbull's book as work upon a dead language.

It is an interesting question whether provision may

not be made for preserving in the future the knowledge of a tongue which has been spoken in regions more widely parted than the provinces of the Roman Empire. Our friend Dr. Horsford enriched the library at Wellesley College with his choice collection of Eliot literature. Is there not some Mæcenas who will endow a fellowship or scholarship there, which may provide for the instruction in the Algonquian language of one or two young women, at the age when people learn languages easily. Let their lives be insured that they may live to be four-score and ten. Let them every year make Algonquian fashionable among the young ladies of their time. Let the familiar phrases for *très bien, comment vous portez-vous?* of Mohegans and Pequots and Nipmucks, become familiar among the young ladies of 1910 and 1920. Let an adequate acquaintance with the language of the Charles River be made requisite for initiation into the secret societies. Then our successors, as they celebrate the Landing of Columbus, in October, 2004, as they look with friendly eye on Mr. Trumbull's Dictionary, will thank us for the care with which the Society of today has edited Mr. Trumbull's contribution to the literature and history of mankind.

The publication of Mr. Trumbull's Dictionary has already stimulated interest in the whole group of the Algonquian-Lenape languages. The people who speak in different forms of that language are scattered between Labrador and Alaska. It would be fair to say that the Algonquian-Lenape is now spoken over a larger territorial range than the Latin language ever commanded as a living tongue. If, however, this interesting language, so complete in its grammar as to challenge the wonder of all philologists; is to be carefully studied, even by a few students, we ought to have in a convenient form, for instance, one or two text-books. Such a book as fills a little part of this requisition is the reprint of Eliot's Primer which can be readily purchased in Edinburgh, and which our

booksellers will soon have at hand if any demand for it should be created. This was reprinted by Mr. Andrew Elliot in Edinburgh in 1877. It could be wished, however, that one of our school-book publishers would put in modern type and print, perhaps, one of the Gospels from Eliot's Bible, the working part of Roger Williams's Key to the Indian Languages. It is hardly the business of the Anti-quarian Society to reproduce the school-books of today, but the Council ventures to express the hope that a popular edition of these facilities for the study of the Massachusetts language may be furnished by some enterprising publisher. An edition, to speak of one of such books, of Mr. Trumbull's Indian Names of Places, etc., in and on the Borders of Connecticut, would do for popular use, even among amateurs in language.

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