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SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

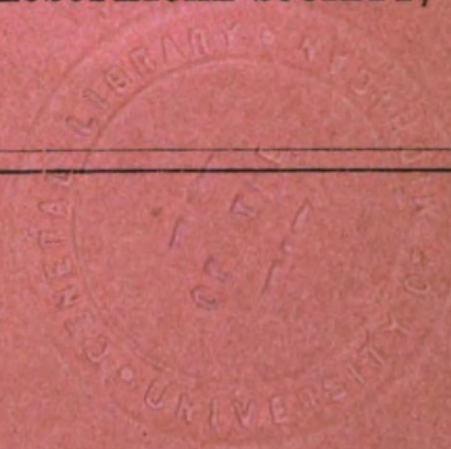
OF THE

COMMITTEE

APPOINTED TO CONSIDER AN

INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE.

READ BEFORE THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY,
DEC. 7, 1888.





*Supplementary Report of the Committee Appointed to Consider an
International Language.*

Your Committee desires to present a Report of Progress at this time with reference to its former observations on the adoption of an International Language and the success of the proposal of the Society to call an International Congress to consider this project.

We may begin by saying that the general subject has visibly increased in importance in the minds of the public. A number of new plans to achieve the end in view have been suggested, and modifications of those existing have been offered. A reference to some of these may not be out of place, as proving that the subject in which the Society has interested itself is not a sterile or insignificant one.

Two of these works are by American authors, and advocate the adoption as a universal language of English, more or less modified. One is entitled "World-English, the Universal Language," by Prof. Alexander Melville Bell, author of "Visible Speech," etc. His claim is that English in its present grammatic form is simple and clear, and in all respects adapted for general adoption but for its incongruous orthography. This he proposes to remedy by a new phonetic alphabet, which he presents and illustrates. It contains forty-two letters, many of them new in form, others old in form, but distinguished by diacritical marks. The accent on the vowels is represented to the eye, and the print is consequently highly complex.

The numerous difficulties of English grammar and lexicography are of course not in the least abated by the phonetic system of Prof. Bell. What these difficulties are has been urged with much earnestness by the second writer to whom we refer, Mr. Elias Molee, of Dakota, in his work, "Plea for an American Language or Germanic English." After setting forth the insuperable obstacles to the general acceptance of English, he proposes to remove them by introducing a series of modifications into its alphabet, its grammar and its lexicon. Various new letters and a quantity of diacritical signs are called in to represent the sounds. The inflectional grammatical system is selected, and the additions to the vocabulary are chiefly from the Teutonic languages. It is obvious, from what we have previously said on the evolution of the Aryan tongues, that this form of grammar is a recurrence to obsolescent principles, and the preference awarded to the Teutonic group

is inconsistent with the broad principles on which a modern universal language should be founded.

European writers have also not been without their suggestions towards the same end. One of the most noteworthy, if not for its practicability, at least for its scholarly presentation, is the work of Prof. Dr. Aug. Boltz, of Darmstadt, entitled *Hellenisch die Allgemeine Gelehrtensprache der Zukunft*, in which the author presents for adoption a modified form of the classic Greek. This, he thinks, has claims superior to any modern language, and advantages beyond any new creation in language which could be devised. It is not at all likely that he will count many disciples, the Greek alphabet alone being sufficient to frighten most men of modern times.

A certain degree of popularity has been obtained by the *Spelin* of Prof. George Bauer, of Agram, in Croatia. It is based upon Volapük, and adopts the same grammatic devices, but with greater simplicity; it is much more euphonious than the creation of Schleyer, and to those who favor a language on any such plan must commend itself by its greater consistency. It requires but six vowels and fifteen consonants to express its repertory of sounds. Of course, its synthetic and inflectional character is, in our opinion, a return to worn-out and barbarous expedients certain not to be acceptable to the civilized man of the future and contrary to linguistic evolution.

It was to be expected that the opinions advanced by your Committee—opinions in many respects both novel and positive—should have been met in various quarters with opposition. This has been the case. The most noteworthy rejoinder is that of the well-known linguist, Mr. Alexander J. Ellis, speaking for the Philological Society of London. In a paper, some forty pages in length, published in the Transactions of that Society, this writer actively combats both the theories advocated by your Committee, and the call for a Congress to consider the question. Not, however, that Mr. Ellis underestimates the desirability of a universal language or considers the project utopian or untimely. On the contrary, he is an earnest advocate of the scheme. He heartily coincides with everything in that direction which any one will urge. What, then, is the animus of his long, labored and acrid opposition to the modest proposal that a Congress of competent men should be convened to consider it? The explanation is in a word. He is a Volapükist, a committed Volapükist, and the Philological Society is hasty enough to allow itself to be officially committed likewise to the imperfect invention of Schleyer, not even opening its mind to the consideration of any other and perhaps better plan. If this is the position assumed by a society calling itself scientific, its appreciation of the spirit of science is indeed unfortunate.

What are Mr. Ellis' censures of the Committee's Report? He makes much of some typographical errors; he meets a number of our censures of Schleyer's Volapük by stating that "other writers" upon that inven-

tion do not adopt the features to which we objected; a statement totally irrelevant, as our remarks applied solely to Volapük proper, and not to its dozen variants and imitations; he cannot and does not deny the needless difficulties of the Volapük alphabet; and he takes great offense that we recommended the Aryan languages, especially the half-dozen most cultivated and extended of them, as the proper basis for the hoped-for universal tongue. This latter is really his main objection, and it is an objection which we shall not pretend to answer in this connection. It is enough to reaffirm what seem to us the two sun-clear principles for the formation of a world-language, if one ever is formed: First, that it should be based, phonetically, grammatically and lexicographically, on the languages of the five or six most cultivated nations in the world (all of whom happen to be Aryan); and, secondly, that these languages should be studied for this purpose in their most recent evolutions, in order to imprint on this world-speech those characteristics toward which Aryan speech has for thousands of years been trending.

It seems to us that any one who denies the latter principle can have no proper conception of the philosophic relation of speech to thought, of logic to grammar, of grammatic matter to grammatic form, and must be blind to the indisputable fact that the changes in language mean the evolution of language from lower to higher stages, from inadequate to adequate expression. It seems incredible that any one acquainted with the distinction between form-languages, like the English, and formless languages, like the Ural-Altai group, could give the preference to the latter; and yet Volapük distinctly associates itself with the latter.

Its deficiencies have been repeatedly pointed out since the publication of our Report. Our fellow-member, Mr. Horatio Hale, has dealt with it trenchantly in *The Critic* (October, 1888); Prof. Addison Hoge, in *The Nation* (Feb. 9, 1888), has exhaustively analyzed it and shown its weak points; and a number of other periodicals have been forwarded the Society containing similar expressions of opinions.

Certainly if we have not accomplished more, we have aided in displaying the ineffective character of the claims of Volapük to become a world-language; and that we have accomplished this is the true secret of the labored attack of Mr. Ellis and the London Philological Society.

The justice of our strictures has been recognized both at home and abroad. Thus Leopold Einstein, of Nuremberg, in a work on "The International World-Language Problem"—himself for years a zealous advocate and teacher of Volapük—says that of all the critics of that scheme, "especially the American Philosophical Society" has pointed out where its short-comings are, and himself renounces it in favor of the Aryan principles (*La Linguo Internacia*, p. 1, Nürnberg, 1888). Dr. F. S. Krauss, of Vienna, fully acknowledges that the defects we

pointed out will prove fatal to Mr. Schleyer's scheme, and adds, "*Beis uns ist für Volapük kein Boden!*"

Herr Julius Lott, another Vienna linguist, for years a zealous apostle of Volapük, has been so completely converted, chiefly by the Report of your Committee, that in his late work on the world-language problem, he expresses himself thus: "I consider that any substantial betterment of Schleyer's language, on the plan of the Volapük, is wholly impossible, because the inventor, in its very construction, pursued a false route, or, plainly, he put the halter on the horse's tail," p. 7. He therefore passes over entirely to the Aryan system which we have so strongly urged, and is now publishing a work in numbers to explain the scheme—and a work, we are glad to add, of signal merit.

Whether Mr. George J. Henderson, whose book, "*Lingua, an International Language,*" which appeared in London last spring, was familiar with our Report or not, he does not say; at any rate, he fully recognizes the radical defects of Schleyer's plan, and ranges himself positively with those who seek to place the proposed international tongue on an Aryan basis.

Of course the delivery of the London Philological Society, bound hand and foot into the Volapük camp, excited high jubilation among the warriors beneath its banners. The Volapük journal in Vienna, *Rund um die Welt*, begins a four-page leader with the heartfelt shout, "Gottlob, es wird Tag!" "Thank God, the day breaks!" And the editor goes on to say that from the 15th of June, 1888, when Mr. Ellis' Report was read, a new epoch began in the history of Volapük. Other advocates of the system were not less gratified at the Philological Society's questionable procedure.

There were Volapükists, on the other hand, who saw that at least some of the objections urged by your Committee were unanswerable, and sought to avoid them by charging them to the "eccentricities and crudities of Mr. Schleyer," adding the explanation that the Volapük academies had removed most of these objectionable features from the worthy father's invention. This, however, excited the ire of Father Schleyer himself, and he came out in June of this year with an emphatic *ipse dixit* which must have set the Volapük academicians in some confusion. "Any resolution," says Herr Schleyer, "any resolution of the Academy not accepted by the inventor is *null*, even if the whole of the members united against the inventor."

It is quite evident that our Report has let in some light among the Volapükist, as the *Rund um die Welt* says, but not exactly in the manner the editor of that journal supposes. By that light it is plain to see that Volapük even among its warmest adherents is splitting up into dialects and dissimilarities which will soon bring its advocates into the confusion of the builders of the tower of Babel.

A far more important Report than that of Mr. Ellis was one presented to the Société Zoologique de France, by MM. M. Chaper and

Dr. P. Fischer, relative to the proposition emanating from the American Philosophical Society. We name it as certainly the reply the most scientific in spirit and intelligent in grasp of any we have received, and we distinguish it as such in spite of the fact that it attacks with earnestness the position your Committee has assumed on many points. Thus it is very severe on our opinion that modern mixed languages or jargons should receive especial attention in forming a proposed world-language; indeed, it denies that there is need of forming any new language at all, and declares in favor of the adoption of some now living tongue as the international scientific and commercial speech. On the other hand, it is equally emphatic in the opinion that such a general language is most desirable, and cordially seconds the proposal of our Society for a Congress to consider the question.

Similar published approvals have come to us in the pages of *La Cronica Rosa*, Messina, Italy; *El Correo*, Madrid, and various other periodicals. The members of the Committee have even been individually honored by a dedication to them of Dr. P. Steiner's *Uebungen zur Pasilingua*, in recognition, as he expresses it, "of their philanthropic efforts in linguistic science." The well-known English scientific periodical, *Nature*, thought the Report of sufficient value to republish it in full, and an extended analysis and criticism of it were published in German by Prof. George Bauer, while another one was written in French in the *Cosmos*, May 5, 1888.

Of direct adhesions to the proposal for a Congress we may especially mention in our own country the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which, at its meeting in August, 1888, appointed representatives to attend the Congress should it be convened. The University of South Carolina writes through its President: "The effort of the American Philosophical Society commands our hearty approval and sympathy;" and the distinguished linguist, Prof. F. A. Marsh, President of Lafayette College, says: "The object seems a worthy one, and I am glad that the American Philosophical Society has undertaken to promote it."

The Senate of the University of Edinburgh officially "express sincere sympathy with the object;" the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters "acknowledges fully the scientific importance of the subject;" the Geographical Association of Halle considers the aim "one most desirable both in the interests of science and ordinary intercourse;" the Batavian Society of Rotterdam expresses the hope "that these efforts will be most successful," and similar expressions of cordial approval have been received from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Georgia Historical Society, the Colorado Scientific Society, the Royal Society of Victoria, the Yorkshire Polytechnic Society, and the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

Of individual expressions of opinion by distinguished specialists, we permit ourselves to quote the following from a letter from Prof. James

Geikie, of Edinburgh: "I agree with the conclusions come to by your Society, and think that the time has come for the serious consideration of the question of a new language." The Rev. W. S. Lach-Szyrma, himself a prominent linguistic scholar, writes: "I believe, in spite of the decision of the London Philological Society, that the plan you suggest is the sole mode of introducing a universal language." The Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, of Boston, says: "I can see nothing but good to result from the resolution of your Society," and the President of Haverford College states that the Report of the Committee meets his cordial endorsement.

It is gratifying to your Committee and complimentary to the Society to have received such outspoken recognition of their efforts as the above extracts exhibit. They completely set at rest the fears felt in some quarters that the Society had ventured upon a subject of doubtful importance or uncertain judiciousness.

Naturally several of the societies who fully approve the plan of a Congress are, for financial or other reasons, not in a position to send delegates to a Congress; of the total number of replies received, about twenty have expressed their willingness to do so. As some months may be allowed to elapse before a call for a Congress is issued, your Committee does not recommend any present action, and desires to be continued.

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Committee.