

Effect of War on English as World Language

Discussed by Brander Matthews.



lish for this position as a medium of international communication has long been obvious, and there was little doubt that English was slowly gaining on French, even if it had not already passed it in the race. For example, French was no longer the sole and necessary language of diplomacy. Again, owing to the fact that the British and the Americans are more abundant and more persistent travelers than the French, it has been evident that the Dutch and the Italians, the Swiss and the Scandinavians were turning more and more to English, even if there was little relaxing in the potency of the appeal of French literature. And equally undeniable has been the effect of British leadership in finance, in commerce and in manufactures, whereby it has been peculiarly profitable for men of affairs in every part of the world to acquire English, if only for the purpose of doing business in it.

Learn English for Profit.

This increase in the number of those who possess English as a second tongue in addition to their own native idiom is not due to any superiority of the language itself any more than the former more or less universal use of French and of Latin was due to any superiority of these languages. Foreigners are led to learn English for political, financial and commercial reasons, and not at all because they hold the language itself to be the best fitted to serve as an international medium. The world-wide use of Latin for nearly a score of centuries was the result, not of its own merits, undeniable as these are, but to the military prowess and to the political capacity of the Roman people. So the subsequent popularity of French was the result partly of the abiding and compelling charm of French literature and partly of the political pre-eminence of France from the brilliant boyhood of Louis XIV to the dark downfall of Napoleon III.

Yet English is no worse fitted for universal use than French or Latin; and perhaps it is even better adapted than either, because of the simplicity of its grammatical structure and because of the richness of its double vocabulary, French and Romance. Even if English is not quite the grammatically language that Richard Grant White held it to be, it has far fewer grammatical complexities than any other of the great languages of the world, ancient or modern. Owing to the fortunate fusion of the Saxon and the Norman the English long ago rid themselves of the artificial genders, the embarrassing declensions and agreements, and the cumbersome conjugations which still abound in French and even now in German, as they abounded in Latin and Greek. Biologically English is the most advanced of all the modern languages in that it has shed the grammatical intricacies characteristic of all primitive tongues.

Better for Its Directness.

Now and again, it is true, scholars of our stock, trained in their youth to an appreciation of the delicate shadings of meaning made possible in Greek by declension and conjugation, have been moved to lament the disappearance of these refinements from our stalwart and masculine speech. But these scholars are only a few at most; and they are far outnumbered by the students of language who rejoice that our tongue has rid itself of these survivals from linguistic juvenility. The Danish historian of English, Professor Jespersen, is emphatic in asserting that our language is superior to other modern languages very

largely because it has dropped these outworn complexities. And an equally open-minded and far-seeing German student of speech, Jacob Grimm, had earlier declared that "in richness, in compact adjustment of parts and in pure intelligence no other of the living languages can be compared with English, not even our own German, which must cast off many imperfections before it can boldly enter on its career."

Whatever its career may be hereafter, German is now severely handicapped in its expansion by its retention of primitive grammatical complexities which have been discarded by more advanced languages—by French to a great extent and by English to a still greater extent. German is also made more difficult to acquire by its clinging to the clogged medieval alphabet long since discarded by the English and French, the Spaniards and the Italians in favor of the clearer Roman letters. And German will be still further unfitted for use as a world language if it succeeds in its present effort to purge its vocabulary of foreign words, casting out the universal "hotel" and "telephone," for example, in favor of the local "Gasthaus" and "Fernsprecher."

Easiest to Learn "By Ear."

As a direct result of the almost grammatical simplicity of structure, English is by far the easiest language to learn by word of mouth—by the ear alone. But English is unfortunately far less easy to acquire from the printed page, that is to say, by the eye, because its orthography is as unnatural as its syntax is natural. The ideal of a national spelling is that there should be a single symbol for every sound and a single sound for every symbol, and if this ideal could be attained there would be no need of the pronouncing dictionary and of the spelling book. Now, this ideal is now attained, if not completely at least substantially, in Spanish and in Italian, languages in which the foreigner can learn to read without delay and in which the children are not compelled to waste years in a barren memorizing of long lists in a speller. This ideal is not even approached in German, in French or in English. Misleading and absurd as the spelling of French and German often is, the spelling of English is far worse. We have half a dozen symbols for every sound and we give half a dozen sounds to the same symbol. Our spelling is illogical, incoherent and chaotic, and no other language, ancient or modern, has ever had a group of orthographic inconsistencies as absurd as "though," "through," "cough," "tough," "tough" and "rough."

Hinders Its Own Diffusion.

It has been said—although probably without warrant—that when the Japanese were engaged in taking over the manifold appliances of modern civilization they considered seriously a proposition to give up their own melodious language and to adopt English as their official speech, and that the determining cause of their final rejection of this suggestion was the surpassing absurdity of our spelling. Even if there were no foundation for this tale—and it is most unlikely that a proud people like the Japanese would ever consider seriously the surrender of its mother tongue—it is an indisputable fact that our uncivilized orthography is an obvious hindrance to the wider diffusion in English. Happily, there are signs that the two peoples who speak English are slowly awakening to the immense disadvantages of our spelling, and that steps are likely to be taken

in the immediate future to regularize it more or less and to make it fitter for world-wide use.

Yet when all is said that needs to be said about the grammatical simplicity and the orthographic complexity of English, the fact remains that it is not by its own merits that any language spreads itself abroad.

The steady expansion of English in the future will be due to the same factors which have brought about the expansion in the past—the masterful energy of the stock that speaks the language.

If English is to continue to press forward this will be because of the enterprise, the industry, the imagination and the courage of the Americans and of the British. If English is to become the second language of all educated men this will be due to the ability of the Americans and the British to hold their own in the intense international rivalry in the arts of peace, in literature, in manufactures, in commerce, in finance and in diplomacy—a rivalry certain to reveal itself intenser than ever before as soon as this war is over.

What Will the War Do?

Of course, the future of English as a world language will depend to some extent upon the result of the war itself. If the British empire should be broken up, the blow would be hard to bear; and if the German empire should be able to hold any large portion of the countries now overrun by its armies there would be a corresponding advantage to the German language. Even if the German empire should be able only to regain its lost colonies this would be to the disadvantage of English, although it is to be noted that Germany has not been successful in persuading its subjects to establish themselves in its own colonies, always under strict government control. Apparently, a German subject, who migrates from his native land, prefers to go to a country where he feels himself free from the meticulous supervision which has restricted his liberty at home.

It seems likely also that there will be very little emigration from Germany when peace is declared. In the first place, the fatherland, after the enormous losses of the war, will need all its subjects to build itself up again; and, in the second place, Germans will not be immediately welcome in the dependencies of the nations with which the empire has been at war. In the neutral countries, however, and especially in South America, the Germans will make strenuous efforts to recapture the trade they have lost during the war. Yet here again the rivalry of the German language is less dangerous than might be supposed at first sight, because the success of German commercial enterprise has been due largely to the willingness of the Germans to learn and to employ the language of the several peoples with whom they desired to do business. The Americans and the British rather expect the foreigner to learn English if he wants to trade with them, and sometimes the foreigner has taken the trouble to do this. The Germans do not take their language with them, and they make no attempt to force the foreigner to learn German.

Competition of German Decreases.

Still another characteristic of the German will tend to diminish the effect of the commercial competition of the next few years. The men who have English for their mother tongue not only take their language with them; they take an abiding pride in the race

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ALTHOUGH nobody can deny the truth of George Eliot's assertion that "of all the forms of human error prophecy is the most gratuitous," we can none of us refrain from speculating upon the deep and wide consequences which will necessarily follow upon the cessation of the mightiest war in the history of mankind. There are scores of questions in our minds as to the immediate future after the coming of peace, when the racial energies now fiercely bent on destruction shall be again directed toward construction, and when men are free once more to work out their own salvation in their own fashion.

Some of these inquiries are of immense importance to all of us, and some of them seem to have only a curious interest to a few here and there. A question which has presented itself to many is as to the effect this great conflict is likely to have upon the expansion of the English language. Is the war going to help the spread of our noble tongue? Or is it going to hinder the diffusion of English and to halt the marvelous increase of the English-speaking peoples—an increase which was one of the most significant of the many significant events of the 19th century.

At the end of the 18th century there were probably 28,000,000 to 22,000,000 human beings who had English for their mother-tongue, most of them being natives of the British Isles, although perhaps a quarter of them were immigrants or the descendants of immigrants in the United States, in Canada, in India and in various sparsely settled British colonies. At the end of the 19th century the number of the inhabitants of Great Britain, of the United States, of Canada and of Australia was probably almost seven times as large as it had been 100 years earlier, and nearly all these 130,000,000 spoke English, even if it was not their native speech, and they were bringing up their children to speak English. Those who had to use English in their every-day life probably outnumbered nearly two to one those who had German for their mother tongue, as they probably outnumbered nearly three to one those whose native speech was either French or Spanish.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in view of this extraordinary growth there were enthusiasts who hailed English as the future world language, the certain successor of the Latin, which for more than a thousand years had been the means of communication between peoples of the most diverse races. Some of these enthusiasts even ventured to predict a linguistic millennium, when many of the evil effects of the confusion of tongues would disappear, because nation after nation would come to perceive the benefit of abandoning its own language and of adopting English instead. Of course, this was only an idle dream; no race will ever surrender its inherited idiom, no matter what advantage—political or commercial—it might find in the exchange.

But even if English might never attain the supremacy and the comparative universality once enjoyed by Latin, it might hope to conquer for itself the proud position once held by French—as the second language acquired by all educated men in all parts of the world. Indeed, the rivalry of French and Eng-

MAN WHO WARNED PUBLIC TO SHUN 'WAR STOCK CRAZE' AMASSES \$6,000,000 IN STEEL

IT IS worse than hopeless for the average man to expect to amass a fortune or to make money by dealing in the stock market. And yet Samuel Untermyer, who made the foregoing statement in a letter addressed to the Rev. C. F. Reiser, Grace Methodist Episcopal Church, New York City, is today some \$6,000,000 richer than he was a year ago as the result of the phenomenal rise in the price of Bethlehem Steel stock.

But Mr. Untermyer has not speculated. Twelve years ago he bought 15,000 shares of stock of the Bethlehem Steel Company as an investment. For some of it he paid as little as \$25 a share, while none of it, according to the wisecracks in Wall Street, cost him more than twice that amount. The same stock today is selling around \$150 a share, and Mr. Untermyer still holds the bulk of the 15,000 shares which he bought originally.

Mr. Untermyer has repeatedly said that in all these years he has had nothing to do with the operations in Bethlehem Steel shares on the Stock Exchange; that he has done nothing to contribute to their recent sensational rise, and that he does not concern himself with the market price of the stock, but is holding it because of his belief in its intrinsic value. On its merits he believes the stock is worth \$1000 a share, although it has never paid a dividend.

This belief rests partly upon Mr. Untermyer's estimate of Charles M. Schwab as the greatest manufacturer and salesman of modern times. The story of how Mr. Untermyer came to form this estimate of Mr. Schwab and invest so heavily in the stock of the present Bethlehem Steel Corporation recalls an interesting episode in the financial history of the United States, when methods of so-called "high finance" were first exposed. This occurred early in 1902.

At this juncture Mr. Untermyer was retained by Roland B. Conklin, Max Nixon and certain other bondholders, together owning about \$800,000 of the bonds, face value.

On their behalf he began an action in New Jersey for the appointment of a receiver, declaring that the promotion and flotation of the securities was a fraud and that the properties, except the Bethlehem Steel works, had been turned over loaded with debt. A receiver was appointed after a struggle in which some of the best legal talent in the country, including such men as Richard V. Lindabury, William D. Guthrie and William Nelson Cromwell, were arrayed on the side of the opposition.

Then followed a long fight in the courts, during which the entire deal was exposed. Men who played a prominent part in Wall-street activities in those days fell under the searchlight of investigation which Mr. Untermyer and his associates turned on in hope of bringing to the surface some of the questionable practices that had been employed in connection with the deal. Messrs. Charles M. Schwab, Lewis Nixon and Leroy B. Dresser were among the men who were examined on the witness stand.

After a couple of years of this legal warfare a settlement was reached by which a new company, the present Bethlehem Steel Corporation, was formed, with \$15,000,000 each of preferred and common stock. The old bondholders received 60 per cent of new common stock and 40 per cent of new preferred stock of the Bethlehem corporation for their bonds, and Mr. Schwab received for his \$10,000,000 of Bethlehem bonds 60 per cent of new preferred and 40 per cent of new common stock. The men who owned the bonds of the old company that had sold as low as 8 cents on the dollar and exchanged them for the new stock, and have held them to the present time, have now a value equal to over 250 for their bonds. For conducting this fight Mr. Untermyer and his associ-

ate, Henry Wollman, were together paid a fee of \$250,000, that amount being agreed upon by all the bondholders. He studies Bethlehem Steel.

In the course of the litigation Mr. Untermyer, it appears, became thoroughly familiar with the merits of the various shipyards that had been brought into the combination, and made a careful study of the Bethlehem Steel property. Also he became well acquainted with Charles M. Schwab, and his confidence in the future of the company under Mr. Schwab's direction was such that he did not hesitate to invest in the shares of the new corporation which he was instrumental in bringing into existence.

The intrinsic value of Bethlehem Steel stock, Mr. Untermyer has said recently in a public statement, does not lie in the fact that the company has taken on a large number of orders for war supplies from the allies, but in the position of that company in times of peace to manufacture steel products on a profitable basis in competition with other large steel concerns in this country.

While Wall street operators have sought to stimulate the bull campaign in the so-called "war stocks" by calling attention from time to time to the big war orders being received by the various steel, automobile and railway equipment companies, Mr. Untermyer has traveled about the country telling the public that he favors an embargo on arms and munitions by way of a reprisal against interference with our commerce by Great Britain and her allies. The adoption of such a policy would unquestionably cut off a good deal of business from the Bethlehem Steel Company for the time being, but for that Mr. Untermyer does not care, as he has plenty of faith in the future of the company on a "peace footing." He has also expressed himself publicly as opposed to any vast scheme of preparedness such as has been proposed at the present session of Congress and which, if adopted, would greatly stimulate the business of the Bethlehem and other large steel companies of this country. In this connection Mr. Untermyer has stated that he is not opposed to the President's programme of expenditures the coming year, but he objects to a programme for years to come, or any definite programme, until after the war, when it will be known whether there is to be a partial or total disarmament by the European countries, and this country will be better able to fix its course.

Nor has the sudden and enormous increase in the value of Bethlehem shares caused Mr. Untermyer to change his ideas in regard to the Stock Exchange. He is just as ardent a champion of governmental regulation of that institution today as for years past.

its gambling operations, he has recently declared, should be stopped, and it should be made to assume its proper place in the financial system as the great security market of the world. This, he claims, can only be accomplished by preventing the manipu-

lation of securities through Government control.

"Honest speculation," Mr. Untermyer has said in public, "is not against the interest, and I am not opposed to it, though never in my life have I bought or sold a share of stock short or

engaged in any form of speculation. "When properly conducted speculation is the surest and, in fact, the only way of accurately determining values. My crusade has been directed against manipulation, which is dishonest speculation. It is like playing with marked cards or with loaded dice. That will never stop until some Government authority can scrutinize the dealings, as in other countries."

While the fever of speculation in war stocks was at its height Mr. Untermyer warned the public to keep as far away as possible from the contagion. Most of the so-called "war stocks" he claimed, were selling at greatly inflated prices, based on temporary conditions, which were greatly exaggerated by pool manipulations and other forms of artificial activity.

Speculation Determines Values.

"Like all such movements," Mr. Untermyer wrote to the Rev. Mr. Reiser, "it finds a semblance of justification, sufficient to fire the imaginations of the novices and visionaries, who are always easily separated from their hard-earned money by the bait of 'easy money' in exaggeratedly inflated prices. The flood of new business involving abnormal profits and that is likely to end as unexpectedly as it began. Stocks that represent nothing beyond hopes and dreams of promoters and that have been rightly regarded as little more than waste paper have suddenly been galvanized into life with the aid of cunningly devised and widely advertised rumors and half truths from unknown quarters and unloaded in reams on the unfortunate public."

"Never in the history of the Stock Exchange has the public been threatened by so dangerous a pitfall as that which is now open wide for its victims. The stocks of a few companies with genuine merit that were selling far below their actual values led the way and made possible this wild orgy of gambling in a market that had lost all sense of real values. The whole matter would be ludicrous to thinking men if it were not so tragic in its consequences."

Since that letter was written many who thought they were well along the road to great riches have suddenly found themselves on the edge of the "pitfall," as the reaction in the stock market equal to anywhere from 25 to 50 per cent of previous gains, has not only wiped out fortunes previously existing "on paper," but in the case of those who went in, for "eleventh-hour" real money from the victims of the "war stock" craze.

But Mr. Untermyer, who never speculates, is still \$6,000,000 to the good through his far-sighted investment of 12 years ago.



SAMUEL UNTERMYER.



Samuel Untermyer