

EDITORIAL

BECAUSE language is the medium of thought, it follows that the words we use will reflect the thoughts we think. Chaotic thought will express itself in chaotic language. Muddled ideas will be the parents of muddled words. The language of a clear and orderly-thinking people will be distinct and unequivocal : its development will be the straight growth of a well-nurtured plant. A people whose thinking is confused and slipshod will speak a language that tends to doubtful and ambiguous meanings—a language whose growth will be wild and tangled. The English language, which can rightly boast of a richer vocabulary than most other tongues, bears in a marked degree this note of confusion : because the English pride themselves on being practical, common sense folk who get things done and do not bother their heads about hard thinking. The average Englishman will act more readily on sentiment, on emotional impulse than upon reason. To win him, appeal to his heart or his imagination ; but leave his head alone.

This racial trait of responding to what Pascal calls “the reasons of the heart” rather than to the reasons of the head—whether it be a virtue or a vice we do not for the moment discuss—has certainly impressed itself on the language we speak ; and by this must be understood not the language of professors or pedants or of the learned people who make dictionaries, but the common speech of the common people. After all, it is they who mould a nation’s tongue ; and in moulding it they do not always change it for the better.

The Reformation is sometimes held responsible for many of our ills, and no doubt there is much to be said for the opinion. Some say that the de-Christianizing of the land has helped to debase the language.

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Whatever it is, whether it be a sort of national fickleness or the fickleness of our climate, there is undoubtedly something that has given our tongue a tilt towards instability. There is not always that perfect "equation of thought and thing" that we call truth. The words do not always mean what the things really are. So easily the secondary and incidental meaning becomes the primary and substantial. Take the word *charity*, for instance. It is a Latin word for the supremest thing in life. Remotely and vaguely it hints at the stupendous mystery of God's love for wayward humanity. Yet to many it suggests nothing more than parish doles, workhouses and soup-tickets: it calls up visions of Bumble and *Oliver Twist*. *As cold as charity* is actually a proverb that has somehow crept into our language. Charity which means uncreated, divine LOVE, which can be very feebly expressed by such metaphors as a consuming fire or a burning white heat!

The simple straightforward word, justice, has fared very badly. It is pigeon-holed in many minds with the Old Bailey or the petty sessions. Invariably it conveys the notion of punishment. The personification of justice, he who is called Mr. Justice Somebody, is the man whose office it is to mete out terms of imprisonment and pronounce sentence of death. Surely this is abusing a fine word which, before all else, means that generous equity by which we give every man his due. Religion is one of its subdivisions: it includes every act of humble submission of creature to Creator; it means rewarding the good as well as punishing evil-doers; it means righting wrongs that many a Justice of the Peace has probably never dreamed of in his philosophy.

Temperance has been debased into meaning teetotalism. Fancy depicts its highest expression in refusing glasses of beer. In reality it is simply the

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virtue that helps a man to regulate his animal appetites, and teetotalism is compatible with the worst forms of intemperance.

These random thoughts have been suggested by our remarks of last month on criticism. Those remarks were not made in any attempt to disarm the critics or to stifle their criticisms. They were not a pathetic cry of *Camarade!* uttered by one outnumbered and almost overwhelmed. They were simply an appeal for sound, helpful criticism. With the same floundering habit of thought we have spoken of above we are so apt to regard a critic as one whose particular business is to find fault. We confound him with the critickin or paltry critic. Let us remind ourselves that a critic is etymologically a judge; and the function of a judge is not necessarily to find fault, but to find the truth.

It is our pleasant duty to thank those of our readers who have honoured us with letters containing kindness, encouragement and sympathy as well as excellent criticism. Our only regret is that we cannot afford space to print all the correspondence we have received. This brings us to the question: What should be our attitude towards a Correspondence Column? Since limited space forbids us to print *all*, on what principle shall we justify ourselves in printing *any*? Why not simplify matters by excluding Correspondence from BLACKFRIARS altogether? It would be a pity to do that, because a lively Correspondence page adds enormously to the interest and value of any publication. We think, for instance, that the Correspondence printed in last month's BLACKFRIARS could not, in justice to the three persons concerned, have been reasonably excluded. Economy of space and consideration for our readers must be the two principles directing our selection of letters for publication.

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If in any letter there is any view expressed, consistent with the special aims of this review, that does not already find expression in any other journal, we shall have no hesitation in printing it.

We shall always try to avoid the cowardice that suppresses truth out of self-interest.

The writer of the paper on *The Lambeth Conference* in our July issue asks us to correct an error. On page 222, for "the Disestablishment of the Irish Church," read "the suppression of ten Irish Bishoprics."

Mr. Eric Gill's paper on *The Stations of the Cross* in Westminster Cathedral, is, with certain additions and amendments, reproduced from *The Westminster Cathedral Chronicle*. We wish to thank the Editor for his kindness in allowing us to reprint it.

THE EDITOR.

