

Esperanto

The New International Language

By William Pickens

Everything now-a-days is being "made to order,"—boots, dry goods, laws, moral systems, religious creeds and languages.

Man does not and cannot *create* anything, but his advancement is one progressive improvement on Nature's product. In this sense a new international language has been made outright—a manufactured article that beats anything which Nature can show in this line from Sanskrit to slang. All previous attempts to formulate what was styled "a universal language" have mis-carried; but Esperanto, the latest effort of this sort, seems to have in its very make-up the elements of success, and in its accent the ring of victory. Last year an Esperantist conference was held in France, attended by representatives from a score of different nationalities, who were not familiar with each other's mother tongues. But they conversed and conferred in Esperanto; and in this new speech business was done, songs were sung, lectures delivered and love made. It was an "all-round" test of its efficiency.

The smiling reader might be thinking: that was a feat possible only to experienced linguists and scholars. One purpose of this article is to show you that any man of any language of Europe or America, who is of sound mind and well trained in his mother tongue, can master the syntax of Esperanto in a week.

The writer saw his first book on Esperanto less than a week ago. His attention being called to the language in January, he immediately sent to the "Review of Reviews" in London for some books on the subject. These arrived and were perused one evening between the hours of six and ten; and the next morning he wrote letters

in Esperanto to some European Esperantists.

But before we speak further of Esperanto to itself, let us interest ourselves by inquiring what would be the practical benefits of any well known international language whatever.

First, it would save time and expense. A language universally understood, if only by the intelligent, would save all the expense that great nations must pay for large forces of interpreters and translators. It would economize time and therefore often prevent bloodshed and confusion. Economy would be served in the same way as by uniform laws and interstate railroad systems. If we had to change passenger and freight trains at every state line, how much more time would be consumed in going or sending from New York to San Francisco!

What if the Peace of Portsmouth could have been given to the whole civilized world in the same words of the same language? Perhaps under such a condition there would be fewer "peace conferences," for a universal language would surely tend, in that direction.

Secondly, to further the cause of international peace and universal brotherhood. Except color, there is no greater bar to sympathy and communion among men than a difference of language. Two men who do not know and cannot learn each other's tongue may live side by side for a score of years and be strangers still. One who does not understand the words and sounds which to you are so intelligible and full of meaning, must forever seem to you outlandish and barbarous. By the Greek populace all men who could not speak Greek were dubbed the "barbaroi." The great languages of civilization are so many Chinese walls

of exclusion, forever shutting out from each other the masses of the different nationalities. If the dealings and relations of two nations could be published in some language legible to the masses of both, the people would often refuse to be tumbled into unjust wars by their unscrupulous demagogues.

Genius itself cannot master more than two or three languages to the utmost idiom; the average man can thread but one such "idiomatic" maze, and the masses never really know their mother tongue. Why? Because all these well known old languages are products of Nature, and Nature is an extravagant and erratic idiot who pampers variety rather than utility. She lays within the stream a myriad eggs to raise a dozen fishes; she sows a hundred acorns to sprout two or three sickly oaks. Everywhere she wantonly mixes and mingles the useful and the useless. Just so in these natural tongues she will write a half dozen words meaning the same thing; in one language she might have four or five regular conjugations or declensions and as many "irregular" ones—where *one regular* would suffice. She will obey no single rule without a half dozen exceptions. All in all, she has so mixed and muddled and anticked in the every-day speech of men, that if idiomatic German be rendered *literally* in English, the King of England could not interpret that English. And the result—the masses of mankind, so far as Nature's languages are concerned, will never be intelligent beings save in that tongue to which they were born.

By the scheme of Esperanto Dr. Zamenhof, the Russian, has removed the whole difficulty, as we shall indicate below. Science can be frugal if Nature is prodigal.

Furthermore, such a language would be an inestimable contribution to the accuracy of international business. The dispatches and reports which we get from foreign

nations are always second-hand, and very often unreliable—they are *translations*. And how much different translations of the same thing do disagree with each other! The Germans translate a report from St. Petersburg, the Swiss translate from the Germans, the French from the Swiss—and what do we get in English? We would get nearer the truth if the news was sent through the same territory but clothed in the fixed and unambiguous words of Esperanto; for words, like the savages that they are, lose in both vigor and grace when clad in other than their native garb.

Now let us speak more particularly of Esperanto. As Dr. Zamenhof thought over the methods and failures of previous efforts to form such a language, he saw that, if such was ever to succeed, three great problems must first be solved, which we state briefly:

(1) The language must be so easy that its acquisition is a mere pastime to the learner of average ability.

(2) The learner must be assured that he can make *direct international use of the language with others who have not even heard of it*.

(3) The natural indifference of mankind to take up a new thing, especially an easy and simple thing, must be overcome.

An idea of Esperanto can be conveyed in the briefest manner by indicating how Zamenhof has planned to overcome each of these three difficulties.

First difficulty. The vocabulary is made easy in two ways: by selecting words which are common to two or more languages, and by making the absolute number of different words very small. This language thus stands on the shoulders of the natural ones. The word for dog is *hundo*; for bird, *birdo*; which words every student of the Teutonic languages at once recognizes. The word for international is *internacia*; for high, *alta*; which every man of the Romance

languages and every Latin scholar immediately recognize. In this way the words of Esperanto are practically all known to an educated person before he studies it. And a linguist would have no use for an Esperanto lexicon.

The shortening of this easy vocabulary is very ingenious. First, there are no synonyms (which make up a large part of other languages). Next, one does not have to learn antonyms. In English we must learn *light* and *darkness*, in Spanish *luz* and *tinieblas*; but in Esperanto we have only to learn *lumo* which means *light*, and for *darkness* we have *mallumo* by adding the prefix *mal* which always makes a word its own antonym. *Estimi*, to esteem; *malestimi*, to dispise. *Alta*, high; *malalta*, low.

By the above processes Zamenhof made unnecessary the accumulation of whole heaps of mental rubbish. And by other devices equally ingenious, which we cannot mention in this brief article, he has produced a vocabulary of 900 words, affixes and all, that can express any idea which English can express with its 100,000 words.

All nouns end in *o*, adjectives in *a*, all infinitives in *i*, the present tense is denoted by the ending *as*, the past by *is*, the future by *os*; the conditional mood by *us* and the imperative by *u*.

There is one conjugation, no declension (but *n* denotes the accusative), and the whole grammatical scheme, most elaborately explained, occupies but 25 small pages.

There are no "exceptions" or "variations" to rules: every letter has the same sound everywhere and accent is always penultimate. When we remember that English has eight variations in the sound of *a*, what a blessing is Esperanto!

A noun becomes an adjective by simply adding *a*, or changing its final *o* to *a*; *hundo*, dog; *hunda*, canine; *du*, two; *dua*, second.

Numerals are simple. The first ten

numbers are: *unu*, *du*, *tri*, *kvar*, *kvin*, *ses*, *sep*, *ok*, *nau*, *dek*. *Cent*, 100; *mil*, 1000. Other numbers are simply compounds of these words: *dudek*, 20; *dekdu*, 12.

Second difficulty. An American can write to an intelligent Frenchman in Esperanto, whether that Frenchman has ever heard of Esperanto or not. A complete Esperantist vocabulary interpreted in any language you please can be bought on a single sheet of paper, costing but few cents, and can be enclosed with your letter. With this vocabulary an intelligent foreigner would have little difficulty in reading your letter; for Esperanto is the only language in the world that can be learned from the dictionary alone. Words have a fixed form and no inflections; they occur in the vocabulary just as they are in the sentence. But what stranger looking, for instance, into a German book for the first time could ever guess that *dachte* in the sentence is to be found under *denken* in the vocabulary; or that *war* is from *sein*?

Third difficulty. Dr. Zamenhof knew that the natural inertia of the human mass, called conservatism, has resisted the introduction of every great scheme of improvement and opposed every inch of scientific progress. Men are especially phlegmatic toward a scheme that is so simple; a thing must be enigmatical and hardly understandable to attract much willing attention.

And Esperanto is so easy.

The cause is prospering, however, through the work of Esperantist societies. They are active in England, and publish works in Esperanto which Dr. Zamenhof kindly revises or approves. A periodical is published in Paris in French and Esperanto; in London there is the "British Esperantist" in English and Esperanto. An annual *Adresaro* (address) of Esperantists is published and sold for a few cents to encourage international correspondence between persons who are learning the lan-

guage. *Hamlet* and other English classics have been translated into Esperanto, and we hear that it is being taught at Harvard.

From what has been said above let the reader, before proceeding further, endeavor to recognize the following passage:

Kaj Dio diris: estu lumo; kaj farigis lumo. Kaj Dio vidis la lumon ke ĝi estas bona, kaj nomis Dio la lumon tago, kaj la mallumon nokto. Kaj estis vespero, kaj estis mateno—unu tago.

(The diacritical marks over the *g* in *farigis* and *ĝi* are necessarily omitted in this type).

This is part of the third, fourth and fifth verses of the first chapter of the Bible.

Now it happens that the writer had never read one word from Dickens' Christmas Carol and has never yet seen it in English. So, as evidence of the ease with which Esperanto can be read at sight (for the writer does not yet possess an Esperanto-English dictionary), we will retranslate into English the first few lines of the Christmas Carol, which Martin Westcott has translated into Esperanto under the title "Kristnaska Sonorado:"

"THE GHOST OF MARLEY.

"Marley was dead. No doubt about that. The official announcement of his death was subscribed by the pastor, the ecclesiastic, the coffin-maker and the chief-mourner. Scrooge subscribed it. And the name Scrooge was much taxed by every matter of the Borse.

"Old Marley was dead as a doornail.

"Mark you!" I do not mean to say that I myself know why a doornail is especially dead. As for me, I regard coffin nails as the dearest iron commodities in trade. But in that simile lies the wisdom of our ancestors; and my hands shall not defile it. Then allow me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a doornail."

How audacious is man to handle so familiarly this most dangerous of weapons—Speech.

How the mind revels in its fancies of the future! Esperanto may yet accomplish what is utterly impossible to the Hague Tribunal and all other tribunals put together—*universal peace*.

The case of Esperanto seems to argue that it would not be impossible to revise the other languages in point of syntax, spelling, etc., spite of the general belief that all such efforts are futile as attempts to reverse the course of nature. All efforts of the American and English Philological Societies to the contrary notwithstanding, very few of us have consented to amend our spelling beyond such particles *thru* and such nouns as *folograf*. Perhaps Esperanto may some day persuade the nations to apply to some better use all the energy that is now wasted on orthographical and syntactical curiosities. Take for example this—*phthisic*—and think of pronouncing that jumble of letters simply *tizzic*.

Perhaps most of the "undergrads" in college could wish with all their hearts that Homer and Virgil, instead of stamping ORDER on the face of the *tohu-bohu* of their respective languages, had sat down and made up something absolutely original.

What next?—Well, let the next genius sit down and draw up some easy international rules of etiquette, table manners, courtship, etc., so that we may not be socially embarrassed when we go abroad.

Esperantist agencies are just now being established in America, and anyone wishing books or other information, can write to Fleming H. Revell Co., 80 Wabash Ave., Chicago, or to 158 Fifth Ave., New York City.



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