

ART. XXI.—*The Languages of Melanesia.* By Professor  
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Prepared at the request of, and communicated by, Dr. R. N. Cusst, Honorary  
Secretary, with a Note.

[THE writer of this communication is the son of H. C. Von der Gabelentz; and is, like his distinguished father was before him, one of the most remarkable Linguistic Scholars of his time. He treats of a subject which is of the greatest importance, and which has this year been brought prominently to the notice of scholars by the Comparative Grammar of the Melanesian Languages compiled by the Rev. R. H. Codrington of the Melanesian Mission, and published by the Clarendon Press. The Archipelago of Islands, known by the name of Melanesia, from the dark colour of their Negrito inhabitants, as distinguished from the fair Polynesians further to the East, extends in a chain of Islands from the Southern Point of New Guinea to Fiji, and includes in addition to those Islands the Groups known as Solomon, Santa Cruz, Banks, Torres Islands, New Hebrides, Loyalty and New Caledonia. They have been the scene of outrages on the part of the white traders, and vengeful murders on the part of the natives: they are a bone of contention betwixt England and France: their population is wasting away by kidnapping to supply the wants of Planters in Queensland and the Fiji Islands, and by infectious diseases, and spirituous liquors introduced by Europeans. The Bible has been translated into several of the languages (and each of the larger Islands has its own language or even several distinct languages), but it is calculated that in a few years the population will, like that of Tasmania, have totally disappeared, and the languages remain as literary survivals.]

In this valuable book<sup>1</sup> the work begun and enlarged by my dear father,<sup>2</sup> and continued by Dr. A. B. Meyer and myself,<sup>3</sup> is taken up on a new plan and on a somewhat broader base. My father's work comprised twenty-three languages in all, while in the book before us the number of languages treated in separate grammars and grammatical sketches amounts to thirty-five, eleven of which are identical with those contained in my father's book. Besides, short grammatical notes are inserted on four other languages of the family. Leaving these aside, forty-seven Melanesian languages may henceforth be counted as more or less known in regard to their grammatical structure. Lifu, twice analyzed in my father's two volumes, has since been made the object of *Notes grammaticales sur le langue de Lifu*, par A. C., Paris, 1882, 8vo. On Aneityúm we have *A Dictionary of the Aneityumese Language, etc.*, also *Outlines of Aneityumese Grammar*, by J. Inglis, London, 1882, 12mo. On Mota, the author's own *Grammatical Sketch*, London, 1877, 8vo. While Professor H. Kern of Leiden has recently made Fijian the subject of copious and fertile comparative researches (*De Fidjitaal vergeleken met hare Verwanten in Indonesië en Polynesië*, Amsterdam, 1886, 4to.). These works and a Dictionary by the Rev. George Brown, Wesleyan Missionary, of the Duke of York's Island Language, New Britain Group, also a Grammar of the same, printed in thirty copies by hectography, Sydney, 1882, 4to., are the principal exponents of Melanesian linguistic literature that have come to my notice. This is little, indeed, considering the width and weight of the subject, and sincere thanks are due to the learned author for the extensive and painful researches the results of which are now at his fellow-labourers' disposal. The following abstract will furnish an idea of the plan followed.

<sup>1</sup> *The Melanesian Languages*. By R. H. Codrington. 8vo. pp. viii. 572 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1885).

<sup>2</sup> H. C. von der Gabelentz, *Die melanesischen Sprachen nach ihrem grammatischen Bau und ihrer Verwandtschaft*, etc. 2 voll. *Abhandl. d. Kön. Sächs. Ges. d. Wissensch.* Leipzig, 1861, 1873.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. xix. of the same *Abhandlungen*.

An introduction, pp. 1-31, describes the geographical extension of Melanesian nations and languages; a general map of Melanesia is added, and further on, there are special maps of the single groups. Then the author points out the kinship of the Melanesian languages as well between themselves as with the Malayo-Polynesian family, finally leading up to a new theory on the origin and prospects of these languages, to which I shall refer towards the end of this paper.

The second section is devoted to comparative lexicology. The nine words in fifty-nine languages collected by Mr. Wallace, and seventy words in forty languages synoptically arranged by the author, are discussed and compared between themselves and with corresponding words in Malay, Malagási, Maori, and, here and there, other languages akin, such as Batta, Samoa, etc. On p. 60, No. 10, it might be observed that in Mafúr *Kōr* (not *Kur*) 'bone,' corresponds to Malay *tulang*.

A short comparative grammar of Melanesian languages in connection with Malay, Malagási and Maori, follows, pp. 101-192. Here the principal common facts and forms of the Melanesian branch are set forth and discussed. Without entering into details, I shall content myself with stating that, in the majority of the cases where my views differ from the author's, this is owing to his general hypothesis already alluded to.

Phonology, pp. 193-219, and numeration, pp. 220-251, are treated in separate sections. In the former, little attempt has been made either to group the languages in respect to phonetic laws, or to gain something like the laws, which form the pride of Indo-Germanic science: laws, I mean to say, which declare peremptorily that this sound in one language must correspond, under the same circumstances, to that in a certain other language. Observations of this nature, indeed, are to be met with interspersed in the grammatical monographs. But even if this were not the case, the defect would be of less importance than might seem. Apparently in those insular languages articulation has been of old, and is partly now, less distinct,

less firm and fixed, than it is in our Arian family. Otherwise speaking, had the ancestors of those islanders formed an alphabet of their own, containing, as is the case with Devanágari, just as many symbols as there were sounds really distinguished in the language, this alphabet would have been far poorer in symbols, and its symbols partly less strict in phonetic value, their pronunciation allowing more variety, than would Devanágari. So, indeed, the Bisáya acknowledged only three vowels and thirteen consonants. This fact of lax articulation explains the irregularities, apparently capricious, occurring to any one who undertakes a lexical comparison of the Malay languages, nor has it been eliminated even by such careful and judicious researches as are contained in Brandes' *Bijdragen tot de vergelijkende Klankleer*, etc.

The last part of the book, pp. 253–572, contains grammars and grammatical sketches of thirty-five Melanesian languages, geographically arranged. Of these, Mota alone occupies pages 253 to 310, so that the average space left to each of the other thirty-four does not exceed seven pages and a half. Scanty as this may seem, the grammatical materials brought to the reader's notice are somewhat fuller than would have been possible had the author followed a different plan. The arrangement of the monographs, on the whole, is worthy of approval and agreeing with the nature of the languages in question. Syntax has nowhere been made the object of separate chapters. Examples consisting of complete sentences are to be found in sufficient number only in a part of the sketches, and so are short texts. Reasons independent of his intentions may have prevented the learned author from being so munificent in this point as we should have desired. As it is, let us hope that he will find enough encouragement in his praiseworthy endeavours to publish some day a second volume containing more copious glossaries and as many analyzed or translated texts as possible.

It would go far even to enumerate the languages more or less made known by the work before us. The Banks' and Torres Islands, not yet accessible to my father's researches,

are now represented, the former by twelve, the latter by two: so is the Santa Cruz Group, while other groups have been filled up by new members. Of the languages treated by my father, Fíji, Aneityúm, Erromanga, Tanna, Mallikólo, Lifu, Uea, Gera of Guadalcanar, Eddystone, Bauro, Mara, Ma-siki, and the three New Caledonian, have been left aside, while for the eleven others the author had such materials at hand as made him wish to see them produced anew.

Let us now, in the author's own words, explain the theory developed in his introductory chapter. "Suppose," he says, "in the islands adjacent to the Asiatic continent a population of dark-coloured and curly-haired physical character with their own language. Suppose the islands to be settled with this population, originally of one stock, and the gradual settlements of the islands further away to the south-east to be going on by the people of the one stock, their language diverging as time and distance increase. Suppose Asiatic people, lighter in complexion and straight-haired, to have intercourse with the island people nearest to the continent, going over to trade with them, residing on the island coasts, giving rise to a certain number of half-castes. These half-castes, then, in regard to language, would be island-people. They would not follow their foreign fathers' speech, but their mothers' and their fellow-villagers'; but in regard to physical appearance they would be mixed, lighter than their mothers in complexion, with flatter features (if their mothers were Papuans and their fathers like Chinese), and their hair would be straighter. This mixed breed would begin on the coast and increase; it would mix in its turn both with the inland people and with the foreign visitors—relatives on the fathers' side. The result, after a time, would be that in the interior of the island the aboriginal inhabitants would remain physically and in speech what they were, but on the coast and towards the coast there would be a great mixture of various degrees of crossings, some very like the Asiatic visitors, some very little unlike the inland people, but *all speaking* the island-language," etc.

Linguistic reasons, I think, would rather recommend a

contrary supposition. Let us break before all with the hypothetic dualism of ascending and descending development, and with the superstition that the former was the general state of agglutinative languages. As to the Malayan family, traces more or less rudimentary of that wonderfully rich and symmetrical grammatical system by which the Philippine languages and their nearer relatives excel, are to be found throughout, and more recently such traces have been pointed out in Fiji and the Polynesian Family by Prof. Kern. The like are met with, more or less fragmentary, throughout the Melanesian Group. Had we not better, under such circumstances, speak of decay on the latter side, and attribute higher primitiveness to those languages which have fully-developed forms where others show lumps and stumps? As to the speciality insisted upon by the author on pp. 27-29, the fact that a part of the substantives requires or allows possessive affixes, while the other part does not, is by no ways confined to the Malayo-Polynesian family, but based on logical reasons, and therefore common to very different languages. Relations, familiar or social, members of the body or other parts of things, require logically something or somebody they belong to—a genitive case. A father, an eye, an upper part, are somebody's father, somebody's eye, something's upper part. From this it seems to follow that the distinction made by the Melanesians may hardly be considered as a striking proof of greater originality. While in the Polynesian Languages such possessive affixes are entirely wanting, they are in full vigour in the higher members of the Malayan, and there applicable not only to every substantive noun without exception, but also, as *genitivi auctoris*, to the (in reality nominal) passive forms of the verbs. Here again the superiority in point of consequent development and the presumption of better conservation is, I think, on the Malayan side.

There is one fact, however, which impartiality forbids me to pass by in silence. The Negrito languages of the Philippines appear, judging from the scanty specimens in my possession, to enjoy grammatical systems very similar

in fullness, richness, and in the phonetic means employed, to those of their light-coloured neighbours. Should, then, these be the keepers of the family treasure, the heirs of our author's ancient island-language? I doubt whether any one, though prepossessed in favour of Mr. Codrington's theory, would insist upon such a possibility any longer than the time needed for a superficial examination and comparison of the materials. Everybody would gain the conviction that, in this instance at least, the light-coloured men were the givers and the black men the receivers, for while Tagála and its sisters form integrating members in the close and solid chain of their Malayan kinship, the idioms of the Zambales, Mariveles, etc., stand in evident opposition to those of the other black islanders, with which, of course, they are related, but only loosely and by Malayan intermediation. Moreover, which is more probable *a priori*, that the more highly endowed Malays should have adopted the languages of inferior aborigines, or the contrary? Which, I ask, is more analogous to experience? It is much to be desired that Professor Kern, or a scholar equally well versed in comparative Malayo-Polynesian studies, would submit the Melanesian materials, grammatical and lexicological, to investigations similar to those exhibited in the former's "Fidjitaal." Then we might expect to see the observations made above confirmed in more than one point, and many of the words till now looked upon as originally Melanesian, derived from Malayan sources.

But strong and eager as may seem my criticism of the author's theory, stronger yet is my feeling of gratitude and indebtedness for the eminent merits of his laborious work.