

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers* 2, 1886 – 1887 June 5, '86 to May 21, '87)

John W. Herron Esq.

Dear Sir:

I was assigned to read a paper before the Literary Club somewhere about this date. The physician whom I have been urged to see and whom I have seen simply because so urged have prohibited my doing any work this summer. Two others, classmates of mine in college who are also physicians insist that the advice is sound and must be followed. I obey, without believing. I have however now been loitering so long that I have become disused to work and it is not easy. I therefore enclose a paper which I read before the U.C.D. Club in Cincinnati, erasing the introductory paragraphs and adding a couple of pages, which I ask you, if you feel inclined, to read for me on the appointed evening.

Truly yours

M. F. Force

#### The Origin of Languages and the Ambiguity of Speaking Man

This evening, I wish to consider in the light of latest researches the origin of languages, and the ambiguity of speaking man. While the discussion of these matters is by no means new and many books and pamphlets & papers have been written upon them I will spend this evening mainly upon a paper read by Horatio Hale before the Association for the Advancement of Science at the meeting in Buffalo last August. Philologists have found difficulty in accounting for the existence of different linguistic stocks. These are large groups of languages akin to each other, constituting a family all descended from a common stock. But the present stocks differ so not only in vocabulary, but in structure, not only in degree, but in kind that it has been found impossible to derive one from the other, or to imagine any common remote source from which these stocks could descend. For example, the great Indo-European family with its sixty distinct languages, and the Hamito Semitic family with its twenty distinct languages can each be traced to distinct and ascertainable stock; between these two mother tongues is a great gulf, which no explanation offered thus far has sufficed to bridge over. Sixty years ago William von Humboldt found it so contrary to the results of his prolonged and profound study of languages to believe, for instance, that a tongue like the Sanskrit could be developed from one like the Chinese, that he frankly said, he would rather accept at once the doctrine of those who attribute the different idioms of men to an immediate revelation from God. Fifty years later Prof. Havelacque said "the abyss between the two systems is not only profound, it is impossible. Experience and history so far as they have any bearing sustain these deductions from comparative philology. Taking the same two families again for example, they retain now, as they have ever born precisely the same

difference from each other. The distance between a Semitic tongue and an Aryan tongue in our day, as for example between modern Arabic and English is no greater and no less than was the distinction between the Semitic Assyrian, and the Aryan Sanskrit a thousand years before the Christian era. If thirty centuries have made no appreciable change in the distinction between these two neighboring linguistic families, why should we suppose three thousand centuries would produce any effect in that direction. The Malay-Polynesian family, having spread over two oceans, from Madagascar to Hawaii, occupying a thousand islands, living in isolated communities have retained everywhere the mass of their vocabulary and grammar with remarkable uniformity. Science and history agree in pointing out that these linguistic families, descended from original stocks; which stocks, were not divided one from another but had independent origins. It is said there are in the world nearly two hundred of these independent irreducible stocks. Many attempts have been made to account for their origin. No attempt has been satisfactory. Chance has at least given a suggestion which is growing into favor as the true solution. It has been observed that small children, twins or nearly of the same age, who play continually together apart from others use sounds which serve them as words, but are unintelligible to others. Some cases have been observed where to such children invent what is evidently a language, sufficient for their wants, and which they speak with fluency, and in some instances use none other and in some instances speak also the language of their family, but hesitatingly as if using a foreign tongue. As they grow older and necessarily mingle with other persons, they drop, disuse and forget their peculiar speech. The speech is called baby-talk and gibberish. But it serves all the purpose of language, and in the one case where an intelligent observer made a vocabulary it was found to be a true language. It appears from this that beings endowed with the organs of speech, will speak as inevitably as birds born with wings will fly. If therefore several small children should in any way drift away and be cut off from all intercourse, under such favorable circumstances that they could subsist and live, they would inevitably invent a language. And if several disconnected such groups should happen, several independent individual languages would find origin. It has been observed that in Oregon fourteen language stocks as independent and irreducible as the Aryan and Semitic have been found. Sixteen other such have been found in California, making thirty within a territory no larger than France. This phenomenon has naturally attracted attention. The inhabitants of this region, Indians, are wont to live much a part: it is common for a single-family to live wholly by itself a great part of the year. It would not be strange in such life for the children to be left orphans in a solitude. At the same time the climate is so mild, shelter of trees and rocks so ample, and subsistence from fruits, berries and roots so abundant, that a family even of small children might survive and grow. Hence it appears that in the region where the astonishing number of linguistic stocks are found close together, it is a region where the independent origin is made possible by the habits of the people, the nature of the climate and the abundance of

subsistence at hand. The same phenomenon and the same conditions are found in the center of South America. It is also been observed that every linguistic family has its distinct mythology. The religious instinct is as inseparable a part of the mental outfit of the human race as the faculty of language. Hence under the same circumstances which would give birth to a new language stock, a new mythology would come into existence. If this be the true solution of the origin of language stocks, then all the languages on the earth may have arisen within a comparatively recent period. And many facts seem to show that the peopling of the globe by the present tribes and nations of men is quite a recent event. The traditions of the tribes, the traditions of North and South America represent the people who preserved them as new comers. There is not a tradition, a monument, or relic of any kind, on this continent which requires us to carry back the history of any of its aboriginal tribes, of the existing race, for a period of three thousand years. Australia was probably first peopled about two thousand years ago or less. New Zealand was settled only about five hundred years ago. The islands from New Zealand to the Sandwich Islands were first settled by their Polynesian inhabitants within the Christian Era; some of them not till the last century. No evidence of tradition or of any monument of social man points to his existence on the earth at a period exceeding seven thousand years before the present time. Yet investigation has satisfied the great majority of scientific men that human beings have been living on the globe probably hundreds of thousands of years. For a period of some 200,000 or 230,000 years the only evidence of the presence of man consists of very rude stone implements of the simplest form, indications of the use of fire and a few fragmentary skeletons and skulls. These rudely chipped stones being found in drift, the men who made them are called the River Drift men. The skulls and bones that are attributed to this race, few and fragmentary as they are are portions of the bony structure of man. The skull though ape-like in form, being almost without forehead is human. The maker of these rude chipped stone implements had the form of man, and the brains of man, though marked with some apelike traits. Very recently two jawbones said to belong to this race have been found, having peculiarities that have given rise to a new field of speculation. The chin bone inclines backward as in apes, not forward as in man. The long projection in the inner front portion of the human jaw to which is fastened the muscle that moves the tongue, is wanting, and in its place is a hollow as in apes. The low forehead, shows that the fold of the brain which is associated with the faculty of language, must have been small and rudimentary. The structure of the jaw shows there was no power of speech. The beings to whom these bones belonged were human but speechless, having neither the faculty of language nor the power of speech. Being human, but speechless, and without the faculty of language, progress was impossible and the race remained stationary during the long ages that it lived. Succeeding these imperfect men came a race called the Cave men, because their remains and their works have been found chiefly in caves. They lived in France when the Siberian elephant, and the reindeer lived in the north of France. The oldest skulls

found of this race at least equal in form and capacity those of the most developed races now living. They were speaking men; they made curious implements of stone and bone; hammers hatchets, arrowheads, spear heads, drills, needles.

They had a fine sense of art, and their carvings in bone, and their incised drawings on tablets of venison horn are full of spirit and artistic sense. The indications are that the Cave men came from the River Drift men, not by a long process of evolution, but by a leap; that the first speaking man was in intellect and artistic sensibility the peer of any of his posterity. This great leap required but slight physical change. An enlargement of a fold in the forward part of the brain raised the forehead and brought the faculty of language, a change in the direction of the chin, and enlargement of a portion of the jaw with a corresponding enlargement of the attached muscle gave the power of speech. There was no creation of any new organ only an enlargement of the existing parts. The physical change was less than the change often observed, of the growth of an additional finger. With this change came language at once. The birth of a single pair was all that was needed. The anau breed of sheep is proven to have sprung from one sheep born with abnormally short legs; and the hornless cattle that browse the planes of Paraguay are known to be descended from a single animal born without horns. The result of investigation is that speaking man did not appear on earth at the farthest, more than ten thousand years ago, and that when he appeared he came fully equipped. It is said, the race of Cro-Magnon, in France, the earliest known race of social men, though barbarians, were in point of cerebral development and artistic powers, not only superior to any barbarians of the present day, but certainly equal, if not superior to any civilized race that ever existed. The other earliest communities known to us, those of Egypt and Southwestern Asia, have surpassed in their architecture and their inventions all succeeding races. Their temples are the despair of our architects. All the first elements of knowledge & of progress have come from them. They invented pottery and glass, the plough and the loom. They invented the alphabet, and with it a varied and voluminous literature. They invented astronomy, geometry and history. They smelted copper and iron. They tamed almost all the useful animals. They first cultivated almost all the valuable esculents. They and their offshoots, all the forms of settled government. They invented good Egyptian, Assyrian and Aryan religions. There was the youth of the world: when the human race on its thinly peopled planet, felt all its energies called forth to meet the wants and solve the problems of its new existence. In fine the last results of science in this field are that speaking man first appeared on earth between seven thousand and ten thousand years ago. The first that appeared were not like his degenerated Hottentot or Australian progeny but he possessed and manifested from the first, intellectual faculties of the highest order. His speech was not a mumble of disjointed sounds, but was, like every language now spoken on earth, by any tribe however rude or Savage, a full expressive well organized speech, complete in all its parts. It may be added that Mr. Hale

suggests as probable on purely scientific grounds that speaking man first appeared in one of the oases that dot the expanse of desert which lies between Arabia and Syria. As to the theory of the origin of languages, there seems no inherent difficulty. Mr. Hale writes to me "Huxley assents to my child language theory as the most satisfactory thus far proposed. So do Brinton, Parkman and other correspondents of similar standing." The date assigned for the origin of speaking man is not so satisfactory. That rests upon two fossil jaw bones and the date assigned to them and to the various oldest fossil skulls. The deduction seems vast for so slender and uncertain a basis. The argument as to the age of these two jaw bones must be aided by the assumption that none such can be found or ever existed of less antiquity. Further the theory that the low browed skull like that of Neanderthal are all of the most ancient date, and the fully developed skulls like that of Eugis are comparatively recent. This theory as to respective age of the more and less developed skulls is not universally accepted. Lyell after careful examination declared that the antiquity of the fully developed Eugis skull was more assured than that of the brutal skull of Neanderthal. And Virchow declared that the furthest back we go in the investigation of human remains we find them as fully and completely developed and as at the present day, and that the fossil skulls of the greatest antiquity are as large and well formed as those of Europe of today. But when I suggested this in a letter to Mr. Hale he replied that another investigator G. L. Mortillet shows by proof which seems to be irresistible that the Eugis skull belongs to the latest of prehistoric eras. And so I leave the topic with a mere presentation of Mr. Hale's theories leaving to others the discussion of their validity.

M. F. Force

May 21, '87