

**A SKETCH OF THE
COMPARATIVE BEAUTIES
OF THE FRENCH AND
SPANISH LANGUAGES**

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A Sketch of the Comparative Beauties of the French and Spanish Languages by Manuel
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MANUEL MARTÍNEZ DE MORENTÍN & ALFRED ELWES

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THE COMPARATIVE BEAUTIES
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LANGUAGES,

BY
MANUEL MARTINEZ DE MORENTIN,
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AUTHOR OF "ESTUDIOS FILOLOGICOS, DIFICULTADES PRINCIPALES DE LA LENGUA ESPAÑOLA."



A Paper circulated in the British Literary Society.

PRECEDED BY INTRODUCTORY REMARKS, BY
ALFRED ELWES, Esq.

"The Spanish Language is nothing inferior to the most celebrated of those now in use, called the living languages; but rather equals them in all points; and, in many particulars, exceeds and surpasses them.

"It is sweet and harmonious; and yet, has at the same time, such a manly and majestic grace, that it at once becomes the mouth of the soldier, the courtier, the preacher, the statesman, and the nicest lady; and it is withal so copious that there is nothing wanting in it to express whatsoever can be found in all others put together."

(Preface to J. Stevens' *Spanish and English Dictionary*, London Edition, MDCCLVI.)

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1859.

T. RICHARDS, 57, GREAT QUEEN STREET.



INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

THREE motives induce me to append a few words, by way of preface or introduction, to this agreeable "Sketch of the Comparative Beauties of the French and Spanish Languages."

First. The interest I take in all studies bearing upon subjects analogous to the present. Second. My desire to awaken a similar interest in others; and Third, The high esteem in which I hold the author.

Few studies are calculated to cause more intellectual delight than the examination of the analogies, the harmonies, and the diversities of languages. As, step by step, the student pursues his researches, new lights burst upon him; fresh ideas spring up in his mind: just as an attentive wayfarer in a new country discovers, as he climbs the mountain side, new prospects opened to his view, and more distant eminences yet to be attained.

If this be the pleasure afforded by philological researches,—and, that it is so, all who have ventured on the trial will readily concede,—how ill-advised must be the endeavours of a small section of students in the present day, to fuse all idioms into one heavy mass, and pompously style it a universal language.

Efforts of this kind must fail, and deservedly so. They must fail because, in order that they should succeed, we must be persuaded to sweep away not only some of our sweetest and dearest associations, such as those attaching to the words of childhood and youth, but all the glories of literature, the diversities of style, the power and pathos, the wit and humour which every tongue, as at present constituted, can convey to the understanding. The great charm of language is its diversity. We admire one idiom for its softness, another for its strength; we praise one tongue for its manly grace, another for its copiousness; we show a preference for one language on account of its simplicity; for another because of its elegance; but all these motives of choice and admiration would be destroyed, could the world, dreadful thought! be induced to adopt a universal idiom.

Endeavours like these seem to have arisen in the minds of certain men through the annoyance they have felt at being compelled to master the intricacies

of other languages besides their own. It is a pity that such assiduous pains should have been so unworthily bestowed. The time and attention expended upon such an object would have sufficed to overcome the very difficulties which induced them first to begin the attempt; and they would have had the advantage in the latter case of discovering, at the close of the struggle, that they had been laying up intellectual food in the garner of the mind for after years of delight and satisfaction.

It was Charles V who quaintly observed that a man was so many times more a man as he knew different languages. Without admitting so broad an assertion, it will be easy to prove how much interest and advantage a man may derive from philological subjects. When once the first asperities, which attach to the elementary portions of all languages, are smoothed down, and the student begins to understand the etymology of a tongue, he makes at every step some fresh discovery, and finds that what he last acquired aids him to push still farther onwards. And when, at length, he is sufficiently advanced to read and comprehend the writers of the foreign idiom, it appears as though another world, hitherto scarce dreamed of, and teeming with life and beauty, grace and majesty, were unrolled before his gaze. Things

which he knew before are there presented to him under another guise, from a different point of sight. Many which he never knew are then made familiar to his mind; and he can contemplate how climate and national feelings, how habits and institutions exert their influence upon mankind. This knowledge leads him to draw comparisons, not always favourable to his own land, and helps to clear away that prejudice which floats as a thick mist between his eyes and understanding. It helps to ripen his judgment by showing him that among every people there is something to be admired and learned, and that it is only the ignorant and shallow-minded who scoff at what they do not comprehend.

It may perchance be thought by persons who have not devoted particular attention to the study of languages as a means to the enlargement of the mind, that I lay too much stress upon the subject, and attribute to it an importance to which it cannot pretend. But I appeal from their judgment to that of others who have, in the humble and inquiring spirit of true students, sought out that source of learning, and bid them say whether I have exaggerated its value.

Having said thus much upon the study of languages in general, I turn to the particular sketch so ably treated by my friend. A phase only of the great

subject which I have so highly lauded, it will serve, perhaps better than a more pretentious production, to prove the force of my argument. A soldier, and a scholar, MARTINEZ DE MORENTIN approaches his subject with something of a military spirit, and charges at the errors he desires to overcome, with the same energy as he would mount a breach or sweep down upon a battalion. That energy, while it does not warp his judgment, lends a particular zest to his composition, and I shall be much surprised if it does not awaken sympathy and respect for the author, even where it may fail to carry entire conviction.

Whatever the causes which may have led to the general study of the French language, the fact of its universality in Europe is undoubted. It is known and spoken at every European Court, and the traveller upon the Continent finds it an indispensable medium of communication.

It may be that the very want of copiousness which distinguishes the French tongue, and which compels all men versed in it to express the same ideas in pretty nearly the same words, has made it in the first instance the idiom *par excellence* of diplomats and ambassadors, and has thus paved the way for its general introduction. Few, who are acquainted with both tongues, will attempt to deny the superiority of the Spanish in