

**CHAMBERS'S  
ELEMENTARY SCIENCE  
MANUALS: LANGUAGE**

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Chambers's elementary science manuals: Language by Andrew Findlater

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**ANDREW FINDLATER**

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## PREFACE.

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THE vital importance of diffusing some knowledge of the leading principles of Science among all classes of society, is becoming daily more widely and deeply felt; and to meet and promote this important movement, W. & R. CHAMBERS have resolved on issuing the present Series of **ELEMENTARY SCIENCE MANUALS**. The Editors believe that they enjoy special facilities for the successful execution of such an undertaking, owing to their long experience—now extending over a period of forty years—in the work of popular education, as well as to their having the co-operation of writers specially qualified to treat the several subjects. In particular, they are happy in having the editorial assistance of **ANDREW FINDLATER, LL.D.**, to whose labours they were so much indebted in the work of editing and preparing *Chambers's Encyclopædia*.

The Manuals of this series are intended to serve two somewhat different purposes :

1. They are designed, in the first place, for **SELF-INSTRUCTION**, and will present, in a form suitable for private study, the main subjects entering into an enlightened education; so that young persons in earnest about self-culture may be able to master them for themselves.

2. The other purpose of the Manuals is, to serve as **TEXT-BOOKS IN SCHOOLS**. The mode of treatment naturally adopted in what is to be studied without a teacher, so far from being a drawback in a school-manual, will, it is believed, be a positive advantage. Instead of a number of abrupt statements being presented, to be taken on

trust and learned, as has been the usual method in school-teaching; the subject is made, as far as possible, to unfold itself gradually, as if the pupil were discovering the principles himself, the chief function of the book being, to bring the materials before him, and to guide him by the shortest road to the discovery. This is now acknowledged to be the only profitable method of acquiring knowledge, whether as regards self-instruction or learning at school.

The subject of the present manual is the SCIENCE OF LANGUAGE. The term is not to be understood as meaning a knowledge of languages for practical use, but the physiology, as it were, of speech in general, and the scientific classification of the various tongues spoken by men. The study of language from this point of view, though of recent origin, possesses an interest that is not confined to learned philologists; and an attempt is here made to present such an outline of the subject as may be intelligible to the ordinary reader. Some knowledge of Latin, French, and German, on the part of the student will be of great advantage; but there is little in the book that he will not be able readily to follow if he have a competent knowledge of his mother-tongue, from which most of the illustrations have been taken.

For simplification in teaching, the subjects are divided into sub-sections or articles, which are numbered continuously; and a series of Questions, in corresponding divisions, are appended. These Questions, while they will enable the private student to test for himself how far he has mastered the several parts of the subject as he proceeds, will serve the teacher of a class as specimens of the more detailed and varied examination to which he should subject his pupils.

EDINBURGH,

*July 1875.*

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# LANGUAGE.

## INTRODUCTORY.

1. LANGUAGE, in its widest sense, signifies any means by which one conscious being conveys what it thinks or feels to another. Thus, we speak of the language of the eyes, the language of birds. But in ordinary usage we understand by language the system of sounds uttered by the human voice in the intercourse of society—articulate speech. The writing of language does not alter its character in this respect; it only introduces an intermediate set of signs or marks. The written characters do not convey the meaning directly, they only indicate certain sounds; and it is these sounds that are still the immediate vehicle of the thoughts. It is language in this sense—the communication of our thoughts by means of spoken signs\*—that is the subject of the present manual.

2. *Natural Language.*—Human speech is the result of a kind of tacit convention as to the meanings of the several signs, so that they are intelligible only to those who have learned them. Such signs are in this respect *artificial*. But distinct from this there is a kind of *natural* language which is universally understood without being learned, and which the lower animals to some extent possess. It is made up of the instinctive and untaught movements of the body that feelings, passions, and desires give rise to. The screams and

\* This is the proper etymological meaning of Language, which is a French word formed from *langue*, the tongue. In classical Latin the word is *lingua*; but the old form was *dingua*, and with this the English *tongue* is evidently cognate. See page 43.

contortions of pain, the fixed gape of astonishment, the tears of wounded affection, the swellings of rage, the placid repose of contentment, the outburst of the ludicrous, are all peculiar effects on the bodily organs, characteristic of the several feelings, and capable of communicating these feelings at once, and independently of all instruction, from one human being to another. But these signs are by far too limited to express the wide variety of thoughts and sentiments which the human mind can entertain, and which require to be communicated between man and man. Even in its most perfect development, in the stage pantomime or dumb-show, this mode of expression is very obscure when it attempts to convey anything beyond the most obvious ideas and feelings. So far as it goes, however, it is the most powerful means of impressing one man's feelings on another, or of inspiring a multitude with a common enthusiasm; hence it continues to be used along with artificial speech, as is seen in the gestures, grimaces, movements, and modulations of conversation and oratory. It is the resource of children, and of persons ignorant of one another's language; and is partially employed by the deaf and dumb. On this we need not dwell longer, but return to audible speech.

3. *Two purposes in studying Languages.*—We may occupy ourselves with languages for two very different purposes. In most cases, the object in studying a language is to be able to understand it, and to speak and write it. From the time we begin to lisp to the time we leave school or college, and even after, we are chiefly occupied in learning the use of our mother-tongue, or of other living or dead tongues; and until recently, the multitude of dictionaries, grammars, critical commentaries, and the like, that constitute so vast a bulk of the literature of the world, turned almost exclusively on the right understanding, and the correct or elegant use of the individual languages.

But there is another light in which the same subject-matter may be viewed. We may study two or more languages, in order to compare them with one another, and note in what they agree and in what they differ. When a

considerable number of tongues are subjected to this kind of examination, it is found that some features are widely prevalent, while others are confined to a narrower circle, or, it may be, are peculiar to a single tongue. It is the facts thus arrived at by comparison that form what are called the general principles or laws of language—universal grammar—as distinguished from the peculiarities of individual languages. Nor is this the only result of such comparison. It becomes at once evident that any particular tongue differs widely from one set, while it agrees extensively with another; and thus the known languages of the world can be *classified*, in much the same way as minerals, plants, and animals are.

4. *Languages are always changing.*—In this process of comparison we do not take a language as it was spoken at any one date, and confine ourselves to that. Not only are different languages compared with one another, but the same language is compared with itself at different times throughout the period of its known existence. The historical method is thus conjoined with the comparative, and it is this conjunction that has shed the most light on the laws of language. All languages are found to be undergoing incessant change; waste and repair of parts are constantly going on in every individual language, as in a living organism, the result being a gradual change in the aspect and character of the whole, so that, after the lapse of centuries, it shall seem to the superficial observer a new tongue. These changes do not happen by blind chance or caprice; they are found to take place, on the whole, according to discoverable laws. Those laws by which languages become transformed, or developed, as it is called, are among the most important of the general principles of the science.

5. *The Study of Language like Natural History.*—In all this, there is an obvious analogy to the study of natural history. The zoologist, for example, investigates the structure and functions of the different animals, and assigns to each its place in the classification of the animal kingdom. But he has this advantage over the linguist: he can trace