

## ANTHROPOLOGICAL MISCELLANEA AND NEW BOOKS.

---

**Note on Mr. W. G. Aston's "Japanese Onomatopes, and the Origin of Language." (J.A.I. xxiii, p. 332.)** By HYDE CLARKE.

BEFORE accepting the most learned dissertations of Mr. W. G. Aston, recording his minute knowledge of the old and new Japanese language, in regard to the origin of speech, there are several things to be taken into account. One is that anthropologically gesture precedes speech, and that speech is not necessary to constitute a sufficient language or converse among men.

This is sufficiently shown by what anthropologists know of North American Indians, and from the valuable mass of records as to the gesture and sign languages of America, now being compiled at Washington by Col. Garrett Mallory.

Everyone is apt to jump to the conclusion that language began with speech, for we believe it to be so natural to us. Some have gone the length of stating that there can be no intelligence without speech, nor apart from it, and that animals have not the same kind of intelligence as men. It is, however, questionable whether an English baby has properly a natural disposition for speech, or whether he may not even be in the condition of Mr. Aston's primitive man, using cries and calls freely, but not speech. Babies generally use gesture freely for a time, as they do cries, and will continue to do so, while understanding speech, or even occasionally using it. This condition sometimes remains until five or six years old, so that children, hearing well, have been mistaken for deaf mutes. In one case a girl had to be sent to a lipreading school before she could be got to speak freely.

On erroneous assumptions, theories of speech are applied to animals, as in the case of the gorilla. There is no evidence that any gorilla ever used articulate speech. Many animals, however, use cries in conditions such as are described by Mr. Aston.

Animals understand signs, as is known to animal trainers, and minute powers of observation enable an animal to understand signs almost imperceptible to us. Observation shows that animals use signs of various kinds and even sounds. I have observed the same sign used by a dog, a cat, and an Australian parrakeet.

A friend bought a dog at Cambridge. After a time he found out that, if in passing a butcher's shop he looked at a piece of meat, the dog would slyly hang behind, and bring home the bit of meat. To make sure he tried the dog several times, and found it was so. As a companion of this kind was too dangerous, the dog was

sold. It was supposed the dog had been trained at Oxford, and afterwards brought to Cambridge for sale. The dog was taught to keep clear of his master and to understand which was the piece of meat looked at.

With regard to the sufficiency of gesture, more clearly even than with Indians who can speak, can it be observed with the mutes of the Seraglio at Constantinople whose tongues are cut out, and who can make no articulate sound. They have among themselves a very copious language. One curious thing I found with these ancient practitioners of sign language was that they had discovered lip-reading. Sometimes when they could not make one understand the individual designated they would make his name, Mehemed, or whatever it might be, with their lips, but I was not a practitioner in lip reading, and did not always comprehend.

The language of the mutes is most likely the same as that which was used by the pantomimes of ancient Rome, from whom it has descended. By a modern scholar no attention is paid to the programme of Terence or Plautus spoken by the pantomime, for he cannot understand how a pantomime could express the name of a city for instance. My friends the mutes were reputed to have signs for every city in the Turkish empire, and I saw that they had signs for every public man. The audience in Rome knew the language of the pantomimes as many people in Constantinople now do that of the mutes.

The extent to which gesture language has prevailed even in Europe is little observed. It has been practised even in these Islands by the monastic orders. A very valuable paper on this subject will be found in the "Transactions" of the Royal Irish Archæological Society for last year. The use of gesture is a tradition of the Benedictine Order, and the paper to which I refer relates to a monastery near Dublin, the ruins of which still remain. The Trappists and other silent orders have, in signs, an alleviation which is little known. The signs, very elaborate, have little relation to natural gesture language, the grammar of which can sometimes be understood by animals. Indeed this grammar is so different from that of the philologist that it is a barrier to him in understanding the real conditions of the origin of language.

Professor Graham Bell told us in his memorable discourse at the Anthropological Institute that the Indians and the deaf mutes at Washington could converse and understand. He had conversed with a French deaf mute at Paris, so easy is the system to one who knows anything of gesture language. It has been a great loss that we made no record of that discourse, for it was felt we could not preserve the illustrations, on which much of the value depended.

Gesture language in some cases holds a position as a common language among tribes speaking various dialects. Its great deficiency is at night in the dark.

A main point in the subject dealt with by Mr. Aston rests on an observation made by Alfred Russell Wallace, and which contains the germ of the whole matter of the origin of speech. This I

named in "Nature" the Wallace formula, and was in hopes it would thereby attract greater attention.

Wallace observed that in many Australian languages the words for mouth and lips are *Labials*, for teeth are *Dentals*, and for the nose are *Nasals*.

Now this is so far true, and very true, that it goes further and applies to hundreds of languages, and what is to be noted, even to us in English, so that it is very easy to remember the law.

Mr. Aston and his fellow inquirers have to deal with this fact, and to account for the origin of speech language on this basis. It also accords with the phenomena of gesture language, and of primitive symbology. Still further it accords with the evidence of characters.

If anyone will take the ancient Chinese characters where they are round, the Shwo-wren for example, he will, as I have pointed out, find much evidence. He will find rounds for round objects and labial sounds. In other ancient characters he will find classed together mouth, eye, ear, sun (day eye), moon (night eye), egg, &c. Objects periodically or casually opening and shutting are assimilated.

How this was worked out and connected with the organs has been sufficiently shown by me in "Nature," and since then the results obtained in a wide field of observation have brought further confirmation.

Mr. Aston is quite right in treating onomatopœia as later and subsidiary and not primary.

---