

of ephemeral duration, which are thus invented by the young and old in various classes of society, in the nursery, the school, the camp, the fleet, the courts of law and the study of the man of science or literature, could all be collected together and put on record, their number in one or two centuries might compare with the entire permanent vocabulary of the language. It becomes, therefore, a curious subject of enquiry, what are the laws which govern not only the invention, but also the 'selection' of some of these words or idioms, giving them currency in preference to others?—for as the powers of the human memory are limited, a check must be found to the endless increase and multiplication of terms, and old words must be dropped nearly as fast as new ones are put into circulation. Sometimes the new word or phrase, or a modification of the old ones, will entirely supplant the more ancient expressions, or, instead of the latter being discarded, both may flourish together, the older one having a more restricted use.

Although the speakers may be unconscious that any great fluctuation is going on in their language,—although when we observe the manner in which new words and phrases are thrown out, as if at random or in sport, while others get into vogue, we may think the process of change to be the result of mere chance,—there are nevertheless fixed laws in action, by which, in the general struggle for existence, some terms and dialects gain the victory over others. The slightest advantage attached to some new mode of pronouncing or spelling, from considerations of brevity or euphony, may turn the scale, or more powerful causes of selection may decide which of two or more rivals shall triumph and which succumb. Among these are fashion, or the influence of an aristocracy, whether of birth or education, popular writers, orators, preachers,—a centralised government organising its schools expressly to promote uniformity of diction, and to