

consequence of transmutation, or abruptly by the extermination of the last surviving representatives of the unaltered type. We know in what century the last Dodo perished, and we know that in the seventeenth century the language of the Red Indians of Massachusetts, into which Father Eliot had translated the Bible, and in which Christianity was preached for several generations, ceased to exist, the last individuals by whom it was spoken having at that period died without issue.\* But if just before that event the white man had retreated from the continent, or had been swept off by an epidemic, those Indians might soon have re-peopled the wilderness, and their copious vocabulary and peculiar forms of expression might have lasted without important modification to this day. The extinction, however, of languages in general is not abrupt, any more than that of species. It will also be evident from what has been said, that a language which has once died out can never be revived, since the same assemblage of conditions can never be restored even among the descendants of the same stock, much less simultaneously among all the surrounding nations with whom they may be in contact.

We may compare the persistency of languages, or the tendency of each generation to adopt without change the vocabulary of its predecessor, to the force of inheritance in the organic world, which causes the offspring to resemble its parents. The inventive power which coins new words or modifies old ones, and adapts them to new wants and conditions as often as these arise, answers to the variety-making power in the animate creation.

Progressive improvement in language is a necessary consequence of the progress of the human mind from one generation to another. As civilisation advances, a greater number of terms are required to express abstract ideas, and words

\* Lyell, *Travels in North America*, vol. i. p. 260. 1845.