

when one form of speech was lost, another was suddenly and supernaturally created by a gift of tongues or confusion of languages, as at the building of the Tower of Babel? Where are the memorials of all the intermediate dialects which must have existed, if this doctrine of perpetual fluctuation be true? And how comes it that the tongues now spoken do not pass by insensible gradations the one into the other, and into the dead languages of dates immediately antecedent?

‘Lastly, if this theory of indefinite modifiability be sound, what meaning can be attached to the term language, and what definition can be given of it so as to distinguish a language from a dialect?’

In reply to this last question, the philologist might confess that the learned are not agreed as to what constitutes a language as distinct from a dialect. Some believe that there are 4,000 living languages, others that there are 6,000, so that the mode of defining them is clearly a mere matter of opinion. Some contend, for example, that the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish form one Scandinavian tongue, others that they constitute three different languages, others that the Danish and Norwegian are one,—mere dialects of the same language, but that Swedish is distinct.

The philologist, however, might fairly argue that this very ambiguity was greatly in favour of his doctrine, since if languages had all been constantly undergoing transmutation, there ought often to be a want of real lines of demarcation between them. He might, however, propose that he and his pupils should come to an understanding that two languages should be regarded as distinct whenever the speakers of them are unable to converse together, or freely to exchange ideas, whether by word or writing. Scientifically speaking, such a test might be vague and unsatisfactory, like the test of species by their capability of producing fertile hybrids; but if the pupil is persuaded that there are such things in nature as