

get the better of provincialisms and local dialects. Between these dialects, which may be regarded as so many 'incipient languages,' the competition is always keenest when they are most nearly allied, and the extinction of any one of them destroys some of the links by which a dominant tongue may have been previously connected with some other widely distinct one. It is by the perpetual loss of such intermediate forms of speech that the great dissimilarity of the languages which survive is brought about. Thus, if Dutch should become a dead language, English and German would be separated by a wider gap.

Some languages which are spoken by millions, and spread over a wide area, will endure much longer than others which have never had a wide range, especially if the tendency to incessant change in one of these dominant tongues is arrested for a time by a standard literature. But even this source of stability is insecure, for popular writers themselves are great innovators, sometimes coining new words, and still oftener new expressions and idioms, to embody their own original conceptions and sentiments, or some peculiar modes of thought and feeling characteristic of their age. Even when a language is regarded with superstitious veneration as the vehicle of divine truths and religious precepts, and which has prevailed for many generations, it will be incapable of permanently maintaining its ground. Hebrew had ceased to be a living language before the Christian era. Sanscrit, the sacred language of the Hindoos, shared the same fate, in spite of the veneration in which the Vedas are still held, and in spite of many a Sanscrit poem once popular and national.

The Christians of Constantinople and the Morea still hear the New Testament and their liturgy read in ancient Greek, while they speak a dialect in which Paul might have preached in vain at Athens. So in the Roman Catholic Church, the Italians pray in one tongue and talk another. Luther's trans-