



A NEW UNIVERSAL WRITING

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Language has been a barrier to communication and understanding among the multiple races of people living on this planet. Eminent thinkers are agreed that the first step to a democratic world federation is the completion of universal literacy. But with three-quarters of the world's population illiterate and speech divided into thousands of languages, the problem has so far been insuperable.

Living in the Sydney suburb of Pagewood is a man who says he has evolved a solution to this problem. The inventor, C.K.Bliss, calls it Semantography - 100 symbol elements to overcome Babel in reading, writing and thought.

Recently in the Wallace Theatre of Sydney University Mr. Bliss, with the zeal of the crusader, expounded Semantography to students and staff. And there was no doubting his faith in Semantography as a cure for many of the world's ills.

Bliss maintains that the peoples of this planet don't like to learn foreign languages, including Esperanto. Educators with years of teaching behind them agree that few persons are interested in mastering a foreign language. Esperanto, the simplest of universal languages (with the Roman alphabet) yet devised has never taken on catholic use.

Bliss, who hails from Vienna, has spent seven years setting down his system in a three-volume book. All the examples given are ingenious; he draws a little symbolic picture of the object or action referred to and portrays it with the fewest possible lines.

For instance, earth is one horizontal stroke; man resembles an upright human being with legs, mind is the top half of a circle symbolizing the outline of the skull which contains the brain; emotion is the conventional outline of a heart.

There are only 100 of these elementary symbols in Mr. Bliss' vocabulary, but from these he develops complex ideas by combining them in groups.

Bertrand Russell challenged him to express the word God in picture writing. He responded by drawing a simplified eye within an equal-sided triangle.

"It is an age-old symbol", he says, "displayed on temples, churches, and synagogues for thousands of years. The eye symbolises the all-seeing, all-knowing Creator. Of all the miracles, the eye is the most wonderful. For Nature or Creation the triangle alone would be the symbol.

Mr. Bliss found the basic idea for his new language through studying the system of "ideographs" or pictorial symbols which form the written language of China. The Chinese system is cumbersome. Its pictorial symbols need a great many strokes of the pen, and a Chinese typewriter has 1500 different keys.

But when he was in Shanghai he observed that these symbols could be understood by people who spoke any of the different languages of China and neighbouring countries.

There is one significant side to Semantography - one which commend itself to a war-weary world. Mr. Bliss believes much of our misery arises because we attach valuations to people.

We must teach the people of this planet to recognise valueless, meaningless statements," he says. The Hitler regime fed the German people on these, and was kept in power mainly because of their inability to see the fraud.

"Those of his minions who put the victims in gas chambers were sustained in self-righteousness because he told them it was 'necessary in a higher sense' - whatever that might mean."

Translated into pictorial language, says Mr. Bliss, the slogans of dictators and rabble rousers would create only heavy laughter, for every one would see at once that they were meaningless.

As evidence that an international language of picture writing will work, Mr. Bliss says that the whole world uses uniform signs in mathematics; signs used in chemistry, physics, geometry, electrical work, and radio are international.

Men at sea use one international code of signals; music in all Western civilised countries has the same system of notation.

In one of his pamphlets Bliss quotes Sir Robert Paget, Fellow of the Physical Society and the Institute of Physics, London.

"We are in the alarming position of having enormous control over the forces of nature, and very little reasoning power to guide our actions - in fact, very much like a lot of children playing with loaded guns. Man, it appears, is still handicapped by his...muddled way of thinking. May it not be that much of this unreasonable muddle is due to the simple fact that our symbols for thought - language - are not yet set in order; that in the matter of thought symbolism we are still much in the same state of confusion as the Romans were in their arithmetic? We should be horrified at the difficulty of multiplying MDCCIX by LVII; to the educated Roman it seemed natural and inevitable, but his arithmetical powers suffered in consequence."

"Human thought requires an efficient method of symbolism such as no language yet supplies. If the keepers of our language maintain a die-hard attitude and succeed in preventing reasoned improvement, the result will, I suggest, be that language will be less and less used for intellectual and rational purposes and relegated to an altogether inferior status as the symbolism of sentiment and small-talk. All accurate thinking will have to be carried out by means of some other symbolism like that of mathematics."

"This idea is also not new...Leibnitz realised the need of a reformed symbolism and method of thought. He imagined a universal symbolism of thought which would be understood by all nations, and by which thought itself would become accurate and quantitative."

The article is accompanied by examples of symbols taken from the Semantography Series No. 7 (see this).