

Some Points From the Philosophy of the Lithuanian Language

By ROMAS BYTAUTAS

(Dedicated to the memory of prof. Jaunius, the Lithuanian scholar who labored in the field of Philosophy.)

TRANSLATED FROM THE LITHUANIAN
By P. W.
URBAN-URBANAVICIUS

(The treatise was originally published in the "Draugija" and reprinted in book form in 1908, or ten years before the Declaration of Independence of Lithuania.)

Feci quod, faciant
meliora potentes.

Cultured nations have worked on their literary language for centuries. Both science and literature had developed gradually. New ideas would come to birth and coincidentally new words would be created for the expression of those ideas. Culture marched on slowly, therefore, language had also undergone a similar process. Each generation would leave an imprint of its cultural achievement upon the language it used in new words or in new forms of expression. Yet this whole process would occur gradually, seemingly without any consciousness on the part of the persons transmitting the language. Slowly, by and by, the language treasures of cultured nations have thus heaped up.

It had not been such a process of culture and language development with us. For many centuries the Lithuanian nation was at a standstill. The culture of humanity had kept striding ahead, but the Lithuanians had not taken part in its spreading. Owing to historical backgrounds up until recent times we had not had any class of people in whom the spiritual culture of our nation could have concentrated itself. The nobility, the only class at that time economically well-being and care-free and thanks to that it still had been able to enlighten itself, became Polonized, while on the other hand the peasantry, materially burdened and politically enslaved could not elevate itself in the way of spiritual progress. With but few exceptional instances, the small group of educated men who had emerged from the peasantry felt objectively incapable of bettering the conditions to which their countrymen were chained, so it is little wonder then, that their inability also made them lack courage to address the peasantry in Lithuania. Such being the circumstances, the Lithuanian nobility always studied and thought, spoke and wrote in foreign languages, while the Lithuanian peasantry, submerged in hard ships, stood for centuries in nearly the same stage of development. One generation would replace another generation, but the people would remain apparently the same both psychologically and artistically. Without making a grave mistake it can be said that the Lithuanian peasantry has had from the beginning of historical times down to the

bygone century the same horizon of mind. That is one of the reasons why our language had not undergone development. It probably kept changing idiomatically, although philosophically, as in regard to the vocabulary of words and their meanings, it stood almost stationary, because the minds of the people had necessity to resort at all times to the same ideas or concepts.

But time went on. Slowly, insusceptibly and imperceptibly the conditions of rural life kept changing. Aye? the same logic of agricultural self-improvement which at first required the enslavement of the peasantry, brought about the freeing of it from the bonds of political servitude. The Slachta fell. The peasantry at once became free and soon began to rise from the chaos of wretchedness and darkness into which the heartless fate of history had shoved it. A group of intellectuals appeared who had themselves emerged from among the *sermėgiai*, or gray-coats, and these began to diffuse the light of knowledge among the ignorant and illiterate masses in the nature language. A national movement has ensued which, eventually, is a cultural movement.

The Lithuanian nation has resolved to catch up with the other nations and to take possession of the whole material and spiritual wealth stored up by humanity through thousands of years. What countless new and varying questions confront our nation in this difficult cultural undertaking, how vast the number of new ideas which spring up in the human mind! Yet all those questions must be properly extricated, and all those ideas must be taken possession of and rightfully accounted for! It means the Lithuanians should develop their language to such a degree as the languages of cultured have already been developed. Furthermore, the task of developing it must be accomplished as soon as possible, for humanity does not stand stationary and does not wait for us to catch up with it, but incessantly keeps on advancing. So, from the point of view of its vocabulary as contrasted to the quantity of ideas capable of receiving expression, the Lithuanian language should, in a short time, undergo a process of evolution through which the other languages have in the course of ages already gone through. Such a problem of infinite arduousness has beset our generation. Wishing to find solutions for it, we must first of all examine and make researches into the Lithuanian language not only from the surface of grammar, but also from the inner side, i. e. philosophically, as in respect to the meanings of various words and modes of expression.

It was impossible to achieve such ends at the very outset. First, before the advent of literature, there had not been either any questioning of literary work or material for the analysis of language. Second, to think at length of the structure of language there was

not sufficient time: each writer was confronted by thousands of vital jobs which had to be done without any dilly-dallying, and for the accomplishment of which no sacrifice was spurned. And thus, simply to serve the purpose temporarily, that of introducing into the language such expressions which it lacks, there began the coining of new words. It is a known fact that coining done under such circumstances could not have always been trustworthy, particularly, when the individuals coining them had been educated in foreign tongues; those individuals never did or could make it clear to themselves in Lithuanian terms concerning what was in existence beyond the realm of the simple Lithuanian ploughman. It would frequently occur, and occur most naturally, that our culture bearers would bring to Lithuania ideas of foreign origin together with a foreign mode for expressing them. Philosophical researches into language not having at that time yet been founded, writers were obliged to create new words and hence, as a result, we witness nearly every one of those words having its own termination. In the first steps of our national renaissance such a situation had not been greatly destructive: at that time emphasis was stressed solely on the awakening of our countrymen from the lethargy of ages, rousing them to bear their duty. To realize this purpose it was inevitably necessary to do simply one thing: speak into the hearts of the people in sentimental and easy understood terms. Purity, correctness and expressiveness of language were unimportant.

It seems that we have by now gone through this preliminary stage of national renaissance. We have already approached the period of positive cultural constructive work. We are beginning to take active interest in the field of learning. The polite literature, originally used as a means for designating national individuality, slowly evolves into a broad field for research into the spiritual side of man. In this new stage of literary development the utmost requirement is the expressiveness of language, because science cannot be interpreted by words having restricted meanings. Science requires, as its prime requisite, expression. Not until we have become acquainted with the philosophical side of our popular speech, will our literary language possess those characteristics. According, I think that the most important requirement of the present time of our literary language—is a research into the spoken tongue from the point of view of its inherent structure; and the most indispensable book for us, is—The Philosophy of the Lithuanian Language. Linguists and men of letters should call attention to this phase of the question of language, for lack of knowledge of the philosophy of language, old errors take on the authenticity of oldness, new ones increase steadily, the susceptibility of the people keeps on reducing itself and the language is more and more subjected to corruption.

Nothing has yet been done in this branch of the study of language which I am pointing out, yet this work cannot be delayed. Although I am nei-

ther a philologist nor a master of Lithuanian, however I possess courage to make an open explanation of some of my studies which may be of aid, if not to a complete answer of some of those complicated yet important queries of our language, at least towards a solution for them.

Before commencing to delve into the detail of my accounts of a few characteristics of the Lithuanian language, I shall point out two principles, which, in my opinion, a philologist should pursue. 1.) The spoken language is not pure. Lacking a written literature of its own, pressed in on all sides by powerful and at the same time cultured foreign nations and enslaved by a nobility speaking a foreign tongue, the Lithuanian peasantry had not been able to preserve the purity of its speech. A countless number of foreign words and forms made their way into the language. For that reason a philologist should not only bring into account the various dialects but also discriminate between the mold and the grain and point out what is Lithuanian and what is foreign. 2.) Any one who has but a slight acquaintance with the Lithuanian language has undoubtedly observed that it is immensely rich in methods for creating new words: with the aid of the most varied prefixes, terminations, variable forms of the word-roots and etc., it forms with indescribable ease many new words from every part of speech. Even by borrowing, for an example, a foreign noun, it immediately from the very same root also an adjective and a verb, while in the language from which the word was borrowed only the naked noun is in existence. The Lithuanian language forms from one root not only many varied parts of speech; taking for instance the simple adjective 'gilus,' deep, we have the following five nouns derived from it: 'gilumas,' deepness, 'gilybė,' depth, 'giluma,' singular deepness, 'gilmė,' extreme depth, 'gylis,' a simple approximation of deepness; or else from the adjective 'gyvas,' live,

alive, we possess: 'gyvumas,' liveliness, 'gyvybė,' life-in-general, 'gyvata,' existence, 'gyvis,' a simple approximation of life...

End of the first Chapter.

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