THE SECRET-LANGUAGE OF CHILDHOOD.

BY OSCAR CHRISMAN.

WILLVUS youvus govus withvus mevus?" To-night, as this sentence goes chasing across my brain, a thousand memories come flocking in: the old brick schoolhouse on the hill; the branch back of my boyhood home, babbling, murmuring along, and almost lulling me to sleep; the river, with its night sounds, heard so often while fishing, singing songs of future greatness to the heart of a boy; the river-bottoms turning brown in the early frosts, and the wooded hills beyond, showing the beautiful tints of autumn that only the limestone region of the Hoosier State can show; the hushed memories of a father and mother gone. Thus the joys and pains of childhood come to all as the secret languages come trooping back from the almost forgotten past.

How these languages do cling to us! Many years may have passed, and yet come ringing out, as in joyous childhood, these sacred things. Some who read this article will at once rummage among their treasures, and out will come the faded brown paper with the hieroglyphics made by one sleeping amid the soughing pines of a Southern hill, or on a sloping side of Gettysburg, it may be in blue, it may be in gray; and the key will be hunted up, and the messages of childish days will be read again and again. By the side of a lock of hair or a faded ribbon will be a paper with

or other devices, the paper having been laid aside to be finished in the morning; but when morning came the little fingers were no more for this work, for during the night the spirit had fled; and the mother, finding the bit of paper, lays it away religiously with the other things. Some one will slip away, and from the corner of a drawer will pull out a little package tied with a blue ribbon, and read again a little love-letter beginning

and, looking across to the old gray-headed children have a few words of such. fellow nodding over his evening paper, won-

mischievous boy of twelve who wrote such

loving epistles.

Of nearly five hundred specimens of secret languages used in childhood, I know only one instance where the children obtained such from a book. A boy twelve years of age states that he got a language (cipher alphabet) from another boy, who found it in a book. At my request, he asked the name of the book, which is Lossing's "Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution" (Vol. I, p. 320). Upon looking up this reference, and comparing the cipher given me by the twelve-year-old boy, I found it to be identical with that in Lossing; thus, even after two copyings, it had remained unchanged. All the other secret languages had been either handed down to the users or made up by them. In the great majority of the spoken languages they were given by somebody to the ones using them, while in the written languages a greater number were made by the users.

These languages are found everywhere. I have discovered some existing in widely separated localities. A homesick Boston boy in San Francisco may be made happy by a fellow-boy exclaiming, "Wigery yougery playgery wigery megery?" and from that moment they are friends. A little Chicago girl playing on the beach at Galveston is delighted by her Texas friend saying to her in the Tut language: "Tuthushisus isus nun-icuce susanundud." The Honolulu girl, just in from her long ride, must be reminded of home when her Nantucket friend, pointing toward a swell young man on the veranda of a watering hotel, says "in Berkshire gab-

ble," "Pippadolify."

This secret-language period is a thing of child nature. There are three distinct periods in language-learning by the child. The first is the acquiring of the mother-tongue. The second period comes shortly after the time of beginning to learn the mother-tongue, and is a language made up by children who, perhaps, find themselves unable to master the mother-tongue. Very few children have a complete language of this kind, but all comes the secret-language period. Although der if in reality he was once a little, teasing, in a very few cases the learning of secret in some instances the period ran till after the eighteenth year, yet the vast majority of eighth and the fifteenth year, while the greatest use is between the tenth and the thirteenth year.

There are many reasons why children learn and use these languages. One lady confesses that she originated a language, and introduced it into a mysterious set of ten, in order to write notes in school; and she truly adds that had their teachers discovered the key, they would have learned many truths.

It can never be known whether these languages originated in the very first cases with children. The names would in many instances imply that children had to do with them, as they show things familiar to the child and loved by him. So in the secret languages we find animals playing an important part in the naming. The hog, dog, goose, pigeon, pig, fly, cat, and other animals, are attached to these languages. The child in the old-fashioned school, where all sat together, hearing the (to him) senseless and unknown Latin, would naturally attach the name to his language, and thus give birth to Hog Latin, Goose Latin, etc. Seeing or hearing a language, one letter may strike the child's fancy, as in one the letter h is "hash," and so Hash language is the result. In another "bub" (b) finds the funny spot in child nature, and so Bub talk comes forth. The child in former days, so frequently hearing of the a-b-c's, would, upon the construction of an alphabetic language, at once recur to such, and so name this the A-Bub-Cin-Dud language.

We are just beginning to learn that we do not know our children. In our school-work we find the learning of Latin and Greek and modern foreign languages is a great burden to many pupils; they are soon forgotten, and, if ever used, only in a very clumsy fashion. If we could know just how the child learns a language, much could be saved to us and to him. It is remarkable with what skill the secret languages are used. A boy trying to learn German seems to have hardly mind enough to open and close his mouth; but this same boy will use with skill a most intricate

secret language. Nor is the secret easily learned. Many of these languages are to the ones not knowing them just as unintelligible as are foreign tongues. Yet the children will use them with a fluency as though born

languages began about the sixth year, and with them. Also, in writing, the characters are almost, if not quite, as difficult to master as those in shorthand. Yet these young mascases are covered by the period between the ters will write them off as rapidly as ordinary writing, and with much more ease. Nor are these languages open secrets; for many of them are so jealously guarded that only a very few know them, and they must be so familiar with them as to speak them so rapidly that no one will get the key. To test this, say over to some one these very simple sentences, as rapidly as does a child when using them, and see if they are easily acquired (add "fus" to each letter and "jig" to end of each word):

Ifustfusjig ifussfusjig rfusafusifusnfusifusnfusgfusiig hfusafusrfusdfusiig.

"It is raining hard."

Alullullie isus a bubadud gugirurlul.

"Allie is a bad girl."

Arwa oota elleha? (final a long).

"Are you well?"

Ohio, mon dieu; go wagon oak horse?

"Good morning, my dear; have you sweet

plums?"

Although there are many varieties of these languages, they narrow down to a few classes. The most numerous class—the syllabic—add or prefix a syllable to a word, or insert it between syllables or letters in a word. This form is the most common, and the syllable most in use is *gery*, with variants of *gry*, *gary*, *gree*, *geree*, as, Wigery yougery gogery wigery megery? Next in use is *vus*, with the variants vers, ves, and vis, as, Willvus youvus govus withvus mevus?

In the second class—the alphabetic—a very common alphabet is made by placing a short u between a consonant repeated, letting the vowels stand as they are; thus, b is bub, c is cuc, etc.

Cipher alphabets are common. Many are arbitrary, being made up by the children using them, while others have been early formed, and used in several generations. One cipher sentence is given so:

"Are you going?" An alphabet often met with is made thus:

A sentence is thus:

JJ ADFE >FFDJ

"I am very tired."

most ingenious way:

	1	2	3	4	5
1	a	b	c	d	e
2	f	9	h	i	j
3	k	L	m	n	0
4	þ	91	N	A	t
5	w	2	w	X	4
6	3		-		(

42.54 42.44 11 43.42.31.51 41.11.55

"It is a nice day."

In the third kind of these languages—the sign language—the deaf-and-dumb alphabet is much in use. Some teacher who reads this may be able to know why the children were when he said that he had "nothin'" in his dumb language to make some pleasing re- young lady sending such designated it.

again used the two fingers, pointing upward, to signal to a boy at a distance to go swimming?

The fourth class-the vocabulary form-Another cipher alphabet is formed in this is not very full. There are not many cases where more than a few words are used. Yet most children have some nonsense Whether these are the remains of the vocabulary constructed while learning the mother-tongue, or whether made up at the secret-language period, remains to be ascertained. A few such words from a dozen obtained from a child are:

> TUELO-TUELO. A jay-bird. TRAMP-TRAMP. A man. TIP-TIP. A lady. PAT-PAT. A child. WAH-WAH. A crying baby. Goo-Goo. A good baby.

The following are from a paper containing twenty-five such, found by a lady among her childhood savings:

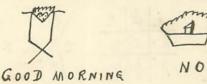
FOOL DEEL. I will kiss you. SQUIGGLE. Yes. Mossy banks. I will go to supper with you. SEAL. Oh, dear me!

A fifth form of these languages consists in watching a boy's hands underneath his desk. the reversing of the letters of a word, and He may now believe the boy told the truth in some cases the entire sentence is reversed, when he said that he had "nothin'" in his as, Loohes ta ti desu ew. Under this class hands; for he was only using the deaf-and-comes mirror-writing, or backhand, as the

Ou eures au thes green grace grown wind the atumb, Now are my own euret sugar-lump. TO READ THIS, HOLD IT BEFORE A MIRROR.

marks about his dear teacher. The Morse and reading such, and in tapping and reading from taps. A boy tapping idly on his slate may not be such a numskull as the there a boy living who has not again and as these three:

Besides the five classes named in the foretelegraphic characters are frequently used, going, there are several languages which some children becoming adept in writing cannot well be classified, and so such are put into an irregular class. In one such a slip of paper is prepared by cutting holes in it which fit over certain words on certain pages teacher may think; for, though he cannot get of a book, and thus make sentences. Anhis grammar lesson, he has got something other comes from that slip of paper menfar more interesting to him, perhaps-a tioned as found among childhood's remains. command of the telegraphic signals. Is On this paper are thirteen such characters





One of the most remarkable things which I obtained in my collections is the "Berkshire gabble," both spoken and written, furnished by two young ladies eighteen years of age. What is given here is taken from a graduating essay of one of the young ladies, and from very full letters written by the other.

This is from the graduating essay:

I know two little girls who hit upon a device which to others, who could not understand it, sounded like an unintelligible cry for expression; but to them, besides giving all the relief afforded by a cry, it was the embodiment of their inmost life. They made up words or names for any appearance, quality, or feeling they could not express by means of the English language. Most of the words were made up by a purely mechanical process. For instance, one day, when these two girls and one other were together, they decided to make a word for "the feeling you have in the dark when you are sure you are going to bump into something." One shouted, "I choose first syllable"; another, "I choose second"; and the remaining child had to take the last one. Each thought to herself a syllable, and when all were ready they fitted them together in the order chosen; the result was ku-or-

If the word sounded to them like the sensation, they left it as it was; if it did not, they changed it. A word so changed was one to describe the class of city girls who, when they go to the country in the summer, sit on the piazza, dressed up in fine clothes, doing fancy work; who can't climb, won't run, and are afraid of cows. The word at first was raggadishy, but finally became rishdagy. They approved of the latter because in order to pronounce it they had to turn up their noses in reality, which mentally they always did at such people.

Another word of some picturesqueness is pippadolify, which means young men who wear very stiff collars, newly laundried duck trousers, and walk as though afraid of creasing them or soiling

their shoes.

Trando. The thing which first suggested it was a gate on a hilltop, sharply outlined against the sky. Beyond it they could see nothing except the blue heavens, stretching on, on, forever. But because there was a path to the gate, and paths always lead somewhere, there must be something beyond. What that something was no one could tell without seeing it. To the imagination it contained as many possibilities as the future. This feeling of the semi-transparency of vastness they called trando.

There was one thing that troubled one of these children very much: Where did utterly lost things go, such as the water which vanishes from a mudpuddle or the cloth which gradually disappears from the elbows of dresses? There must be some place apart from the earth for such things; so she made up a name for it—Bomattle. The idea of the place gradually grew. She realized that some of the things which went there came back, as the

water came back to the puddle in the form of rain. It came to embrace larger things as the child grew, and she has never outgrown it.

When one struck a match there was light; when the match was blown upon there was no longer light. Where did the light come from and go to, and where did the darkness it chased away go to and return from? That place must also be Bomattle.

The following, from the letters, is also about the "Berkshire gabble":

Our words did not make up a language, being mostly comprised of adjectives to express our "feelings which did n't seem to be already expressed in English." I should say we were from ten to fourteen years old when we were most interested in building up our collection of words. Every new friend I met, I introduced to them. . . .

We went so far as to make a dictionary, which, I think, must contain over two hundred words. I am afraid I can explain most of the definitions to our words in anything but a lucid manner; but, as I have found our dictionary, I can at least give you the best ones, which, however, were not the ones, always, which we used the most.

I will begin alphabetically:

Ankerduddle, adj. Weird and spectral and romantic feeling of a big, solitary house by moonlight. Bogewatsus, adj. Fluttering, though determined, feeling before a high jump or dive (as in bath-

ing).

Bozzoish, adj. A person lacking individuality in his looks.

BUTTOR, adj. Peaceful summer Sunday morning feeling out of doors, with the hum of bees and the fluttering of butterflies.

CLONUX, adj. Grown up for one's age.

CREAMY, adj. Desire to squeeze a little fat cat or baby.

DINX, adj. Vulgar and "showy off."

DOVEY, adj. When one seems to resemble one's name.

This last is very hard to explain, as many of them are—especially in good English.

Evo, adj. Instinctive feeling that some one whom you do not see is in the room with you.

Faxsy, adj., is one of our best and most used words, and explained in our dictionary as "stuffy-parlorish," which means a close little country parlor, its water-lilies under glass domes, its dried pampas-grass in tall vases at each end of the mantelpiece, its shell and seaweed designs, its parlor organ, etc.

Fomo, adj. Nervousness about squeaking slate pencils, etc.

GOATY, adj. The kind of person who uses long words to express very ordinary emotions.

HALALA, adj. Exultant feeling, wild and inspiring, from the influence of being out in a wild wind-storm by the sea, etc.

HAMALET, adj. The indulgent cheeriness of mothers.HAWPLOW, adj. Sinking feeling, as in a marsh.

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HEELY, adj. Feeling of some one close behind you in the dark.

Kuawbee, adj. Feeling, with one's eyes shut, as if running into something.

LULLISH, adj. Feeling, in going up or down stairs, that there is one more step (thinking there is, and taking it).

Monia, adj. Presentiment that something is about to happen.

Mousy, adj. Applied to your unfortunate companion who is not wanted, is in the way, and is staying in the hope of getting something by it.

Munchy, adj. Up-to-date in every way—dress, speech, manners, and ideas; that is, up-to-date in a worldly way rather than intellectually.

NOTTLE, adj. The kind of practical children who play dolls and "horse," etc., as a matter of course. OPPLE, adj. Crackly and glimmering, as sheets of bright tin or copper.

OWLY, adj. Feeling one has when one has found

anything.

Paldy, adj. Feeling of the world being like a theater.

PATBOORAY, proper n., was the name of a club about six of us had for anti-slang-using.

PILTIS, adj. Feeling when one has made something all alone, or bought something with one's own money.

Pussy, adj. A child capable of making up funny faces.

Quono, adj. Feeling of delicious sense of perfect rest—drowsy and luxurious.

Rewish, adj. Feeling numberless eyes on you as you are about to recite something, etc.

SABBA, adj. Individual house smell.

SPAILY, adj. Old-fashioned and awkward—I may almost say directly the reverse of "munchy."

Stowish (or Stoish), adj., is one of our best, but one I really cannot possibly explain. Out of a large number of persons or things, there is always one that is stowish—and, considering all points, is the one least conspicuous. We used to differ as to what was stowish. It is a word which is wholly comparative, wholly relative. One thing alone can never be stowish; i. e., from the alphabet, d, k, n, and t are considered most universally among us as most stowish. Thursday was the most "stowish" day in the week, and April and November of the months. This is very vague, but the best I can do.

Thuks. An unexplainable sensation about an old blue pump.

VANIDIES, n. The "sillies."

Willish, adj. When a thing smells as something tastes (or taste reminding one of smell).

ZONCE, n. Terrible hatred.

ZUMMY, adj. A closely knit, neatly built, shorthaired dog.

These are a small per cent. of all our words, and ill explained, and, as you see, for the most part very childish and foolish. I think, however, we derived more enjoyment out of them than the children whom I describe above in the definition of "nottle."

There are some important things to be considered in reference to this secret-language period of children. Its highest stage, coming between the ages of ten and thirteen, marks a very important time in the child's life. At this very period nature is secreting material preparatory to the changing of the boy into a man and the girl into a woman. Nature, acting thus on the physical part of the child, reacts on the mental part, and so makes his whole being secretive; hence the development at this period of secret means of communication. Pedagogically this period shows that, next to the mother-tongue period, it is the very best time for the learning of foreign languages. Thus a very strong argument is given for the beginning of the work in foreign languages in the lower grades of the school. A very important matter here has reference to the origin of linguistic stocks and varieties therein. Many are familiar with the late Mr. Horatio Hale's theory that "the origin of linguistic stocks is to be found in what may be termed the linguistic-making instincts of very young children" (the second language period of children). It appears to me that as good a theory may be woven out of the facts of the secret-language instincts of children. When, in an early community, the secret-language period came upon the children of a family, this strong and much-used language found a place among the weak parents, and was used by them, and then they moved away by themselves, and a new variety of language was formed. Thus, following Mr. Hale's theory, the linguistic stocks might arise from the second language period of children, and the varieties in the individual stocks might come from the third (secret) language period of children. If we should hold that the child passes through all the periods of the race, -an epitome of the race, - this secret-language period again becomes an important matter; for it may show that at a corresponding period in the race man had an instinct for secret-languagemaking. One family would have its own language, and another family its own language; these in time separating, and each family keeping up its language, would give to us the linguistic stocks or the varieties in the linguistic stocks.

Laying aside theories, we have a great fact here which must be accepted and acted upon—the great inventiveness, acquisitiveness, patience, and language-forming ability of children at this secret-language period.