

22nd December 2022

Common

“Language is the dress of thought.”

Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets (1781), 'The Life of Cowley'*

In conversation with American friends, I regularly come across examples of, “Two nations divided by a common language”. I once told someone I would contact her soon. “I’ll give you a phone,” I promised. To which she replied, “But why? I have a telephone already.” I confused a colleague when I said, “That’s me here now.” He had *no* idea what I meant! Try explaining that a sticking-plaster isn’t a wallcovering when what you need is a band-aid. Or asking for drawing pins when they’re called thumbtacks. Pants and trousers, purse and handbag, biscuit and bun, suspenders and braces, braces and retainers, retainers and servants ... The list is endless.

This came to mind when I found a quote from a Croatian-American physicist, Nikola Tesla, in a 1905 academic paper, *A Means for Furthering Peace*. His thesis was that the transmission of electrical energy without wires could be a major step towards the creation of “Universal Peace”.

A practical answer ... must perforce be found in times to come, for it is manifest that by adopting one common language the onward march of man would be prodigiously quickened. I do not believe that an artificial concoction ... will ever find universal acceptance, however timesaving it might be. That would be contrary to human nature. Languages have grown into our hearts.

There is much that divides us, as evidenced by different usages of English in two nations. Divisions are widened further when a national language differs from ours, customs vary and religious practices are diverse. We have to work at understanding and respecting such differences and deal with the prejudices and separation they may create. But surely “adopting one common language” is about what’s “grown in our hearts” and not just expressed in our words. In this sense, we could do worse than look to the meaning of the Christmas Season to provide us with the common language we seek, which has “peace and good will” at its core.

This is no “artificial concoction”. Christmas gives us what we need. If “language is the dress of thought”, let our thoughts be of the right things, so that our march to universal peace might be “prodigiously quickened”.

A prayer for today

The language of love, and peace, and harmony ... Need I speak of anything else? Amen

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>