

## FOLK-SPEECH IN AMERICA.

**E**VELYN, recounting his visit to Beverly in 1654, says, "Here a very old woman shew'd us the monuments, and being above one hundred years old, spake y<sup>e</sup> language of Queen Marie's daies, in whose time she was born." The change in speech was probably even greater than in written English, in the century preceding the Commonwealth — the century in which the mother colonies of Virginia and Massachusetts received most of the stock from which their widely scattered children sprang. The "language of Queen Marie's daies" was perhaps more antique than the English spoken by Queen Elizabeth, which, if we may judge from her letters, was less modern than Shakspeare's. Elizabeth called her eyes "yees" — that is, "i-ees," as Chaucer pronounced it. She says "hit" for it, the old neuter of *he* in Anglo-Saxon days. This pronoun is yet heard among the Virginia negroes, who got their English no doubt from the white bondservants, who outnumbered them in the tobacco-fields until near the close of the seventeenth century. (The negro preterit with "done" for an auxiliary is perhaps Anglo-Saxon old clothes. I have seen a citation from a translation of Luke made in the fourteenth century where one reads: "And it was done that the beggar died." The negro would clip it to, "The beggar done died.")

From the days of Evelyn's entry above cited — that is, from the middle of the period of primary American settlement to the present time — the language has changed more slowly than in the hundred years between Mary the Catholic and Cromwell the Puritan. The English of book-reading Americans differs from that of educated English people only in those superficial traits that are the unavoidable result of a different environment and the fluctuations of fashion. But along the shore of a stream the current moves more slowly, and suffers eddies and backsets. Much old English of the days of Cromwell, some that goes back farther even than to "Queen Marie's daies," will be found in the dialect speech of rustic neighborhoods in America. There are facts in the history of English words that will never be known until some of the younger American philologists go afield in search of the living forms that grow in the soil about them, and that are not less instructive than the dialects of England assiduously gathered by a multitude of observers, or the *patois* of the French country

to which Littré was not above paying his respects. Disavowing any pretension to be a philological expert, I propose to write here as an observer of American folk-speech. On that portion of the history of the English language which has to do with its conditions and changes in this country, and on that alone, I may claim to speak with some authority, if the life-long habit of studying the people's speech, exceptional opportunities for observing it in many widely separated districts, and an extensive acquaintance with writings of all sorts, printed and manuscript, of the colonial period, can give authority.

English travelers very early mention the differences between colonial speech and that of the mother country. This arose partly from the great number of new objects and processes that must have names, and partly from English provincial words adopted into general speech in America. For example, "swamp," with a far-reaching Scandinavian ancestry, and no doubt a long provincial use in England, had to be explained to English readers, though its use appears to have been general in the American colonies. By 1676 it had passed into a verb in common use in Massachusetts: thus Ninigret, the Indian chief, is said to have "swamped himself" when he had hidden in a wooded morass. In 1730 "swamp" formed part of a compound word; "swamp-law," in Maine, stood for certain extra-judicial methods of attaining justice known to all rude and pioneer lands. The word "swamp," like many other provincials of the time, bettered its fortunes by emigration, and was received into good English society when it went back. There are many other words in orthodox use to-day that were apparently not so universally understood in the seventeenth century. Josselyn, the traveler, thinks it needful to make a curious explanation about 1675. "At last we lost our dogs," he says, "it being (as the Lancashire people phrase it) *twi-light*, that is almost dark." But twilight was in occasional literary use long before this time. I find "sky-setting" used for a time of day in an item of news from Edinburgh printed in Bradford's "New York Gazette" in January, 1731. I suppose the disappearance of twilight to be intended.

There are indigenous words in our folk-speech, but our local rustic dialects are composed almost entirely of words in their older forms or older senses, of English words now quite obsolete, and of words from provincial



English dialects. When first I heard farmers in the Lake George region call a "cowslip" a "cow-slop," I smiled to think how modern the corruption was, and how easy to imagine that the name had something to do with the feeding of a cow. But rash guesses in etymology are ever unsafe; "cusloppe" is given as a form of the Anglo-Saxon word nine centuries ago. The etymologists miss the history of this word, and of the word "slop," by not knowing that, both as noun and verb, "slop" refers to any liquid or semi-liquid food for cattle, and this overspread a region of America as to make its antiquity certain.

Take another expression that seems strictly American. "She is in a perfect *gale*," one says of a little girl or a young woman in a state of effervescent mirth. It is easy and natural to suppose this to be modern, and to derive it from a seafarer's figure of speech. But the "Danes" who settled in England spoke a tongue very much like the Icelandic, and there is in this speech the word *gall*,—with a long vowel,—meaning "a fit of gaiety," so that Anglo-Danish ladies in the court of Knut probably "got into a perfect gale" as our American women and girls do now. In New England they have the verb to "train" for to romp. For this I can find no remote ancestry; it may have come from the New England "trainin'," with its rum, cider, and ginger-bread, but I do not think it so recent as that.

Whenever a "half-cut"—but "half-cut" is a folk-word heard in New York city, and must not pass without explanation. The phrase is sometimes, "half-cut quality"—people whose social position is the irksome one of looking down on nearly everybody, except those who look down on them. The phrase is probably tautological, cut being used in its original sense of docked; "half-cut quality" is only "bob-tailed quality." To begin again my remark—when an English traveler of the class designated in New York as "half-cut" comes to this country, and goes home to write a book,—for the half-cut traveler, English or American, is prone to embalm his impressions of foreign lands in a book,—he is pretty sure to express great amusement at the "niggers." Especially does a "nigger regiment" marching down the street give him no end of diversion.

Now, an American feels something vulgar in the word "nigger." A "half-cut" American, though he might use it in speech, would hardly print it. It repels us even in Thackeray. The black man has taken to calling himself *negro* nowadays, and he puts no little race assertion into the word; but he is mortally averse to "nigger," which on this side of the sea has the tang of overseer's lingo. "Don't you call me niggah; de debbil is a niggah," is the way

a South Carolina black woman uttered her objection a while ago. But there is nothing diabolical—indeed, there is nothing essentially vulgar—in the pedigree of the offensive word. The first blacks brought to Jamestown are not called in Captain Smith's history "negro," the Spanish word for "black," but "negar," from the French word for a black man. They were similarly called in Boston—in the records it is spelled "neger," but a will of 1653 made it "negar." This pronunciation "negar," or "neger," was the commonest one on the Ohio River in my childhood, and is an older word in English than negro.

In the first anti-slavery tract printed in New England, in the year 1700, Judge Sewall writes not only "negro," but in one place "niger," which I take to be "nigger" in sound. Perhaps the sound of the old French word is most nearly kept in the Irishman's "naygur."

Our Lake George people say *fairce*, and the word seems merely a broad sound of fierce. In Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" we read:

Whan he him knew and had his tale herd,  
As *fers* as a leon, pulled out his swerd.

"Fers" here is a literal transcript of the old French *fers*, which would be sounded very like our "fairce." Lowell also notes "ferce" in New England. The word "fierce" is used by our country people as a different word from "fairce." "Fierce" is a word descriptive of character—a *fierce* dog is dangerous. But "fairce" only means eager; a dog may be *fairce* to catch a rabbit, or *fairce* to get indoors on a cold night, and yet not be fierce, and so a man is said to be *fairce* to hear the news. *Fers* and *fers* were two forms of the word in old French.

Alongside "swamp," which signifies a wooded morass, the country people in many places have another word for boggy ground covered with grass. This word, "mash," occurs in many of the colonial writers of the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century it was sometimes confused with "marsh"—that is, "marsh" was written and "mash" pronounced. Among the Du Cimitière papers I find a humorous "Reply to the Assessors," in which is this couplet:

I have no banks, I have no Marsh,  
Delaware's tide ne'er does me dash.

But it could hardly have been a recent corruption of marsh. The elision of the liquid is easy, but the flat vowel probably points to a closer kinship with the old form "marish," which occurs in a Virginia document of 1679. The corruption, whenever it first occurred, is a variant from attraction. The notion of a yielding substance is consciously present with a countryman when he uses it. The rustic likes to twist



a word about so as to make it descriptive. The word "tarantula" is corrupted by Mississippi wood-choppers into "tareantelope," and the peasants of the Pays de Vaud call "laudanum," *lait d'anon* — young ass's milk.

A good example of the attraction of one word for another is to be found in our American word "riffle," which gets the go-by from all the dictionaries and vocabularies, so far as I know,<sup>1</sup> though it is present in the excellent proverbial phrase, "He cannot make theriffle," *i. e.*, he cannot achieve his purpose against opposing circumstances. The notion is that of a boatman or canoe-man struggling up-stream over a riffle, or ripple. The word "riffle" is common enough in this sense, and seems at first a corruption of "ripple." But this latter word is by the etymologists considered a modern form of "rimple," while riffle comes doubtless from "rift," which is the form given to the word in the letter-press to Evans's analysis of his famous "Map of the Middle British Colonies." Now "rift," as applied to a slight fall, or a "shoaly place," as the first English explorer of the Delaware has it, is but another form of "reef." Mr. Skeat cites from Hexham's "Dutch-English Dictionary" of 1658, "rif" or "riffle," defined by "a foard or shallow place," and of this the colonial "rift" was but another form. By attraction of "ripple," or mere effort to produce representative sound, we get "riffle." "Riff," "rift," and the more modern "riffle" are wholly omitted from the dictionaries, and the word "ripple," in the sense of a *slight fall in a stream*, is not known to lexicographers. I believe its use to be all but universal in the United States. I very much doubt the derivation of "ripple" from "rimple."

Much like "ripple" and "riffle" are "whipple-tree" and "whiffle-tree," both in common use, yet each susceptible of a derivation of its own. It is worth while remarking here that the "double-whiffle-tree" or "double-tree" is known in some Northern regions by an excellent descriptive name, the "evener." By analogy with "whipple-tree," the ghastly wit of "The Sotweed Factor" calls a gallows a "tripple-tree," which was probably colonial slang.

The change of "rif" to "rift," pointed out above, reminds us of "clift" for "cliff," which I find in Josselyn. "Clift" is the folk-word in many parts of the United States, as it is also in England. Two picturesque streams in Indiana claim the adjective "clifty" for proper name. It is not for a student of folk-speech to go above his last, and meddle with the difference among philologists, as to whether cliff did or did not come from the verb "cleave," to split open. The wide prevalence of the form "clift" creates a prejudice in favor of this etymology so strongly re-

jected by some authorities. A fissure in the rocks is called a "rock-cleft" in an old Connecticut writing.

But the *t* in "clift" may easily be an excrescence, as it is in many other folk-words. Unlettered people love uniformity. I heard of a company of mountaineer soldiers who persisted in changing their captain's name, Lambkin, to Lambkins, in order to make it dress the line with Tomkins, Watkins, Jenkins, Haskins, and Simpkins. There is a strong tendency to put an *s* on every proper name that will bear it, from the prevalence of the old possessive or patronymic termination. Given soft, raft, aft, daft, rift, drift, shift, and other words like them, and skiff straightway becomes skift; whiff, whift; and cliff, clift. "Once" may get a *t* because it is so often used to mark time past that it seems to deserve a preterit ending; "twice-t" may have caught the *t* from proximity to "once-t," for final sounds are highly contagious. Many a terminal *t* appears to have come from the frequency of its sound in the past tenses of verbs. Thus "across" becomes "acrost," perhaps from "crossed," or maybe from association with *past* used as a preposition of place. This latter in turn pays itself back by filching an augment, though Chaucer uses "apass" as a verb. Thus a man from the bottom of the Indiana "Pocket"—let us say from the hill country of "Posey Kyounty, Injeanny"—might have said thirty years ago: "I come straight acrost the crick, an' kep' a-goin' right ahead, and clim plum' to the top of yan hill over yander, an' wuz a-comin' down on t' other side of that air branch, apast the woods paster," and so on. No types can express, however, the long-drawn flatness of the accented vowel in apast, yander, and paster, or for that matter, in "pasnips" for parsnips, in "passell" for parcel, in "sassers" for saucers, and in "sassingers" for sausages. I give "sassers" for extreme Hoosier, but I find "sasers" in a Connecticut inventory before 1650, in the time of American phonetic spelling. "Passell" I give as equivalent to parcel, but it has in the dialect the sense of a portion or quantity, as "he spilt a whole passell of eggs in the road." It is also applied to people in contempt, as "a passell of nateral born fools," and especially "a passell of thieves."

To begin again with words like "acrost" and "apast," the Pennsylvania laws in colony times speak of "wears [weirs] *cross* creeks and rivers." Judge Sewall of Massachusetts says "aclock" before 1700, as most of our country people do to-day. Indeed, the "New York Gazette" has no other form, I believe, until 1733. I suspect that this is the most ancient locution. Folk-speech uses the prepositional prefix *a* much oftener than modern literate language does, especially before present participles. Oliver the Protector says, "What is the Lord adoinge?"

<sup>1</sup> This was written before "The Century Dictionary" was issued.



precisely as a Western exhorter says it. I have never heard the plural of "ado" as King James uses it when he thanks Queen Elizabeth for "her motherlie caire" of all his "adoes." But I know a woman of the upper Hudson country who "puts the tea adoin'" when she sets it to draw.

When I was a little boy my playmates at a country school in southeastern Indiana wore "skeets" and went "skeeting," though the village boys said *skates*. I counted "skeet" a curious corruption. Fancy my surprise at meeting an old acquaintance in a far-off land, and in strange company, when long years afterward I read the passage in Evelyn's "Diary" for the year 1662, in which he speaks of "having seene the strange and wonderful dexterity of the sliders on the new Canal in St. James's Park, perform'd before their Majesties by divers gentlemen and others with Scheets after the manner of the Hollanders, with what swiftness they passe, how suddainely they stop in full carriere upon the ice," and so forth. The *ch* in "scheets" is Dutch, and therefore sounded like *k*. Pepys tells of being at St. James's Park on the same day: "Where I first in my life, it being a great frost, did see people sliding with their skeates, which is a very pretty art." I here discovered that the country boys in the hills of Craig Township, when they said "skeet," were only one or two centuries behind the fashion, and were using the word as pronounced by Charles and his courtiers when they brought the "very pretty art" to England. A New York journal of 1784 complains of the time wasted in "skeating" on Collect Pond. Nowhere is it truer that "all which is partakes of that which was" than in language.

I have often heard on the Ohio River a curious phrase, "Hump your stumps"—that is, "Hurry along." Skeats notes the kinship of the verb "stamp" with the Sanskrit "stambha, a post, pillar, stem," without remarking that a near kinsman of this word, applied to those "pillars" of the human body with which men *stamp*, has come down to us through the by-ways of English. Do you smile at this and say that "Stir your stumps" is used by all the world that knows English, and is only modern slang and a manifest figure of speech? Perhaps "Stir your stumps" is another form of "Hump your stumps," the alliteration in the one phrase supplanting the rhyme of the first and last words in the other, but Halliwell cites "Stirre your stumps" from a writing of 1640. That "stumps" was used for "legs" at least three hundred years ago is proved by a passage that I find in Philip Stubbes, who, in pouring out the lava of Puritan indignation upon the gross festivities of the English Christmas-tide in 1583, gives us this lively picture:

Then marche these heathen companie towards the churche and churche-yarde, their pipers piping, their drommers thondering, their *stumpfes* dancyng, their belles ringlyng.

"Stump and Rump" is given in Halliwell in the sense of "completely." Literally it means "leg and thigh." "Stumps" is equivalent to "legs" in several English dialects, and a direct connection is found with stamp in the English provincial word "stump," to walk heavily—*i. e.*, to "stomp," as our American country people give the vowel. I have taken pains to follow this word so far as a sort of test, showing that humorous and slang-sounding phrases may have long lines of descent and a widely scattered kindred. I find the phrase, "On a sudden," in the English Public Record Office. It is in a report on Bacon's Virginia Rebellion of 1676. In a despatch from The Hague in Bradford's "New York Gazette" of December 11, 1727, it is said: "The Council of Desmesnes of the Succession of Orange are *struck all of a heap* by a vigorous resolution enjoining them to give an account," etc. The familiar "Take care of yourself," uttered at a parting with a friend, I found used in the Pays de Vaud, where one peasant says to another, "Conservez-vous." The phrase may go back to the original Aryans. "Good-by, Jake, take keer of yerself," was the farewell caution a poor-whitey gave to his brother, who was about to be hanged in Columbia, South Carolina.

But let us look at the other end of the phrase, "Hump your stumps," the assonance of which hangs like a pair of saddle-bags across the middle word. "Hump" is not, as the dictionary people imagine, from the noun. It is clearly a derivative of the root of "hop." "I must hump along if I would get home to-night," the people say. Mr. Lowell gives us another word from the same stem in the phrase, "I must hyper round and get tea." So the vocabularies give us an archaic word, "huppe," to hop. In parts of Pennsylvania, in the eighteenth century, there were wild frolics of dancing and drinking called "hup-se-saws," which name analyzed gives us "hop" and "see-saw." The verb to "hump" is probably a nasalized form of "hup" or "huppe." "Hyper," which I fancy borrowed its *r* from the next word in "hyper round" (hype round), is identical in meaning with hump. A Hoosier house-mother would hump around and get supper, while a Yankee matron was hypering round and getting tea.

I cannot suggest any explanation of an Indiana mother's injunction by which she seeks to quicken the pace of the boy "creeping like snail unwillingly to school." She says, "Marvel, now!" I have heard it "Marble, now!" "Mosey" is another imperative used in the same



way, and this I have heard in Brooklyn as well as in the old West. Bartlett, with his usual felicity in going wrong, gets "mosey" from a runaway postmaster in Ohio named Moses, and "the Spanish *vamosé*." In colony times a ship's yawl was sometimes called its "Moses," in allusion perhaps to the ark of bulrushes. The play known to boys as "mumble-the-peg" is called by an old writer, "moselle-the-peg," but this does not help us out with "mosey." Nor can I suggest any original for "torshent," a Cape Cod word for the youngest child in a family. Those who have read "The Chezzles" will remember how delightful is the use Mrs. Morse makes of a deaf mute "torshent" and of the word. I believe it is not confined to Cape Cod.

The word "gent" nowadays seems to wear its hat cocked on one side of the head, and to walk with a caddish swagger of vulgar self-importance. But I know a worthy old lady in the country who calls her husband the "old gent," using it as a title of respect, and such it was in her childhood and long before. In 1754 the Reverend Samuel Davies, afterward president of Princeton College, traveling in England, describes the Reverend Dr. Lardner as "a little pert old gent," epithets that would not be flattering to a minister to-day, nor even dignified for a minister to use. "Pert" here has the sense of "lively"—much as a Kentuckian might use "peart," or a New Englander "perk." Indeed, I suspect that Davies gave the word the sound of "peart." That Davies used "gent" as a term of respect is shown by his characterization of another reverend doctor as "a venerable, humble, and affectionate old gent." It will not do, therefore, to account a word recent because of its slanginess. When a smoker professes fondness for "the weed" he does not dream that he is using an epithet applied to tobacco by King James I. in 1620, and that nearly two hundred years earlier than James, in the reign of Edward VI., the hop-plant just coming into England was called "the wicked weed." What plant had worn this title of contempt before the hop I do not know.

Our very mispronunciations and distortions of words are ancient. Seeing an old quarto of 1623, entitled "Le Negoce d'Amsterdam," lying on the table in an auction room, I left a little nibble of a bid for it, and got it for a dime. One has a good chance of finding something of value in an old tome, even if it should finally go to the junkman to save shelf-room. This one, redolent, as I deemed it, of the dingy counting-house of some ancient Dutch grossburger to whom it had served as a sort of trade-bible, stood on my shelves for a long time without being opened. In moving the books awhile ago I tried it to see if it could pay shelf-rent.

There was not much in it; explanations of obsolete weights and measures, lists of the fees of convoy-loopers, and tables of exchange in the outlandish moneys of those times. But I presently found that this book hugged another between its back cover and fly-leaf, and had held it for a century perhaps, and held it so close that even the expert maker of auction catalogues had not found out that he was selling two books for one. The inclosed pamphlet of forty-two pages was in English, and entitled "The Captain's Directory, etc., by T. M., English Ships Broker at Rotterdam." This sea-captain's hand-book, preserved by good fortune from the destruction which befell its mates, enables us to overhear the pronunciation of a ship-broker of a hundred-and-sixty years ago, for these pages have not known the hand of the literary reviser. T. M. must have spoken English much as a man of his class in South street, New York, would to-day. He said "marchandise," which is out of date, but he also said "pruens," "liquorish," "salpeter," "Ierland," "celtificate," and "lamb-black." Apropos of this last word, Mr. Wright defines it by "to black shoes," and cites from Wycherly "lamb-blackening the judge's shoes." But any one who has seen lamp-black and tallow put on shoes, as it sometimes is in country places, will readily perceive that Wycherly merely spelled "lamp-black" as many of our people pronounce it. And, indeed, all of the corruptions cited above in this paragraph are in the interest of euphony, and would perhaps have been sanctioned by usage among a people like the Greeks, who had what our English stock so wofully lacks—the artist spirit. But I cannot say much in favor of the word "peter," which is used for saltpeter by some of the Massachusetts colonists; it even gets into some official documents, in the time of the Indian wars, perhaps because saltpeter was then regarded as a very proper apostle to send to the Gentiles.

The Earl of Surrey, in one of his best poems, says:

Laid in my quiet bed,  
In study as I were,  
I saw within my troubled head  
A heap of thoughts appear.

He here uses "heap" in precisely the sense given it by people in southern Indiana, in Georgia, in Texas, and generally over a large part of the United States. This sense of the word is very primitive. I believe "The Century Dictionary" gives the sense of a crowd or throng as the earliest meaning of the word. It was good when the first colonists came out of England. It seems a little monstrous nowadays to hear a man speak of his cow's giving "a heap of milk," or to hear that "there was a heap of people at the basket meetin'."



"Sight" is also used for a great quantity, or a great number, and an example of it is given from a writing of 1540, "Where is so huge a syght of mony?" But this is not quite the same; it shows the phrase in transition. The Hoosier duplicates the sense: he has raised "more corn by a heap-sight" than his neighbor. Sight is intensified by becoming plural, as "There 's goin' to be sights and sights of people at the barbecue." The poor-white's phrase for a great quantity is sometimes "gobs," sometimes "lots and gobs," or rather "lots and *gaubs*," with a long hold on the last note. He also says "the whole gob" for all of anything. To "sell by the gob," in the dialects of parts of England, means to sell the whole lot. Our "job-lot" is only a sprucer form of "gob-lot." On the western slope of the Green Mountains each cluster of charcoal kilns with the shanties of the workmen is called a "job." In ascending the road which crosses the wooded summits of Mount Tabor, I was told to go on "to the third job," and there turn to the right. In the village of East Dorset, Vermont, the marble factories, which make monuments and tombstones by machinery, are severally called "marble-jobs," and in the same region a lumbering-camp with its saw-mill is a "lumber-job."

The low-down man not only says "gobs," but he also expresses quantity by a still ranker word, as: "He 's rich; he 's got gaums of money," as though his Dives were all besmeared with riches—"gaum" being the old English and French *gomme*, that is, "gum."

Since this article was written, "The Century Dictionary" has made my examples of the American "guess" antique, by showing that Gower, Chaucer, Shakspeare, Sheridan, and Wordsworth use this Americanism. I therefore omit them, only remarking that I find the word so used in the Paston letters in the fourteenth century, and that there is evidence of its existence in our colonial period. It is by no means confined to New England. It is common in Pennsylvania, and in southern Indiana, where there is practically no population of New England origin. But "calc'late," or "cal'late," is exclusively Yankee, and is limited to the substratum of folk-speech. So, on the north side of the Ohio River, "guess" is genteel enough for colloquial use, but "low" is lower class. Bartlett's "Dictionary of Americanisms" gives this word as "allow," which it rarely is except when pressed and laid away in an herbarium. Bartlett wholly misses its sense. He has misled Lowell and all the dictionaries in this as in many other definitions. Professor A. S. Hill of Harvard is the latest writer I have met who gives "allow" as a dialect word meaning "to assert, to affirm," which it never does except by way of irony—just as "guess" and "calc'late"

and the Southern "reckon" are used ironically to express assertion. "I allow," or rather "I 'low," in its commonest sense is equivalent to "I guess," "I calculate," "I reckon," and the Englishman's "I fancy." By way of irony, an Appalachian mountaineer will say, it is true, "I 'low that 's a mighty nice hoss, Squire." He means to affirm by innuendo, as a Yankee, in the same case, might "calc'late." The word has another very common signification. "I 'low to go to town to-morry" is an expression of purpose. A New England up-country man would say, "I 'lot on goin' to taown."

"Guess" appears rarely, "low and "calc'late" almost never, in writings of the past. Our forefathers regarded writing as a solemn business, and certain colloquialisms were never put down on paper except by inadvertence. My father was a Virginian, and, like Virginians in all generations, spoke of his father as "pa." But one would never suspect it from his most intimate family letters. He always sends his love and other messages to "my father." I remember how surprised I was when a boy, visiting in Virginia, to find that "mama" in a letter was pronounced "ma." I was regarded as outlandish because I did not know that "ma" was always spelled but never pronounced "mama." Who knows how much of the speech of the past we have lost by such conventions? In the Dillwyn manuscripts in Philadelphia, young Susan Dillwyn's form of address is "father." But once in telling what she said to him in a dream she calls him "daddy"—no doubt the common colloquial form in Pennsylvania. Once again she slips into calling her grandfather "granddady." In another Philadelphia journal of the last century, the sprightly Sally Wister writes "dada and mama," and as she elsewhere says "daddy," she no doubt pronounced "mama" "mammy" as it seems to have been generally spoken in country places in the early years of this century.

The first-comers to Connecticut must have pronounced many words exactly as my neighbors, the lake-dwellers of northern New York, utter them to-day. The old Hartford inventories have "tacklin'" for harness, "exepinn" for linchpin, and "grin'ston' and winch." The real sound of grindstone here is "grin'st'n'." We also anchor our rowboats with an "anchor-st'n'." To "get shut of," in the sense of "to get rid of," is given in Halliwell's provincial vocabulary; the phrase is used in, though not confined to, what I have called the Hoosier—the speech of illiterate people within the Ohio River watersheds, and in the whole southern Appalachian region. But the Hoosier sometimes "gits *shet* of," or "*shed* of" what he does not like.

Halliwell gives "duberous" for "dubious"



in several English dialects. The Hoosier makes it "juberous," and gives it both a subjective and an objective sense. He feels "mighty juberous" about crossing an unsafe bridge, and he also regards the bridge as "juberous." But two words have been well mixed here, for "juberd" is a form of "jeopard," and "juberous" in the same sense may be "juberdous"—that is, "jeopardous." But folk-speech often applies a subjective word to the object. The peasants on Lake Geneva speak of *une chose envieuse*, when they mean *une chose enviable*.

Our country lads say "galluses" for what we call suspenders, as the Yorkshire dialect has "gallaces" for what the Englishman calls braces. Ashton gives from a London newspaper of 1712 an advertisement of a house for sale. It is interesting, from an architectural as well as from a linguistic point of view, to know that this unquestionably "Queen Anne" house had a "cupalo" on it. By a similar transposition "gundalow" was the name given to a large, rough flat-boat on the Potomac; it was to the lively imagination of the earliest boatmen a gondola, or, as they said it, a "gundalo." The word is now applied to a box-car for coal.

I find "daythe" for dearth in early colonial letters, and "haythe" for height in Vaughan's journal of 1684, but I nowhere find the Hoosier "hath" for hearth. One not only hears "haith" but also "hait" for height in the Adirondacks. "Fur" for far, and "further" for further, were common enough on the Ohio a quarter of a century ago, and may no doubt be found there yet, in spite of hostile schoolmasters. In the Hutchinson papers I find "farder." Edward Winslow, a Mayflower pilgrim, says "admired to see" in a letter to Winthrop; the phrase is still green in Massachusetts, though the word admired has shifted its sense. "Overhalls" appears in the secret record of Sir Henry Clinton, which Dr. Thomas Addis Emmet contributed to the "Magazine of American History," and as a noman who wears overalls ever called them anything but "overhalls," I am inclined to think it the original word. Major Vaughan, the New Hampshire colonial magistrate, who says "haith," also writes "menester," "heither" for hither, "becase," "scurse," "haifer," "rauth" for wrath, "caitch" for catch, and "dafter" for daughter. Nearly all of these are yet to be heard in one or another down-east folk-speech. Vaughan uses some quaint terms and phrases that I have never met with elsewhere. "Hand-apase" is his expression for with haste. He says "rutted at" for scolded or threatened; literally roared at, akin to the Latin *rugitum*. There is an English dialect word, "raut," to bellow, and the same root is found in "rother beasts," a name in use in this country two hundred years ago for horned

cattle. Vaughan writes "at ditto time" for at the same time,—literally at *said* time,—"ditto" being a form of the Italian *detto*, "said." He also says that Mason "had *refin'd* up to the Kinge all fines and forfeitures." "Fine" has in several of the writers of this period the sense of a composition in one payment for future instalments on contingent dues. It will be seen that Vaughan's language is antique and well-preserved, many of his words are in even an earlier stage of development than those in common use in his time. Edward Randolph, the most gifted liar of all the royal agents in the colonies, said "hursh't" for hushed, and "forgit," and "bene," now coming into favor again. The latter two were common in that day. Randolph, though professing a great attachment to the English Church and its rites, unluckily calls the liturgy "the lethardge of the church."

One John Wright, living near the site of the city of Trenton, wrote a letter to Andros in 1680. He speaks of persons "concernid in the satlin of a toune." He is an emigrant from Martha's or, as he calls it, after the manner of the time, "Martine's," Vineyard. He seems to have had trouble there: "A sentence of death" had been "given upon all my Concernes." Andros had interposed in his behalf and given him what he calls "a Resericktion"; otherwise "I had now been but the prodikt of a sifer." He writes "curis" and "concaiveing"; he makes three syllables of "afayars" and "desiar," but he gives rather short "mesar" for measure. He says "destover" for discover, writes "reule," and calls the "Deucke" of York "Riall Hiness." He has "holle" for whole, by which he seems to intend the unspellable pronunciation prevailing throughout New England to this day. He says "acenn" for akin, "case" [caze] for cause, and he writes "implyment." I suppose "mesar" is the only one of the pronunciations indicated by his spelling that could not easily be found to-day among illiterate people.

I have given enough examples to show that the most ancient and least mutable part of a language is the residuum—the folk-speech. Fashions may change, but the countryman is slow to give up the ways and words of his forefathers. If the world's changes knock the sense out of a word he will put another meaning into it with as little alteration as possible. Some of the provincial English people say "hallow-day" for holiday or holy day. But New England hallowed no holidays, and kept holy no holy days but the Sabbath. So from *holiday*, or the broad sound of *hallow-day*, some of our Northern farmers get "hollow-day"—that is, a day with no work in it. They attach quite another sense to "hollow" when they note the condition of the atmosphere in which sound



is easily carried. "The air is so *hollow* that I can hear a train ten miles off," one will say.

There are *patois* much more outlandish than our well-known rustic dialects; such as are to be heard in out-of-the-way places — in North Carolina byways, in the Jersey mountains, in some parts of the "Eastern shore," and in some remote nooks of the Appalachian range. Nowhere in print can I find any parallel for the most atrocious features of the dialect of the "tar-heels" and "crackers," the Carolina dregs. A Confederate officer told me that during the long siege of Petersburg, whenever the battery to which he belonged fired upon the entrenchments over against it, the return fire was very disturbing to the North Carolina infantry alongside. At length one of the infantry soldiers came over to remonstrate with the commander of the battery against this reckless provocation of an enemy's dangerous fire. He said: "Leftenant, ef you uns could shell the uns 'thout the uns shellin' we uns, ur hurtin' you uns, we uns would n' keer ef you uns wuz to shell the uns all the time." "What the deuce *is* he saying, anyhow?" cried the South Carolina lieutenant, in despair, turning to his orderly for explanation. In such out-of-the-way *patois* there are preserved perhaps distorted fragments of now this and now that English dialect, with bits of argot perchance brought from the slums by ancestors who emigrated involuntarily, and new distortions or contortions of speech developed by the sheer intellectual depravity of clay-eaters and moonshiners.

If all the monstrosities of such dialects had come from England we should not be able to find evidence of it — such people do not record their speech. Now and then, however, an early immigrant who could write has set down some of these distortions, and we are led to suspect that most of them came from Britain; some of them came with the Saxons from Frisia, no doubt.

One of the most curious documents that I have met is a petition of one Barnard Hodges of Delaware. It gives us what is to be found to-day, though rarely, the excrescent "y" at the beginning of a word, a sound that might easily have begun from a drawling use of the definite article before a vowel, and from a habit common with illiterate people of using *a* for *an*. Thus if I say "a understanding," it helps the euphony to let it slip into "a yunderstanding." This Hodges, albeit he shows some education, is partly phonetic, as will be seen by "maapeyer" for "may appear." But his letter *u* is often silent and superfluous. He styles the governor, "Your Younneur," and he says, "yunless," "yeunder," "yunderstanding," and "yeundertake." He even takes pains to write "yeouffeis" for office. His dialect must have

been strangely antique; that he pronounced the past tenses of regular verbs as a separate syllable is shown by his frequent spelling of them with *a*, without eliding the feminine *e*. For example, "returnead" for returned, "seattlead" for settled, and "obtainead." He wrote "bestoued" for bestowed; his was is "wous," his what "wout" — but in these the *u* is probably superfluous. What gives consistency to his speech is that he twice writes "wertue." It is a general rule that the man who says "yundertake" and drinks "yarb" tea when he is sick, usually spells wertue "with a we." The author of this letter, which is evidently written with considerable elaboration, and no little perspiration, had probably received more "schooling" in England than his neighbors. He complains that his cause had been tried by a jury of "unettercat men."

In nothing is the student of American folk-speech so liable to error as in assigning geographical limits to a word or phrase. The English local dialects were pretty thoroughly mixed. One gained a little more dominance in one place, another in another, but a stray provincial term is prone to turn up in places the most unexpected. "Tote" has long been regarded as a word of African origin, confined to certain regions where negroes abound. A few years ago Mr. C. A. Stephens, in a story, mentioned an "old tote road" in Maine. I wrote to inquire, and he told me that certain old portage roads, now abandoned, bore that name. I find the word used in a "Remonstrance" from the people of Gloucester County, Virginia, preserved in the Public Record Office in London. This paper bears date 1677, when there were four times as many white bond servants as negroes in Virginia. "Tote" appears to have been a well-understood English word in the seventeenth century. It meant then, as now, to bear. Burlesque writers who represent a negro as "toting a horse to water" betray their ignorance. In Virginia English, the negro "carries" the horse to water by making the horse "tote" him.

"Quoit" is pronounced "quait" in most rural districts in America, I believe. There are other words showing a like interchange between the vowel sound represented by our "oi" and the long "a." It is precisely the characteristic most easily remarked by a foreigner in Canadian French, that such words as *bois* are sounded "bway," while a reverse process takes place in words with the sound of our long *a*. An amusing instance of this is found in early New England history. Elizabeth Hanson was carried away captive to Canada by the Indians in 1724. She fell at length into the hands of a kind French family, who insisted on baptizing her infant in order to make it French. Mrs. Hanson relates



that the name given to her baby at its French baptism was "Mary Ann Frossways." I make no doubt the last of these names was a riddle to all New England. But the poor woman's English tongue could not come any nearer to the Canadian pronunciation of *Françoise*. What the little Yankee child was called at its Canadian christening was equivalent to "Mary Ann French."

The relations between Protestantism and the Roman Catholic church have now and then changed a familiar word. Governor Winthrop was so Protestant that he changed the name of a fording place in a stream from "Hue's Cross" to "Hue's Folly." So I find that what we nowadays call scare-crow is called in an American document of about 1680, preserved in the Egerton manuscripts, "a scare +," that is a scare-cross. Did our reforming ancestors change cross to crow?

Franklin noted in the pages of "Poor Richard" the differences of speech in the several provinces; he laughed at the Marylander and the Connecticut man for beginning and ending their sentences with "sir"; at the Dutch New Yorker for saying "diss" for this; at the Pennsylvanian's "painter" for panther; and at the residents of New England and Cape May because they called a cow a "keow," "by a certain involuntary twist at the root of the tongue." The striking difference between the speech in two adjacent towns on Long Island was noted very early, and is significant. Sally Wister, in

the Revolutionary times, thought it royal good fun to return the gallantries of the Virginia officers by chaffing them about their broad speech and their lost final *r*. It was, perhaps, a peculiarity of the accepted English speech when Virginia was settled. Queen Elizabeth writes "moe" for more, as a Virginian utters it yet. Our Southern dialect writers succeed in misleading all but Southern readers by using an *r* where none is sounded. All my friends say "Brer Rabbit," as Mr. Harris writes it, but as neither he nor any other Georgian, white or black, says it. It is "Bruh Rabbit," if one gives the common sound to the letters, but the Virginian and the Georgian regard a final *r* only as a modifier of the vowel.

While I was yet a young man living in the West, I received a letter from Lowell in reply to one of mine, in which he gave me somewhat full suggestions regarding methods of collecting dialect. Some sentences I transcribe here for the sake of their Lowell-ish flavor.

I hope you will persevere and give us a collection. Remember that it will soon be too late. Railways are mixing and the school-master rooting out. . . . Archaisms of speech survive only among people who are so lucky as not to be able to get at your new-fangled phrases. When the lumberer comes out of the woods he buys him a suit of store-clothes and flings his picturesque red shirt into the bush. Alas! we shall soon have nothing but store-clothes to dress our thoughts in, if we don't look sharp.

*Edward Eggleston.*

## PAIN.

THOU drear companion of the slow night-hours,  
 Thou sharpener of the soul! Long, long had I  
 Waged weary combat with thee, though my cry  
 Of anguish only cheered thy mocking powers,  
 As through the years we strove; no respite ours,  
 Till, lo! one day each breathed victorious sigh,  
 The master, thou, of my mortality,  
 But master who beneath my spirit cowers  
 Its slave forever. Now fast friends are we,  
 My vanquished victor Pain, and much I owe  
 To thy stern fellowship: through thee I see  
 With quickened sense all things both high and low,  
 For knowing all that I can never be,  
 Tutored by thee, all wider life I know.

*Elizabeth West.*