

THE TRICKS OF TIME

CURIOS CHANGES THAT HAVE BEEN WROUGHT IN OUR DICTION.

Some Striking Examples of the Difference in the Use or Meaning of Words That, Once of High Estate, Are Now Looked Upon as "Slangy."

It is now some 200 years since Dean Swift proposed to establish in England an academy, such as that of France, for "correcting and ascertaining" the English language. Are many people aware what exactly would be the result of an institution of this kind? Probably not, for its effects would be mainly negative, and hence not likely to attract attention, and few men are philologists or even sufficiently interested in the history of language to realize that words are born and live and die as we do, and that in the interval they are subjected to insidious changes of fashion—affecting them where they can be affected in meaning and spelling and pronunciation—and that a British academy would put an end to all this.

But as yet fate or chance or whatever the god of dictionaries may be called has a free hand. And to the fact that time plays such unkind pranks upon poor harmless words, making them vulgar, perhaps, or ridiculous, we owe the lighter side of philology. So that when we take up an old version of the Bible—Wyclif, say, or Coverdale, or Tyndale—we may read, with feelings, perhaps, not of unmixered reverence, that the Lord "trounced" Sisera and all his host or that he smothered his people, or, looking a little further, we may see the beloved of King Solomon "hopping" among the mountains, and the apostles, or the long skirted elders of Israel, rending their clothes and "skipping" out among the people. "Lo," says Wyclif, "he shall not nappe, nether slepe that kepeth Israel." And in translating Hebrews xii, 22, "But ye are come . . . unto an innumerable company of angels," Tyndale, in perfect confidence of its fitness, uses the unhappy expression, "a sight of angels." But indeed we do not need to go so far back. Look at the seventeenth verse of the Seventh Psalm of our modern Bible. "His mischief," says David, "shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate."

Some strange discoveries we make, too, among the poets. "Ye sacred 'imps' that on Parnassus dwell," sings Spenser in an ardent invocation to the Muses. And let us look at the opening lines of another poem long forgotten:

O Israel! O household of the Lord!
O Abraham's "brats!" O brood of blessed seed!

Brats and brood! Could we better this? But poor Gasconne intended neither jest nor profanity, and Milton, a greater than he, writes thus of Christ's temptation on the mountain, when Satan, having shown him the kingdoms of the world, bears him back to the wilderness:

Our Saviour, meek and with untroubled mind,
After his airy jaunt, though hurried sore,
Hungry and cold betook him to his rest.

Strange that words which have been applied with reverence to the highest should fall so low.

But the hand of time moves ever slowly and touches gently, and these changes, we may be sure, grotesque as they seem to us, came very gradually. We have but to think a moment to see that something of the kind is going on now. Take the case of pronunciation, where we are dealing with what is relatively obvious and simple, for ten men can tell how a word is pronounced for one who can say what it means. Have not many of us heard old people talk of revenue or committee instead of revenue and committee, the first word following the rule of change in English pronunciation—that the accent should be thrown back to the beginning—the second being a rare exception? And did not Samuel Rogers complain that the newfangled pronunciation balcony made him sick? He, good man, had been brought up to call it balcony, and that is not so very long ago. So that whether it goes by rule or by exception, whether we are governed by law or chance, we have to face the certainty that our pronunciation of many words will sound as old fashioned to our grandchildren as committee does to us.

But whether it makes us feel young or whether it makes us feel old the habit of noticing words and of inquiring into the origin of common phrases is an excellent one and unfortunately not common. Take some of the stock political expressions one finds in every newspaper, for example. The "man in the street" whom the Boer war made famous, has Emerson for his parent. And Horace Walpole has the phrase "little islander," which has perhaps a family likeness to the epithet "little Englander." And what of slang terms which we are accustomed to think of as American and modern and wholly reprehensible? Alas, Horace Walpole, the typical fine gentleman of the Georgian courts and literature, talks—it is almost too shocking to relate—about "sitting gawling," and of being "as drunk as an owl," both epithets, we hasten to say, descriptive of others, not himself. And Dr. Burney, the historian of music and astronomy, the friend of Johnson and of Burke, is actually found writing to his daughter in 1798, "The young Lady Spencer and I have become very thick." But, more surprising still, that celebrated laughter herself writes in her diary, "I sneaked out," "I had a vile cold," "Did you ever know such a toad?" all very direct, forcible expressions, any schoolgirl will say. "Is it not a shocking thing, my dear Susette," the author of "Evelina" writes (in 1780) to her favorite sister, "that I am obliged to write to you upon this decent

paper! . . . It always goes to my heart to treat you so gently."

And eight years later, when she has been exalted to a post in Queen Charlotte's household, we find little Fanny, fresh from a royal visit to Gloucester, and look in her diary again. "I will not detail it," she says, "for any Gloucester guide will beat me hollow at that work." Strange! We did not think that the literary ladies in the eighteenth century would have permitted themselves expressions so unclassical as these, and least of all the first of British lady novelists, Dr. Johnson's darling little Burney. After all, no doubt, we do injustice to that poor century. Life was not all made up of tears and swoons and sighs. There were naughty people, perhaps, who knew the right and did the wrong then, as now. Or is fashion to blame again, and were these respectable literary expressions and their authors most innocent? If we remark that "we are afraid the price of tea is ris," we can scarcely hope to pass for literate persons, and yet once upon a time this was excellent English. And does not one of Fox's martyrs talk of his persecutors finding themselves "in the wrong box?" And do not certain old translators of Latin talk of some one "going to pot," and of the Romans being "in the dumps" after their defeat at Cannae? And Milton surely uses somewhere one unbecoming expression, "to save one's bacon!" So that we must not be hard on the little keeper of the robes. Perhaps Fanny Burney and her good father come out scathless after all.—Fall Mall Gazette.

BISMARCK'S STRATEGY.

A Letter That Would Not Excite Official Curiosity in Austria.

Bismarck was not only a statesman, able to handle abstract theories of government, but a shrewd player of the lesser games of life. Some years ago an anonymous writer contributed to the New Review this story of the Iron Chancellor's very human cleverness. When he represented Prussia at the diet of Frankfurt in 1866 he had reason to suspect that his letters and dispatches were tampered with by the Austrians. Other diplomats suffered from the same meddling.

One day, after a stormy meeting, Bismarck and the representative from Hanover walked away together, and as they walked the Hanoverian touched on the sore subject and asked Bismarck if he had found a way to get his letters through.

"You shall know presently," answered Bismarck.

The prince, as the two strolled along, led the way through dingy bypaths into a slum. Drawing on a thick pair of gloves, he entered a little shop where the poor bought tea, cheese, pickles, lamp oil and such commodities. The astonished Hanoverian followed.

"Hard on the English."

In the time of James II. of Scotland the relations between the Scotch and English were bad indeed. The king objected to any business dealings between the Scotch and their southern neighbors. To his subjects he thought nothing could result therefrom but evil. To preserve them, therefore, from any approach to amity and intercourse with the hated southron he actually decreed outlawry against those who should desire, even in that time of peace, to smooth down the differences which divided the two peoples. Against Englishmen visiting Scotland without leave the law was especially severe. Nor was any Scotsman to be allowed to become security or guaranty for an Englishman under any circumstances whatever unless he wished to be accused of high treason. Even legitimate trade was forbidden. No Scotsman was to supply the English garrisons in Berwick or Roxburgh with "ony victual, fewal or uther substantioun" under the pain of treason, while no intermarriage was to be allowed between "the Scottis and English, that men's affectiones be na' led away fra their ain kinrik."

How much is this? And this?" said the diplomatist, handling one cake after another.

While the soap selected was being wrapped up Bismarck thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out an unenclosed letter. He gave an exclamation as of dismay and surprise. Apparently annoyed at his forgetfulness, he cried, "Boy, do you sell envelopes?"

Envelopes of a cheap grade were produced, and Bismarck put the letter in one. Then he asked for pen and ink and set out to write the address, but his heavy glove hindered him. "Here, boy," he exclaimed, throwing down the pen, "just write this address for me!"

When the scrawl was finished Bismarck took the letter and left the shop. "There," he said, putting the letter to his companion's nose, "what with the soap, the herring, the candles and the cheese, I don't think they'll smell my dispatch under that writing."

How Ice Forms.

On the surface of a river or water exposed to the air ice is made by the coldness of the air against the top of the water. When water is cooled thus it at first shrinks in size and therefore sinks below the less cold water next to it. This in turn gets cooler, shrinks and sinks, and so on till all the water from top to bottom is lowered to 4 degrees C. above zero. As soon as the water gets colder than this it begins to swell and therefore no longer sinks as before, but stays on the top, and if the cooling still goes on till zero C. is reached it begins to turn into ice. When, by the colder air atop of it, as much heat is taken away from this water at zero as would have raised a pound of water at zero to a pound of water at 79 degrees C. a pound of ice is formed; when twice as much, two pounds, and so on till, if the air above the water keeps cold enough, the whole of the water will in time be made into ice.

African Ant.

The following is an extract from Dr. Livingstone's "Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi": "We tried to sleep one rainy night in a native hut, but could not because of attacks by the fighting battalions of a very small species of formica not more than one-sixteenth of an inch in length. It soon became obvious that they were under regular discipline and even attempting to carry out the skillful plans and stratagem of some eminent leader. Our hands and necks were the first objects of attack. Large bodies of these little pests were massed in silence round the point to be assaulted. We could hear the sharp, shrill word of command two or three times repeated, though until then we had not believed in the vocal power of an ant. The instant after we felt the storming hosts diver head and neck."

DUTCH FISHER FOLK.

An Interesting People Who Are Fond of Jewelry and Finery.

The presence of any foreigner, Dutch or otherwise, trading or living the life of the people, would not be tolerated for a day in most of the Dutch fishing villages. No person from the mainland has for years taken up his abode on the island of Marken. They intermarry with each other; the priest forbids their marrying within the third degree, and they implicitly obey him. They never marry out of their own village, and this accounts for the extraordinary similarity in their faces. They might all have been cast in the same mold. To those who approach them in a friendly manner the men are as interesting and attractive as the women. Both sexes are singularly good looking, with regular features and blue eyes. The women have beautiful complexions; the men are bronzed by the sun or the sea. At first the latter appear somewhat surly and defiant, but that is generally due to shyness, and they soon become kindly and courteous. They are nearly all teetotalers, their drink being weak tea or coffee, which they take several times a day and on which they seem to thrive, for they are a splendid race. They are very moral and religious. At 6 o'clock every evening, in the Roman Catholic villages, the angelus rings, and then both the men and women rise from their sitting postures by the doors, the men doff their caps and the women lay down their knitting, all bend their heads, cross themselves and remain a few minutes in prayer. Religion is no mere name to these simple fishing folk.

Both men and women are very fond of jewelry, and most of the cottages contain a good many gold and silver ornaments, necklaces of coral beads with large gold clasps of curious designs and solid gold head bands, called helmets, with rosettes of gold filigree on each side. In Friesland there are a number of goldsmiths' shops. When in holiday dress the men almost outshine the women in their love of self adornment. Their shirts are fastened with gold button links and are embroidered with black lines; they wear velvet knee breeches and silver buckles to their shoes, which are often richly chased. In most of the fishing villages the men, when in full dress, wear four great silver buttons. These are often decorated with Scriptural subjects in repoussé. They are enormously proud of their buttons, which are heirlooms from father to son. Most of the Dutch fisher folk are very well to do. They are thrifty and economical, and their wants are few. They have no desire for luxuries. They rarely touch meat, are total abstainers, and this is probably the reason for the high standard of morality which obtains among them.—Pittsburg.

Apples and Drunkenness.

With the view of learning the opinions of other medical men concerning the efficacy of the habit of eating apples to destroy the taste for liquor a New York city physician corresponded with many medical men living in various states. He received replies from all but three. From a large majority came answers that they had never known a case where a person was accustomed to the free use of apples and was a drunkard, nor did they ever know of a drunkard who was accustomed to the daily use of apples. From a personal observation, covering a period of more than twenty-five years, the physician says he never has known a single instance where a person who was a free user of apples acquired the liquor habit, nor has he known a person addicted to the free use of liquor who was fond of apples.

Color and Warmth.

The color of materials has some influence on the warmth of the clothing. Black and blue absorb heat freely from without, but white and light shades of yellow, etc., are far less absorbent. This difference can be demonstrated by experiment. The same material, when dyed with different colors, will absorb different amounts of heat. In hot countries white coverings are universally worn, and sailors and others wear white clothing in hot weather. With regard, however, to heat given off from the body, the color of the materials used as clothing makes little if any difference. Red flannel is popularly supposed to be warm, though it is no better in this respect than similar materials of equal substance, but white or gray in color. Dark clothing is best for cold weather, because it more freely absorbs any heat that is obtainable.—Fortnightly Review.

SCHOOL FOR THIEVES

LONDON FAGS TEACH BOYS AND GIRLS TO STEAL.

The Way the Young Aspirants For Criminal "Honors" Are Trained to Their Work—Methods of the Juvenile Second Story Burglars.

Daring crimes are often committed by children in London, and only Scotland Yard is aware of the fact.

Youthful offenders are rarely caught in the act of committing even slight offenses, or, if they are, a tolerant policeman is more often than not inclined to look with lenient eyes on a misdemeanor, that in an older person would mean arrest, by boxing the ears of the tiny culprit and letting him go.

A recent remarkable series of house-breaking cases in the Enfield district, in which the father of an errand boy was sentenced to six years' penal servitude for teaching his fourteen-year-old son to commit burglaries, shows conclusively that the criminal classes do not hesitate to teach children to do what they fear to practice themselves.

The Scotland Yard authorities know that many criminals, too old now to commit various crimes with impunity, to all intents and purposes reform and become respectable members of the community. They open small shops, and then in a very quiet way hold classes of pupils eager to pay for learning the secrets of the "craft."

The first thing the "master" does is to examine the would be probationer's hands. "The thief's mark" must show up strongly on both the boy or girl is not worth the risk of training. Even if the child has clever light fingered parents, and the "thief's mark" is absent from its hands, the trainer will have nothing to do with the case. He does not believe in a child inheriting its parents' evil propensities.

Girls are mostly taught pocket picking and how to steal trifles from shop showcases. Members of both sexes are well drilled in the art of unobtrusively telling lies. They daily rehearse hold-ups by imaginary policemen. The trainer, of course, acts the latter role and instructs the young idea how to invent plausible excuses at a second's notice.

The girls are the sharpest at this game and very seldom get caught. A trainer will never have anything more to do with a child that has once entered a reformatory. The clergyman there has generally worked on the youthful conscience, and ever after fits of repentance must be counted on to occur at inopportune moments.

Boy burglars are trained in a very simple manner. It is argued that most people living in villas pay a great deal of attention to bolts and bars on their ground floors, but very little if any to those on the upper floors.

Accordingly the juvenile Bill Sikes is provided in the early days of his training with a ten foot silken rope tied in knots a foot apart. Fastened at the end is a strong but light steel hook. The boy is required to practice with this rope, throwing it in much the same way as a lasso would be up to a window sill six or more feet above him, so that the hook holds to the stone.

When the lassoning is acquired to the trainer's satisfaction the lad is next required to shin up the rope without dislodging the hook from the sill. This requires a great deal of practice, and many are the falls endured. As the height is seldom more than ten feet, and prior to this stage the boy has been taught how to fall, only slight bruises result.

The children in their first expeditions are always taken and shown the house that is to be entered in the daytime and instructed as to the best methods of entry to the back.

Then late at night the instructor takes the little lad to the "crib" and from a convenient spot watches his pupil disappear according to instructions. The presence of an adult with a boy of tender years late at night alarms any suspicious alert policeman might have if the boy were seen walking through a street alone. Once at the back of the house, the boy, quite at his leisure, makes an inspection of every window on the ground floor. If one opens readily he enters by it; if not he surveys the next tier, and in nine cases out of ten discovers that the bathroom window is partly open. That is sufficient. From a side pocket he draws the coil of silken rope and a couple of minutes later is standing inside the little room.

The juvenile burglar is instructed to make his entry by a bathroom wherever possible, because there is always a risk in villadom of any and every room being occupied as a bedroom, and a window opening with a sleeper in the room would nearly always insure an alarm being raised.

Not long ago a remarkable thing happened at a villa on Brixton hill. When the people awakened in the morning the house was in perfect order. Every window was closed and fastened; every door was bolted. Yet every one's pockets had been rifled; every article of jewelry had been taken away during the night. The maid and her boxes were searched, but even she was minus her month's money, paid the day before.

The police were communicated with. On examination tiny finger marks were found on the bathroom window, and traces of a hook were plainly visible on the window sill. A clever boy burglar had paid the villa a visit. He was never caught, for he had departed in the way he had come, taking with him only valuables that could be carried unobserved in his pockets.—London Mail.

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