

The practical side of our subject lies in the consideration of how far the use of slang may be justified in conversation, and also in writing. It may perhaps be urged by some that since the object of speech is to express our thoughts to others, that form of words is the best which most fully and precisely conveys our meaning, whether it be sanctioned by general usage or not. But this broad view of the question is a very superficial one. Among people with any claim to culture, to give pleasure to the ear and mind of the hearer or reader often becomes an aim scarcely less important than to render our ideas with precision. So we see that it is impossible to lay down a clear rule on the point at issue. It is well to realise at the outset that the use of slang is absolutely universal. Those who would confront this assertion with an indignant denial are frequently among the most hardened offenders. We have the slang of the university, the school, the turf, the cricket-field, the street, the stage, the drawing-room; slang in trade, in art, at the bar, even in the pulpit. It cannot be denied that our slang comprises a large number of apt metaphors, happy similes, and successful strokes of "word painting," whose expressiveness is proved by their untranslatability into the English of the lexicographers. Some of the best slang expressions ultimately work their way into the recognised tongue. Words like *queer*, *cheat*, *bet*, *vagabond*, *filch*, etc., were once slang. Having "served their apprenticeship," as it has been termed, in that capacity, they have been promoted and duly authorised. Until civilisation comes to a standstill, it is impossible for language to become stationary. But the art of inventing or selecting really expressive slang is not possessed by everyone. Few can use it with the skill and effect of "Ingoldsby" or Tom Hood, and the majority of aspirants have

recourse to it merely for singularity to give a cheap semblance of humour to their talk, or to parade their familiarity with various phases of life and manners.

Any detailed consideration of the more open and obvious forms of the slang of the present day is unnecessary, but I shall specify certain peculiarities of speech to which there is a marked tendency, and which may reasonably be included under the head of slang in the wider sense in which we have used it. The needless use of technicalities is one of these tendencies. It is objectionable when new and uncouth words are thus thrust under our notice, but it is more objectionable when good old words are saddled with strange meanings. This is the sort of slang towards which our lawyers, politicians, and divines evince a leaning; it affords such facilities for those strokes of sophistry which logicians call "*Ignoratio Elenchi*" and "*Petitio Principii*," that it is of the greatest use to all whose position involves them in disputes and arguments. There are many words, such as *loyal*, *orthodox*, *constitutional*, *sensational*, *æsthetic*, which a plain man is now almost afraid or ashamed to use. Slang is in a sense the technical language of common life, but to intrude upon it the technical terms of lawyers and theologians is an unpardonable affront to slang itself.

Next we may notice the excessive use of pointless quotations or weak phraseology. To call a fire "the devouring element," or a dinner party "the festive board," or to describe a crowd as "a sea of faces," may have been brilliant ideas in the brain of the man who first used the expressions, but now they seem to be a *little* threadbare. The chief offenders in this way are those ingenious newspaper writers, generally called "penny-a-liners," and that well-known social monster the "comic man." It is true that the lat-