

A journalist, on a swing of the country with the late William Jennings Bryan, on a stumping trip in the popo-  
crat days, coined the term "volublist" to describe the or-  
atory that poured from the famous golden throat. The  
description fired the fancy of the retinue of reporters on the  
tour and in one blaze the word flashed from the front pages  
of the press from coast to coast, and thence was cast into  
the dictionary.

President Grover Cleveland, reputed an omnivorous  
reader, was forever digging up the archaic in some fastness  
of literature and grooming it for contemporary use. Who  
first phrased "innocuous desuetude," to express simply a  
harmless disuse of something, no one knows probably;  
but doubtless it will always be associated with Cleveland,  
who brought it to light in modern times.

Mayor William J. Gaynor, of New York City, whose  
clever and original personal letters brightened many drab  
columns in the news during the tenure of his popular favor,  
will long be allied with "spissitude," which was archaic  
previous to his resuscitation of it from the tombstones of  
the tongue. He unearthed this word to impress upon the  
public consciousness how sticky or gummy some of the  
politicians' fingers could become when funds for public  
improvements were being passed out.

Woodrow Wilson undoubtedly was about the greatest  
phraseologist, outside of an advertising agency, that the  
United States has heard in many generations. "Watchful  
waiting" and "too proud to fight" are memorable of his  
expressiveness in arranging new word groupings; but he  
failed to enrich our mother language with new words.

Warren Harding, desirous of unmeshing his country  
from its postwar plight, sounded an appealing slogan of  
Back to Normalcy, and the nation hailed the introduction  
as symbolizing the hopes of a debt-burdened land in one  
fresh new word. We turned to the files in our word shop for  
corroboration, but—unfortunately perhaps, for it was a  
happy phrase—we discovered that "normalcy" was in  
circulation at the latest by the year 1857.

**A Cartoonist Who Struck Oil**

THERE was a young detective in the New York City  
Police Department some years ago who was acclaimed  
the handsomest man on the force. This gift of the gods he  
accepted as a license to strut and swagger a trifle more than  
his companions. Combined with a flowering of the physical,  
he was also clever in his appointed tasks. After cul-  
minating several successive scoops, his chest measurement  
seemed to increase perceptibly. In order to relieve the  
strain on his vest buttons the then Chief of Detectives  
Devery stated to reporters anxious for details of this thief  
catcher extraordinary that he was a splendid officer, but  
too chesty.

Chesty! Again the subheads of the newspapers fea-  
tured a new word. Forsooth, it became overworked, so  
widespread was its appeal; but this constant repetition  
whipped it into the working vernacular of the average per-  
son and today it is a byword on the tongues of the multi-  
tude. Upon retrospection, it is almost difficult to imagine  
that it hasn't been with us always, and it hasn't cele-  
brated its twentieth birthday yet.

Another fertile source of new expressions, idioms  
more than words, is the studio of the cartoonist, the

columnist and the gag man of the motion  
pictures and the theater; also the campus  
of the carefree collegiate. These are mainly  
springheads of slang, mothered mostly  
by a desire to be smart or witty. The is-  
sues emanating from this speech incubator,  
though popular for a brief period, fade  
into oblivion in the same skyrocketing  
spirit that marked their ascent.

"So's your old man," "dim-  
box," "necking" and their ilk,  
though humorous and catchy,  
have no innate lasting qualities  
and are only mottoes of the mo-  
ment. Each year brings a veri-  
table horde of such linguistic  
corruptions that are scarcely  
worth housing room in our word  
shop; but we offer them shelter for  
the one gem in a thousand that will rise  
above its class and become a member in  
good standing in the society of speech.

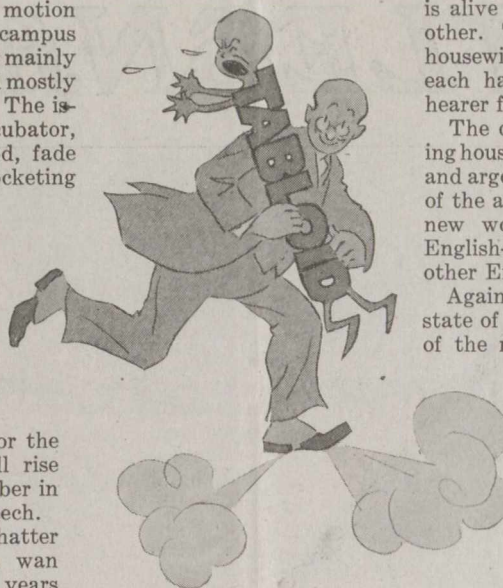
Then who shouldn't coin such chatter  
when it irons the wrinkles from wan  
purses? A little more than two years  
ago I chanced to meet a struggling young  
cartoonist, and he was struggling. A  
most engaging personality, brimming  
over with a radiant line of bright banter, willing to illu-  
strate his ideas on the back of an envelope or a scrap of  
paper, he cooled his heels in the waiting rooms of many of  
New York's publishing plants. He had the goods, but it  
seemed no one would let him deliver.

Eventually he obtained contact with a metropolitan  
journal, and within a short time coined a word that  
captured the fancy of the public. Forthwith he was  
famous and well started on a successful trail. I am in-  
formed that envoys from many of the publishers who once  
spurned his wares have since waited in his anteroom. He  
has gone now to Hollywood, where he has been promised  
some of the fabled wealth of that cinema community.

But don't think the dictionary wears a high hat. Far  
from it. In assembling new diction we are only hearkening  
to the edicts of the time-ripened formulas of accepting  
the best, the most useful. Slang isn't.

Though we do ferret slang from its habitat for investiga-  
tion, there is a more fertile field, somewhat allied—dialect.  
A dialect is still considered by many people as degraded  
and a vulgar variety of speech. But it isn't. Beyond the  
rim of the city's stir and strife, along the shady lanes and  
in the nurtured acres of the countryside, there has gradu-  
ally grown from time immemorial a distinct vernacular.  
It is rustic, we say, and the pedagogically inclined are apt  
to sniff at this poor relation of the literary language.  
Evolved by those who live closest to Nature, it is not only  
more varied but, within limits, much richer than its  
more precise counterpart.

The cant of every class is as much dialect as the  
jargon of the gypsy. Every profession and vocation



"Tabloid" Was Stolen, if So Harsh a Term  
May be Used, From its Progenitors

is alive with terms that are Greek to an-  
other. The lawyer, the mechanic, the  
housewife, the journalist and the laborer,  
each has a vernacular that mystifies a  
hearer from another environment.

The dictionary must become the clear-  
ing house of these diversified provincialisms  
and argots. So we scout the meeting places  
of the arts, crafts and trades to report the  
new words for the purpose of aiding  
English-speaking people to understand  
other English-speaking people.

Again, the language is in a constant  
state of flux; there is a ceaseless mutation  
of the meanings of words. "Boy" once  
meant girl. "Agony" once  
meant a wrestling match, or  
exhibition of combat. "Run"  
years ago was a simple little  
word denoting the forceful  
dashing movement of a being.  
Now it has expanded until  
the dictionary lists ninety-  
four different meanings for  
it. Thus a writer or speaker  
may give a new interpreta-  
tion to a common word which,  
gaining currency, takes unto  
itself another significance. These departures from the  
normal must be captured, for they modify the language.

**Busy Workers at the Word Mint**

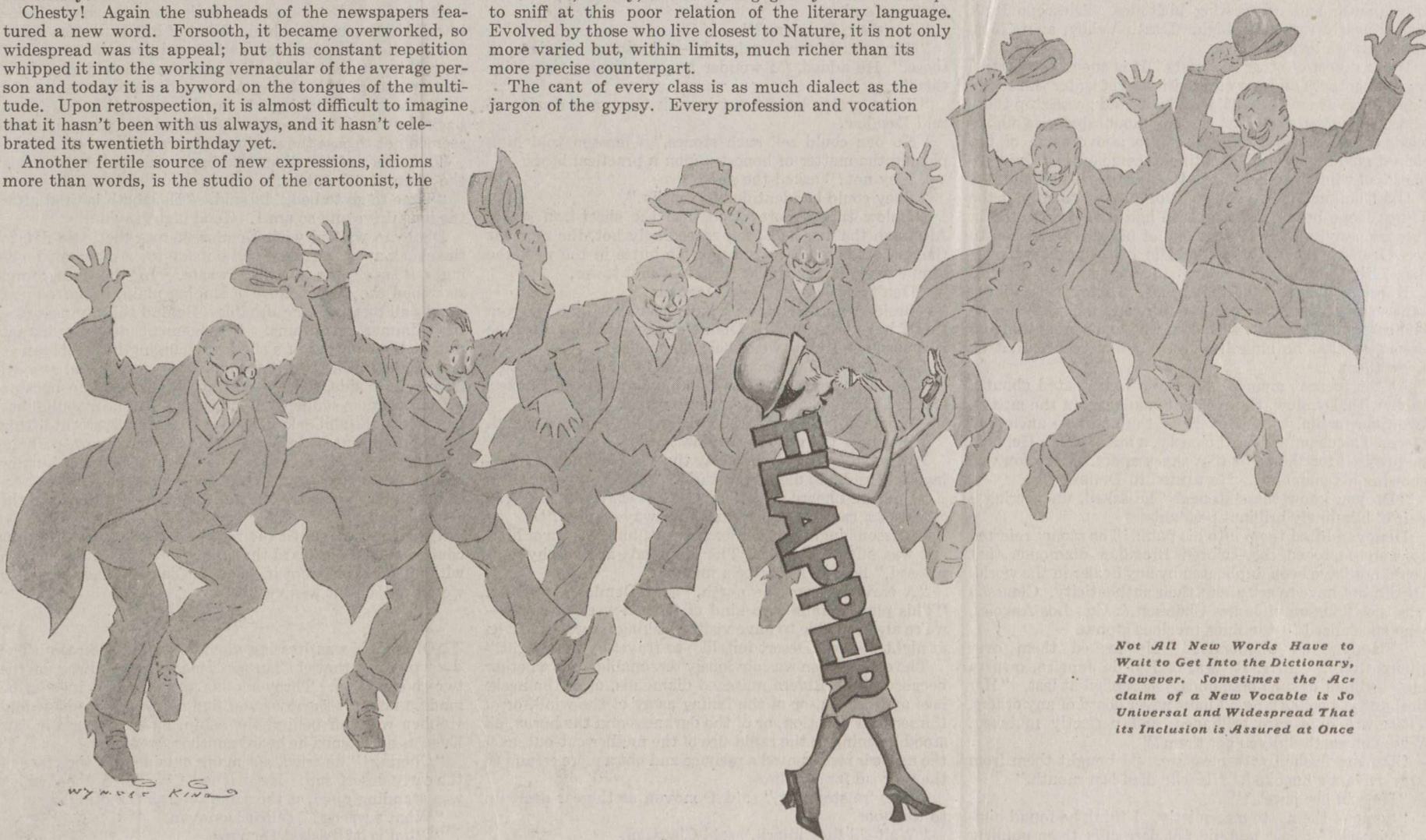
TO THE trained eye and ear, words are flowering every-  
where; new meanings for old words. In one of Octavus  
Roy Cohen's merry stories of colored society in Birming-  
ham appearing in THE SATURDAY EVENING POST we  
spotted "exodust," a new speech mintage.

Mr. Cohen wanted to express excessive speed in the de-  
parture of a dusky gentleman from troublesome quarters.  
I suppose that no word that was already in the dictionary  
could denote the swiftness of this runner as he sped in front  
of a razor flashing in the hands of an expert wielder  
behind him. He was exiting in a cloud of dust; thus,  
exodust.

In fact, a new profession—the word coiner—has capi-  
talized the modern demand for personal and business dis-  
tinction.

Though the numerical power of this group is small,  
perhaps not exceeding a dozen exponents in the whole  
country, its output is sometimes quite prolific.

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Not All New Words Have to  
Wait to Get Into the Dictionary,  
However. Sometimes the Ac-  
claim of a New Vocab is So  
Universal and Widespread That  
its Inclusion is Assured at Once