

## POLITICAL SLANG.

(Cornhill Magazine.)

NOT long ago there was published on the other side of the Atlantic a "Dictionary of American Political Slang." In the States the colloquial developments of the language in relation to political parties and subjects have been so many, so various and often so extraordinary, as to render such a glossary a very necessary book of reference. In the Old Country we have hardly advanced so far; but we are getting on. Although we may not be so quick as our cousins in inventing new words and phrases, or in grotesquely applying those already in existence, yet we have been by no means slow, especially of late, in adopting Yankee coinages and giving them extended currency and use. One of the best known examples of this system of adoption is the much used and much abused word "caucus." What a caucus is, as popularly understood in England, needs no explanation; but the curious thing about the word is the seeming impossibility of ascertaining with any certainty its origin and derivation. The explanation generally given is that it is a corruption of "caulkers" or "caulk-house." One authority says that the members of the shipping interest, the "caulkers" of Boston, were associated, shortly before the War of Independence, in actively promoting opposition to England, and that the word arose from their meetings in the caulkers' house or *caulk-house*.

In the "Life of Samuel Adams," one of the American revolutionary leaders, sometimes styled "The American Cato," his biographer carries the word farther back. We are told that "About fifty years before 1774 Samuel Adams, senior, and about twenty others, one or two from the north end of Boston, where all ship business was carried on, used to meet, make a caucus, and lay their plans for introducing certain persons into places of trust and power. It was probably from the name of this political club, composed principally of shipbuilding mechanics, that the word *caucus* was derived, as a corruption of 'Caulkers' Club.'" In the "Diary" of John Adams there is a curious and graphic description of a meeting and proceedings of the Caucus Club of Boston. He writes, in February 1763, "This day learnt that the Caucus Club meets at certain times in the garret of Tom Dawes, the adjutant of the Boston regiment. He has a large house, and he has a movable partition in his garret, which he takes down, and the whole club meets in one room. There they smoke tobacco, till you cannot see from one end of the garret to the other; there they drink flip, I suppose; there they choose a moderator, who puts questions to the vote regularly; and select-men, overseers, collectors, wardens, fire-wards, and representatives are regularly chosen before they are chosen by the town. They send committees to wait upon merchants' clubs, and to propose and join in the choice of men and measures. Captain Cunynghame says they have often selected him to go to these caucuses." Another derivation has, however, been proposed. In the "Transactions of the American Philological Association, 1872," Dr. Hammond Trumbull suggests that the origin of the word is to be found in the native Indian *cau-cau-as-u*, meaning one who advises. Professor Skeat is inclined to support this suggestion, and points out that Captain John Smith, the historian of Virginia, writing about 1607 of the Indians of that country, mentions that they are "governed by the Priests and their Assistants, or their Elders, called *Caw-cau-wassoughes*." Dr. Trumbull's proposal is ingenious, but the "caulkers" have a strong case. Perhaps the earliest mention of the word by an English writer is in an article on America by Sydney Smith, in the "Edinburgh Review" of 1818. He writes, "A great deal is said by Fearon about *caucus*, the cant word of the Americans for the committees

and party meetings in which the business of the elections is prepared—the influence of which he seems to consider as prejudicial."

Our party nicknames are not many in number. There is not much difference between "Whig" and "Tory" as regards their derivation: the former is contracted from a corruption of Celtic words meaning pack-saddle thieves, while the latter comes from an Irish word meaning a band of robbers. The name Whig was first given to the followers of the Marquis of Argyle in Scotland who were in opposition to the Government in the reign of James I. "From Scotland," says Bishop Burnet, "the word was brought into England, where it is now one of our unhappy terms of disunion." The name of Tory was first given, according to Lord Macaulay, to those who refused to concur in excluding James II. from the throne. The "Rads" have a name of more modern political application, for the term "Radical," as a party name, was first applied to Major Cartwright, Henry Hunt, and their associates in 1818. The Americans have many more or less strange party nicknames, and one of the last-invented has reached this country, only to be in various ways misapplied and misunderstood—we mean the euphonious word *mugwump*. *Mugwump* is an Indian word, and means a captain, or leader, or notable person. From this genuine original meaning it was an easy transition to the signifying a man who thought himself of consequence; and during the last contest for the Presidency the name had a political meaning attached to it, by its application, in derision, to those members of the Republican party who, rejecting Mr. Blaine, declared that they would vote for his Democratic opponent, Mr. Cleveland, the present President. Such is the explanation, doubtless correct, given by Mr. Brander Matthews of New York. The name is now generally applied to those who profess to study the interests of their country before those of their party.

An interesting, but one would hope decaying, class of voters are the "floaters," the electors whose suffrages are to be obtained for a pecuniary consideration. There is a story told of a candidate in an American township who asked one of the local party managers how many voters there were. "Four hundred," was the reply. "And how many 'floaters'?" "Four hundred!" Somewhat akin to the "floaters" are those who sit "on the fence"—men with impartial minds, who wait to see, as another pretty phrase has it, "how the cat will jump," and whose convictions at last generally bring them down on that side of the fence where are to be found the biggest battalions and the longest purses. These "floaters" and men "on the fence" used in the olden times to be the devoted adherents of the "man in the moon." When an election was near at hand it was noised abroad throughout the constituency that the "man in the moon" had arrived, and from the time of that august visitor's mysterious arrival many of the free and independent electors dated their possession of those political principles which they manfully supported by their votes at the poll. Of course no candidate bribed—such a thing was not to be thought of; but still the money was circulating, and votes were bought, and as it was necessary to fix the responsibility upon some one, the whole business was attributed to the action of the "man in the moon." In the States the money used for electioneering purposes is known as "boddle," "sinews of war," and "living issues."

One can well imagine what influence the "man in the moon" had in days gone by with voters of the class known as "pot-wallopers." The bearers of this melodious name were electors whose sole title to the possession of the franchise was the fact of their having been settled in the parish for six months, the settlement being considered sufficiently