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TORONTO, MARCH 25, 1886.

UNDER the title (curiously enough) of "The Purity of Language," a writer signing himself "Henry C. White, University of Deseret, Utah," writes to the *Chicago Current* a vigorous polemic against all purists. "By what authority," he asks, "do over-fastidious people, calling themselves 'purists,' claim the right to dictate to millions of others how the English language should be used, and in what manner or mode? To my mind the right of so dictating does not seem to be very clear nor well-grounded upon the true principles of the good old English, which grew where it would, without caring much for the restrictions which grammarians or purists have placed around it. Old words have died a natural death and been consigned to eternal oblivion; new ones have sprung into life and been admitted into the 'body corporate' of the language

almost before those busybodies, the purists, could protest against the use of them. The process will go on for all time."

As examples of words which have thus "sprung into life," he recalls the origin of 'selfish,' 'boycott,' 'mugwump,' and because these have been "admitted into the 'body corporate' of the language," and, as he thinks, materially added to our vocabulary, despite the protests of purists, therefore such protests should be unheeded, and purists generally disregarded. "In short," he says, "the best test of words in the 'well of English undefiled' is common usage, by which phrase is meant the practice of the majority of the people in the use of the words, no matter from whom they originated or from where." "It may be remarked," he also says, "that the press is a great factor in the development of our language, having invented many of the most popular words of the day, and introduced others out of the sloughs of vulgarism into genteel society. Possessed of great courage, not to say impudence, the daily press exercises unbounded influence in moulding not only the minds of men, but also their current modes of expression, unmoved by the voice of censors or rigid purists."

To every one of these theses exception may be taken, and the validity of the arguments adduced in their support is only an apparent one.

But for the jealous eye of the purist we know not what disintegrating elements might not creep into language. That new words are daily being added to our vocabulary is a fact of which we are all cognizant and all proud; but if there were no censor to pass judgment on such additions who knows but that these new growths should turn out to be unhealthy products which would eventually sap language of its proper vitality? That the press is "a great factor in the development of our language" is no doubt true; but that it succeeds in introducing more inelegant words and more ungrammatical phrases than perhaps any other factor is equally

true—at least of the press of this continent.

That language is a 'growing' thing everybody grants. But to whom should we look to aid its growth—to the educated few, or to the uneducated many? It seems needless to ask such a question, but such writers as Mr. White make it necessary. Every great author adds to the list of English words; and, for ourselves, we confess we would accept with less hesitation a word coined by Hooker, or Jeremy Taylor, or Carlyle, or Ruskin, or any other recognized master of English prose, than any word brought "out of the sloughs of vulgarism into genteel society" by the daily press.

Mr. White seems to grant that there is such a thing as a "slough of vulgarism" in the coinage of words. He seems also to concede that it is well for such words to receive from some or other source a title of nobility. Granting all this, the only suggestion that need be made is, that this honor would better be conferred by the cultivated and the refined than by the illiterate. Who can gainsay this? And yet Mr. White's tirade is in reality directed against such a truism. After all, what is it that has put the stamp upon 'selfish' and 'boycott,' and made them current coin of the realm? Is it not the fact that they are accepted and used by writers of accepted merit? No amount of 'common usage' can transform words of base metal into true coin. They require the stamp of authority. We tremble to think what floods of slang and worse than slang might sweep away the historical landmarks of our glorious language if no purists existed to keep it within bounds. The well of English, we think, would become terribly defiled if our Ruskins, Matthew Arnolds, Goldwin Smiths, Walter Paters, Robert Louis Stevensons, instead of going to Dryden, to Hume, to Hooker, to the Old Testament (as more than one of these have told us they have done) for style and language, were to go to "common usage" in Mr. White's meaning of the phrase.