

who was conscious of being invariably heartily laughed at whenever she spoke in the conversation of literary circles. She confessed this suspicion to the doctor and asked his advice.

"Madam," said he, "be natural and true to yourself. You are apt to forget it and that is why you are esteemed a fool."

These words of the great lexicographer contain the key-note of my theme this evening, CALL A SPADE A SPADE.

It is affectation which is the root of offences against good language and good manners. The simple and uncouth expressions of the circus clown are often far more nearly allied to the roots of our mother tongue than the high-flown efforts of mannerists and euphemists, and people are never ridiculous as long as they are contented to remain themselves.

I charge our educational institutions with neglecting the cultivation of what is called the "Queen's English," that is, the proper use in writing and speaking of our idiomatic mother tongue. I am not going to discuss this subject from the standing-point of grammar, spelling and pronunciation. Many of our writers and speakers use faultless grammar, yet they offend against the idiom of our language; and again many whose grammar is woefully defective do catch that idiom and, being understood by those whom they address, they influence the spread of knowledge, and so accomplish an educational work that the grammarians fail in utterly.

As a rule, you will find that discussions on these points are not common among men of learning, for the same reason that points of etiquette are not discussed among well bred people. Grammarians and rhetoricians may set bounds to language, but usage will break over in spite of them.

The discussion as to what is correct in the structure of language intended to express our ideas depends on the direction and deviations of the current of a nation's thoughts, and the influence exercised on words by events beyond man's control. The elegance, accuracy and propriety of the language in use among a people depend mainly on the preservation of a pure standard of speech at the bar, in the pulpit, in parliament, and as far as possible by the periodicals and principal newspapers, though the jargon of the average press, unhappily, acts more commonly in the opposite direction; indeed, for much of the vile English in common use, both in ordinary conversation and in our periodical literature, to say nothing of that used by a majority of platform speakers, the newspapers are responsible.

Excluding the leading newspapers, which as a rule do express themselves in idiomatic English, the press are very great