

called skin-tights, and while answering a similar purpose, are very different from trousers in their shape. The origin of such a misnomer is sufficiently obvious. Such prudish euphemisms are by no means peculiar to Canada or the States. They find their complete parallel in the English synonyms: *unmentionables* or *inexpressibles*, and the like familiar shibboleths of immodest prudery, which belong exclusively to no class or county, but are none the less to be avoided by all who would regulate their mode of thought and expression by purity and true refinement.

In England, good housewives and the lieges at large, are sometimes horrified by the apparition of a loathsome insect, yeelped a *bug*. Gardeners also find creatures of the same genus on their plants, and zoologists are familiar with numerous varieties of them. But, however great the variety, and how very diverse the habits of different species, few words associated with insect life are so universally avoided, or are, from certain associations, more revolting than this monosyllable. And yet, we hear people on this side of the Atlantic, who, to say the least of it, are quite as familiar with this insect-pest as those on the other,—applying this nauseous title to the beautiful firefly which makes our fields so glorious on a warm summer night. Canadians call it the “lightning-bug.” Here, we have, not simply an abuse of language, but a breach of good taste, which it might be thought no person of refinement could ever perpetrate. As well might they dignify a vase of sweetly scented roses by making it share with the offensive and suffocating missile occasionally employed in naval warfare, the euphonious epithet of “stink-pot!” Moreover as this term *bug* is universally employed both in Canada and the States as a synonyme for *insect*, the further result is a loss of precision, such as, in the commonest use of terms at home, discriminates at once between a fly, a beetle, and a grub. In England the term *fly* is also applied occasionally to a light vehicle, and it is on the same principle I presume that a four wheel d gig receives here the elegant name of *buggy*!

Turning again to another class of words; there is a curious disposition manifested among our manufacturers of improved English, to convert our regular into irregular verbs, for the sake of gaining what some modern grammarians have styled the strong preterite. In England, when a swimmer makes his first leap, head foremost, into the water he is said to *div*, and is spoken of as having *dived*, in accordance with the ordinary and regular construction of the verb. Not so however, it is with the modern refinements of our Canadian English. In referring to such a feat here, it would be said, not that he *dived*, but that he *dove*. Even Longfellow makes use of this form,—so harsh and unfamiliar to English ears,—in the musical measures of his “Hiawatha:—

“Straight into the river Kwasind
Plunged as if he were an otter,
Dove as if he were a beaver,” &c.

As we say *drive*, *drove*, *driven*, we may look for the completion of the verb to *dice*, on its new model, and find the next poet’s hero having “*diven* as if he were a beaver” or any other amphibious native of the new world. Though as yet unsanctioned by such classic authority, the verb to *give* not unfrequently assumes among us the past form of *he giv*, *rose* becomes *ris*, *child*—*chode*, *delved*—*dolve*, *helped*—*holp*, or *helped*, *swelled*—*swoll*, &c. Yet so lawless and systemless are the changes, that, along with such alterations, which might seem to aim at a universal creation of strong preterites, we have the process reversed, and *froze* becomes *freezed* or *friz*, *felt-feeled*, &c. That some of these are as yet mere vulgarisms is not to be denied, but when the older examples receive the sanction of the highest literary authorities we may reasonably dread that the adoption of the remainder is a mere question of time.

When an Englishman speaks at random or without sufficient authority, he *guesses*. When he expresses an opinion, he *thinks*. *Guess* and *think* are not synonyms, but refer to two opposite states of mind. Far otherwise is it in the neighbouring republic, and with too many here; for, with Americans and their imitators, *guess* and *think* have an identical signification. A “Clear-grit” *guesses* that the person beside him who does not spit on the floor, is a tory and a contemptible aristocrat, while a tobacco-moistening “Hoosier” *guesses*, and for like reasons, that a Boston merchant must be a federalist. Now if they only knew it, neither of these discerning and refined individuals *guesses* at all. Contrariwise each feels confident in the matter pronounced upon. The general conduct of the persons of whom they thus judge, together with the subdued action of their salivary glands, has satisfied both that the political tendencies of the others must be the antithesis of their own. They are in no uncertainty, and a *guess* is impossible. The ordinary American use of this word justly subjects its users to ridicule, un-

less the precision which our English tongue once boasted of, is no longer a feature worth preserving.

But a volume might be written about the evils glanced at here, In closing this paper, therefore, I can only indicate a few more of the indigenous elegancies which are already meeting with such general acceptance, and thereby corrupting, not simply the speech of the Province, but such literature as we have. It cannot, we fear, be justly affirmed that such expressions as the following are so entirely confined to the vulgar and uneducated as to be undeserving of notice as an element likely to affect permanently the language of the Province:—

“Are you better to-day?” inquires Britannicus. “Some,” replies Canadiensis. “Were there many people present?” asks B. “Quite a number,” answers C., meaning thereby, “a number,” for how can a number be otherwise than *quite a number*? B:—“Where did you go to-day?” C:—“down town,” that is, he walked through, or in the city. B:—“are you going by this train?” C:—“yes, I’m just on board.” B:—“where is your master?” C:—“the boss is out.” B:—“How many horses have you?” C:—“a span,” which word he substitutes for “a pair.” B:—“what is that man’s character?” C:—“he’s a loafer, that is, in plain English, “a good for nothing fellow.” B:—“how do you vote?” C:—“I go the Hincks ticket.” B:—“has there been a committee meeting?” C:—“yes, they had a caucus last night.” B:—“can that wheel revolve now?” C:—“yes, I guess it can do nothing else, for I’ve fixed it.” B:—“did you mend my shoe?” C:—“yes, I’ve fixed it.” B:—“when will your sister be ready?” C:—“Jane is just fixing her hair.” B:—“what do you eat to venison?” C:—“jelly fixings.” B:—“what have you done with your other horse?” C:—“I’ve dickered him.” B:—“what kind of a speaker is W—?” C:—“a stump orator.” B:—“how did he get his present office?” C:—“by chiselling.” B:—“is there much jobbing in the house?” C:—“no end of log-rolling.” B:—“did he run away?” C:—“yes, he sloped,” or “he made tracks.” B:—“how do you feel to-day?” C:—“I’m quite sick.” B:—“sick! why don’t you take something to settle your stomach?” C:—“my stomach isn’t unsettle. Its my toe that aches!” &c.

Nor is it in solitary words or phrases alone that we are thus aiming at “gilding refined gold,” in our improvements on the English language. So far has this process already been carried that it would not be difficult to construct whole sentences of our Canadian vernacular which, to the home-bred ear, would stand nearly as much in need of translation, as an oration of one of the Huron or Chippeway Chiefs whom we have supplanted from their ancient hunting grounds on the shores of the great lakes. Let us take a brief example. A Canadian who has enjoyed the advantages of the American vocabulary will thus describe a very simple transaction:—“I traded my last yorker for a plug of honey dew, and got plaguy chiseled by a loafer whose boss had dickered his lot and betterments for notions to his store;” some of the words introduced here are genuine Americanisms, such as *betterments*, i.e. improvements on new lands; *lot*, or division of land; *town lots*, sites within the area designed for a village or town; *boss* (Dutch) the euphemism for the unpalatable word *master*; and *store*, the invariably term for a shop. Others again, such as *yorker*: a shilling york currency, or sixpence sterling, are no less genuinely Canadian; and the whole, will become intelligible for the first time to the inexperienced English ear when thus translated:—“I exchanged my last sixpence for a packet of tobacco, and got thoroughly cheated by a disreputable fellow whose employer had bartered a piece of improved land to obtain small wares for his shop.”

These and a thousand other examples which might be produced, fully justify the use of the term “Canadian English,” as expressive of a corrupt dialect growing up amongst our population, and gradually finding access to our periodical literature, until it threatens to produce a language as unlike our noble mother tongue as the negro patua, or the Chinese pidgeon English. That the English language is still open to additions no one can doubt, or that it assimilates to itself, when needful, even the racy vernacular of to-day, to enrich itself, where synonyms are wanting. Hence, whenever a single word supplies the place of what could only be formerly expressed by a sentence,—unless the word be singularly uneuphonious,—the language gains by its adoption. But if *chiseling* only means *cheating*; and *log-rolling*,—*jobbing*; and *clearing out*, or *making tracks*,—*running away*; then most men of taste will have little hesitation in their choice between the old-fashioned English of Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, and Addison, and such modern *enrichments* of the old “well of English undefiled.” Such words-of-all-work, again, as *some*, and *quite*, and *fix*, and *guess*, having already a precise and recognized acceptance in classical English, it is probable that good writers and educated speakers will still recognize