

SOME POINTS IN AMERICAN SPEECH AND CUSTOMS.

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IT is perfectly plain that the English tongue common to Britain and America is not spoken and written in exactly the same way in Britain and in America. The man of either land carries with him marks characteristic of his own land which will not fail to bewray him to men of the other land. But those marks are not of the nature of dialectic difference strictly so-called. I told my American hearers, in some of the lectures which I gave in several places, that between them and us I could see no difference of language, no difference of dialect, but that there was a considerable difference of local usage. Now local usage in matter of speech, whether it be of old standing or of quite modern origin, is altogether another thing from real difference of dialect. Real difference of dialect is a matter which lies pretty much beyond the control of the human will. It is often unconscious, it is almost always involuntary; if any reason can be given for the difference, it is a reason which does not lie on the surface, but which needs to be found out by philological research. But mere local usage, though it may have become quite immemorial, is not thus wholly beyond our own control. There is something conscious about it, something at any rate which can be changed by an immediate act of the will. For mere difference of local usage in language, we can often give some very obvious reason, which needs no philological research at all to find it out. For instance, what we may call the language of railways is

largely different in England and in America. But this is no difference of dialect, only difference of local usage. In each case a particular word has been chosen rather than another. In each case the word which has been chosen sounds odd to those who are used to the other. In each case we can sometimes see the reason for the difference of usage, and sometimes not. No obvious reason can be given why in England we speak of the "*railway*," while in America they commonly speak of the "*railroad*." But no one on either side can have the least difficulty in understanding the word which is used on the other side. And indeed the American might say that, in this as in some greater and older matters, he has stuck to the older usage. Though "*railroad*" is now seldom used in England, my own memory tells me that it was the more usual name when the thing itself first came in. "*Railway*," for what reason I know not, has displaced "*railroad*" in England, and it is worth remarking that it is doing the same in some parts of America. Here one can see no reason for one usage rather than the other, and no advantage in one usage rather than the other. But when the American goes on to speak, as he often does, of the railroad simply as "*the road*," his language may sometimes be a little misleading, but it is easy to see the reason for it. In England we had everywhere roads before we had railroads; the railroad needed a qualifying syllable to distinguish it from the older and better known kind of road.