

With the avidity of a child who thinks he has tripped up his senior on a point of knowledge, the Yankee seizes on these facts; and never (from the comparatively dead level of society in America) conceiving the idea that there are classes in England where manners and forms of speech are essentially different one from another, sets down every Englishman as vulgar in speech.

The poor simpleton, wrapped in his national mantle of conceit, has not an idea of the fact (and it is a fact) that, as a general thing, no English is spoken more pure, more utterly devoid of affectation, (notwithstanding the "how haw" style which some gentlemen, otherwise good fellows enough, foolishly affect)—more free from any intonation which does not come from the chest and throat as it ought to do—more perfect in simplicity, and in the avoidance of stilted or superfluous words—than that which is spoken by a well-bred Englishman, save, perhaps, that which is spoken by a well-bred Englishwoman.

The terms in which an admirable writer, Henry Kingsley, describes American peculiarities in a specimen meant to be an exceedingly favourable one, are sufficiently amusing. I quote from "The Hillyars and the Burtons."

"The house was blazing with lights, and carriages were flashing rapidly up to the door; but kind Nalder came down to him. Seeing no one but a mild looking old gentleman before him he ventured to talk his native language, which he would not have done for his life in his drawing room, and explained to Mr. Compton, that Mrs. N. had got on a tarnation tall-hop—a regular old Tar River breakdown; and seeing Mr. Compton was in full dress, he hoped his business would keep, and that he would jine 'em and shake a toe. Having relieved his heart by so much of the old prairie talk, and seeing Mr. Compton was anxious and displeased, he began to speak in diplomatic American—very perfect English, slightly Frenchified in style, and spoken a little through the nose.

"Mr. Compton stood silent for half a minute; before he had time to speak, Mr. Nalder rammed both his hands into the bottom of his breeches' pockets, and said in that loud snarling whine which it has pleased the Americans to adopt in moments of emergency, I'll tell you whawt, lawyer: I'll bet New York against New Orleans, or Chicago against Kingston, that she has bolted to Australey, back to her sister."

And the worst of it is this detestable snarling nasal twang is all over the continent, more or less. Canadians are by no means free from it—though, apart from it, they are a people of very fairly refined speech; far more than Englishmen, taking mass for mass, and excepting the upper classes. They have their little vulgarisms

too. We have heard such wickedness in high places as "I seen," and "I dono" out of the mouth of a Cabinet Minister, as well as out of the mouth of a lady (at all events she thought herself one) who also indulged the questionable taste of sarcastically telling a very polished English gentleman in our presence that she was not "Henglish." As the cap of aspiration did not fit, the lady's benevolent intention of mortifying our friend was a signal failure.

But, to return to the dissection of American conceit, and of the universal tendency to bad taste among them which it inevitably generates. Even respectable American newspaper writers permit themselves to slide into vulgarisms which no decently educated Englishmen would conceive the possibility of printing. For instance, the use of the preposition "of" after the word "all," is of almost universal prevalence, and is gradually creeping into use here. Not many weeks ago I saw it so used in so respectably written a paper as the *Church Herald*. Yet nothing can be more erroneous or more clumsy. If we were to say "several of the members were present" it would be correct: but if we say "all of the members were present" it is incorrect, and sounds vulgar and clumsy. Of conveying the idea of a part, not the whole.

Very infelicious also, we think, have been some of the attempts of the American Lexicographers to reduce orthography to what they in some cases superficially deem the principles of common sense. In other cases they have achieved good. For instance their substitution of "plow" for "plough" is sensible enough, as any one may realize who recalls to mind the stories he has heard of the Frenchman in difficulties over the "oughs;" besides it saves two letters in writing, and wherever this can be done it is an absolute benefit, as in the case of English nouns identical with Latin substantives in "or" as in "honor." Here the omission of the old fashioned "u" not only shortens the word for writing, but actually improves its written appearance.

We think most persons of taste and education will agree with us that there is quite as much in the way of association in the look of a word when written, as in the sound. A remark which will be found peculiarly applicable if we analyse our associations with names, especially with female names. American improvers in their endeavors after a bold rationality have effectually destroyed the association and vulgarized the appearance of many words. Notably, Greek derivations ending in "re" which they have elected to terminate in "er." Take as two examples and trace their formation successively from the Greek, through Latin and French—Theatre—Greek, *Theatron*, Latin, *Theatrum*, French, *Théâtre*—here is association, broken with utter bad taste; when the word is spelled theater. There is a little difference in the word metre—Gr., *Metron*,

Lat., *Metrum*: Fr., *Métre*—inasmuch as there is Saxon warrant for spelling it "meter." But after all the Greek is the root, and the Saxon spelling was probably more owing to the want of appreciation of the association than anything else.

Webster's conclusions appear to us to be utterly mistaken on this word. His instances the common orthography of "diameter," "hexameter," &c., as reason for the use of "er" instead of "re." It should rather be affirmed that so long as we agree to give the final "re" an indefinite sound as "er," all derivatives of *Metron* should follow the orthographic construction of the originating word. But as long as something different to English usage can be established American envy, hatred, malice and vanity are alike gratified.

The English language is in fact of such diverse and complicated origin, of such vigor and elasticity, and necessary, from its continual importation and adoption of foreign terms, of so arbitrary a nature, that the rules of Lindley Murray, or any other grammarian, utterly fail to control it. The only rule is the common usage of the best society. For instance, some very few years ago the "h" was habitually sounded mute in "herb." "humble," and the grammars so laid it down. Well, Dickens, out of the mouth of Uriah Heep, damned the mute "h" in "humble" for everlasting, and there are few people of intuitive refinement of speech at the present day but will expire at "herb."

In Spain there is a college for the continual revision of the Spanish language, and its effects are manifest in a remarkable simplicity of orthography. For instance, none of those languages which are permeated with the Latin heaven have the Greek "Phi." Wherefore the Spanish Lingual (oliego or dain: that the word "philosopher" be spelt "filosofo." Here is legitimate simplicity, and the nature of the language renders it peculiarly amenable to such treatment without loss of beauty. But the Americans try the same sort of experiment, without the same organization or discretion, and the result of their labor is, for the most part, simply bald vulgarity.

In all directions, far and wide, we see American bad taste obtruding itself on our notice. It would appear that Madame Ollivier, the wife of the French Prime Minister, has been making a laudable attempt to stem the torrent of fashionable extravagance in dress, set flowing by the frivolity of the Empress, by studious plainness of apparel at her own receptions.

Whom do we find opposing this attempt at a most beneficial reform by studied displays of jewellery? The ladies of the court—the Russian ladies—and, of course, the American ladies, who are indeed almost always overdressed.

With one more remark let us conclude a paper which we have been unsensibly beguiled into drawing out to a portentous length.