

and on either side." Here it is obvious that "each" should have been used in place of "either," as signifying both sides. "Either" signifies one side or the other, whereas it is very clear that the writer meant both sides. And this may become very important. Suppose a general in his instructions to an officer were to request him to keep, on a march, to *either* side of a river, would that officer understand that his instructions were to march on both sides? Would he not take his choice?

A very frequent vulgarism is the use of "was" in place of "were." People who would feel the impropriety of saying "if they *was* here," will say "if I *was* there" with impunity. Again, "I should like to do it if it was possible" is an ordinary incorrect sentence. There should be no difficulty in the correct use of "is" and "are," the singular and the plural, yet some people find them perplexing at times. Few would say "two and two is four," yet many would question whether it should be "there *is* or there *are* in this country a grandeur and magnificence of living which distinguish it from all others."

Let us take another familiar phrase "this sort of thing." Suppose there is more than one thing spoken of, what is to be done? It lies between "these sort of things" and "this sort of things"; both have an awkward sound, and it is not easy to persuade the ear that the latter is correct, though it is so. Substitute "kind" for "sort" and "peaches" for "things," and there is nothing distressing. Nothing appears more puzzling at times than the use of "has" or "have"; and one other familiar example occurs to me in the confusion between "who" and "whom."

How many persons use the superlative for the comparative! They say, "This is the best," or "this is the biggest," when there are only *two*. One may be the *best* or *biggest* out of *three*, but can only be the *better* or the *bigger* when the comparison is between two only.

The twin difficulties with the language are its bulk and its irregularities. It is undoubtedly copious and flexible to an astonishing degree; but no man can use it all, and there are many points on which the learned are at issue as to how it should be used. As to how it should be pronounced, that opens out yet another difficulty, which, however, is more easily to be mastered. All this arises from the fact that as we are a composite people, so our language is a Mosaic. We have taken the best out of every tongue. The Britons were conquered by the Romans. Thus we got an early mixture, but it did not stop there. Defoe said "an Englishman is the mud of all races." He certainly partakes of the qualities of most of them. The Saxons and the Danes contributed something to the language before the Normans landed at Hastings and gave us Norman French. In the eight hundred years since then there have been stirring times, and among other results we have taken toll of the languages of the world. The bulk of our tongue is therefore enormous, but the words, while useful, do not always mix well, and the grammar has had to be made very elastic and not a little irregular. It is in consequence the despair of foreigners, and is hardly to be mastered by us who are "native and to the manner born." The best critics even differ on innumerable points. There is hardly a writer, however eminent, who does not outrage some of the rules. In our time a greater approach to uniformity has been made, and there is less excuse for falling into gross blunders, since examples of good writing are quite common. So, though as Mr. Podsnap (whom I accepted last week as an authority) put it, "Our language is difficult, it is a copious language, and trying to strangers," we ought, as a people, to speak more of it, and that with greater purity and correctness than we do.

I am led to the foregoing remarks in consequence of the publication of a new edition of Webster's Dictionary, with a supplement, professing to register everything new which has made its appearance, new yet not ephemeral. A few examples will illustrate the character of the additions, and incidentally afford a glimpse of the world's progress since 1864, the date of the last edition:—Afterglow, aggressively, Albert-type, alcoholism; banality, bicycle, Bohemian (literary and other), butter-fingered; carpet-bagger, cod-liver-oil, Comtism, credit-mobilier; Darwinian, dead-beat, derringer, Draconian, dynamite; earth-closet, evolution; Faradization, Fenian, fractional currency; Gatling-gun, gang-plough, gouache, granger, greenback; health-lift, heliotype, herd-book, Hicksite, humanitarian (in the modern sense of a philanthropist); interview, Irvingite; Kindergärten, Krupp-gun; lacrosse; margin (on the street), microphone, mitrailleuse, Molly Maguire; Nihilist; object-teaching, one-horse; papyrograph, pool (on the street), Portland-cement, primary (political), Pullman-car; repeater (at the polls), repoussé; shogunate, sorosis, stereogram; tasimeter, ticket (for voters), totemism, trade-dollar, trapeze, type-writer; underground railroad; walking-gentleman.

Criticism of a dictionary generally takes the shape of good-natured or ill-natured fault-finding with particular articles, and many instances might be furnished in which a person utterly ignorant and trustfully seeking information would not find it; *bench-show* is defined broadly enough to include cattle-fairs, and *bog-wood* to include all wood dug from peat bogs. Such words as *arose* (coppery), and *anserous* (silly) the seeker is not informed, are extremely rare and to be recommended, and some other words, such as *armsweep* and *daintify* are probably wilful and quite ephemeral creations of individual writers, which hardly deserve cataloguing in an appendix. One phrase, which has become the

bête-noire of those who have occasion to consult dictionaries frequently—namely, "a kind of"—still affronts us in the supplement; a *bag-wig* is "a kind of wig in use in the eighteenth century," and a *bertha* is "a kind of cape worn by ladies." So much every one could tell from the context of the book he was reading.

There is one improvement, affecting the whole scheme of the Dictionary which might well have been uniformly carried out in the Supplement. There are thousands of words—verbs, substantives and adjectives—whose meaning is completed, or relations to other words in the same sentence indicated, by adverbs or prepositions which are idiomatic to the English. Often enough the native has to hesitate which to choose; sometimes usage is mixed; not seldom the English is opposed to the American. Now, neither in Webster nor in Worcester is help given invariably and systematically. As a rule it is left to an illustrative quotation. No such chance aid is given under *despotize* (*over*), nor under *irresponsive*, which requires the preposition *to*, although *irrespective*, to the foreigner's confusion, requires *of*. To be sure, in the main work, under *averse* we are assured that the adjective ought to be followed by *to* and not *from* "as formerly"—rather say as now in England, and as in old time, as "Men averse from war" (Micah ii., 8); and under *different* that it is proper to use *from* and not *to*, as in England. But there is nothing systematic about this, so that if, for a final example, under *dependence* we learn, directly or indirectly, that it is followed by *on* or *from*, under *independence* we find no mention of any relative word, whether *of* or *upon*. It would not be doing justice to the Dictionary, however, if I failed to mention that on the whole it is creditably accurate, and appears to be based on trustworthy examples.

Quevedo Redivivus.

NEWSPAPER PETS.

Of the many questions which are peculiarly suggested by this age of artifice, puffery, and imposture, none is more characteristic or more puzzling than that relating to the origin and growth of certain reputations. Individuals of whom one has never heard suddenly become the centres of a blaze of notoriety: how is it managed? Ladies and gentlemen who, to the ordinary observer, seem at the best respectable mediocrities are gradually credited with the possession of extraordinary capacities: how is the illusion produced? A politician, whom each one of his acquaintances would admit, in the charitable unreserve of private friendship, to be weak, vacillating, vain, with a great deal of the prig in his composition, and a decided dash of the pedant, is paraded before the world as the pillar of a Cabinet and the saviour of the nation. What, it is natural to ask, are the means employed to produce such an end? The simple truth is that, given certain commonplace qualifications, public characters can nowadays be manufactured to order, just like any other saleable commodity. There must be an absence of positive imbecility; there must be some modicum of worldly recommendation, position and rank. Given these things, and public fame up to a certain point can be bought just as well as anything whose worth can be measured by a monetary standard.

Here we have a crucial illustration of the power of the press. It is doubted sometimes what influence the newspapers of the day exercise, or whether in the more serious business of life they can be said to exercise any influence at all. The answer is to be found in the phenomenon that has just been mentioned. The press is to the public what the importunate widow was to the unjust official of the New Testament. That unscrupulous person admitted that he knew neither divine nor human fear, that he had no convictions of any sort; but boredom extorted from him what equity could not, and he relieved the needy applicant as the sole method of getting rid of her. It is precisely the same thing with the relations between the public and the press. Newspaper readers may resent having their attention perpetually called to some hero of whom they have never heard. But what begins in irritation ends in acquiescence. The demigod of the journal of their choice is an established fact; his virtues and gifts must be taken for granted; the world is told how good and noble and true he is; and after these epithets have been repeated a certain number of times those who hear them are seized with a vague sort of idea that they cannot be wholly misapplied. When this stage has been arrived at the manufacture of the hero is practically complete. A newspaper or a certain ring of newspapers has resolved to laud an individual statesman or general to the seventh heaven, and it executes its intention. The celebrity is created, as so many other things are created, by advertisement, nor are the advertisement columns of a newspaper the only ones which imply a definite payment for publicity. Newspaper reputations are as much matters of contract and bargain, of well-understood barter upon decently veiled conditions, as the insertion of a paragraph which draws attention to the excellence of a sewing-machine or the superlative virtues of a hair-wash. There are several journals in London, not so much in the daily as in the weekly press, which have, especially in politics, their peculiar idols. They "run their men," and in some way or other their favourites are made to tender a substantial payment for the privilege.

A capricious and vacillating politician, who takes up a principle one day in order that he may drop it the next, is not likely to be selected for the highest