

FEWER AND FITTER WORDS

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reader" that to understand and to profit by his book, a knowledge of the alphabet was necessary.

More than once suggestions have been made that a dictionary of the unusual words in the language should be compiled, but the persons recommending such a book invariably fail to define what they mean by an unusual word. That which is unusual to one is sometimes familiar to another; therefore, the production of a work of this kind would probably fail to please either.

It was Dr. Isaac K. Funk's idea that a dictionary should record all words about which a large body of persons is likely to seek information. It was upon this idea that he based the "New Standard Dictionary" and this is the policy followed by his successors. "Include every word that is likely to be inquired for by a large number of persons." Another sound principle impressed upon every definer was to "define by definitive statement in terms that could be understood by the high school student."

Words once dead and forgotten sometimes come back in an unexplainable way—often with a more respectable meaning than they originally had. The term "flapper" is one of these. In England under the Georges it belonged to the low speech of the day in which it was used to describe a courtesan. To-day it is used indiscriminately for a young girl—sophisticated or otherwise—but for more than a century before it had not been heard in speech or used in literature. "Hobson's choice" and "buncombe," once common, are now rarely met, still they have been given place in the literary language.

With the passing of the *church-bell* or "talkative woman," the flapper has introduced the *alarm-clock* or "chaperon," and although the term *cigareticide* has passed out, the practise of smoking cigarettes to excess still remains. When the high bicycle was introduced, wheelmen were stigmatized by such silly phrases as "cads on casters," "monkeys on gridirons." *Bull*, which among us to-day is a term used to designate "bosh," was used in my boyhood as a nickname for a "teapot," and frequently also for "a second brew of tea." *Jumbo*, from the famous elephant who bore the name, worked its way into the language as a word used to designate "anything particularly large or striking," but these have all passed out.

There was a time when *G. T. T.* and *G. T. C.* passed as current among us to describe the sudden disappearance of any one. The first stood for "Gone to Texas," the second for "Gone to Chicago." So, at least, taught the *New York Mercury* of 1885.

In view of the agitation now being made in Great Britain over the suppression of betting, we may perhaps yet live to see the reintroduction of Joseph Chamberlain's unique coinage. In a speech given by him on the twenty-ninth of April, 1885, he declared that he did not believe that "any sensible men will commit their fortunes to a party or a statesman who would run such tremendous hazards in such a *gambolous* way"—words that even that great opportunist, Mr. Lloyd George, may perhaps find wise to adopt in his new political campaign.