

## FEWER WORDS

(Continued from page 48)

experience extended over thirty-five years I have never once been asked for the meaning of any one of the following terms: *ataraxy*, *coaxation*, *col-luctation*, *delinition*, *dyscolous*, *exente-ration*, *formosity*, *humectation*, *illaque-ation*, *immarcescible*, *lapidifical*, *ludi-bundness*, *medioxumous*, *mirificent*, *moliminously*, *mulierosity*, *pauciloquy*, *sanguinolency*, *septemfluous*, *subsanna-tion*, *vertigonous*. Verily, a lover of his native speech may well tremble at what that speech may become if such terms as these, and all the latest coin-ages in words, are given free course.

Looking back, I find that we can in large measure trust the language to purify itself, but we are not now living in an age of such purification. It is true that some of the words that have made a home among us were at first foreigners and bore traces of their origin on their faces. For a while this was retained, but in due season the alien became naturalized, and with his naturalization his form changed. For instance, in "The Mystery of Iniquity," the Greek word, *chasma*, was used where to-day we use *chasm*. *Idioma*, another Greek term, has been sup-planting by *idiom*; *prosody* has taken the place of *prosodia*, and *abyssus*, from the Greek *abyssos*, has been re-placed by *abyss*. Some writers delib-erately avoid the commoner word for the unusual one, and others born to the shovel insist on wielding the pen; so it comes about that we hear that "So and So has a *flair* for this or that," in-stead of "a *talent* or an *aptitude*" for it. But yesterday one of our intelli-gentsia told me that the dictionary definition of *effete*, which he pro-nounced *affate*, was out of date, and that in modern speech the *effete East* meant the bright and lively East. He spoke of a society woman who was quite as much at home in the saddle on a Western plain as she was in the *effete* surroundings of a New York home. Subsequently, I learned that in his mind he had confused the French phrase *au fait* with the English word *effete* which, as I have said above, he pronounced *affate*.

We speak the greatest polyglot tongue that the world has ever known, but there is no need for us to keep in-troducing from abroad terms for which we have good equivalents in English. The task of weeding strictly technical terms from the modern dic-tionary is by no means an easy one. There are few lexicographers who, having deliberately omitted certain terms from their books for these rea-sons, are not at some time chided be-cause these terms have been sought and are not to be found in those books. Thirty years ago the word *bifurcate* seemed to be one of the elusive ones. The public did not know how to spell it and therefore was at a loss to find it in the dictionaries of the day. I re-call other words of the same kind. *Autotoxic* and *psychic* brought to my desk many communications from per-sons who had heard the terms but did not know how to spell them, and there-fore could not find them in their lexi-cons. *Psychoanalysis* is the latest in this class. All of which brings us to the point that it is necessary to have some idea of the formation of words before one can find them even in a dictionary. Cawdrey, in the preface to his little work, which dates from 1580 or thereabouts, warned the "gentle

(Continued on page 124)