

we alter the conditions; and a regiment which has taken part in a hard-fought battle, and comes off the field only decimated, that is to say with nine living and unscathed for each man left on the field, might be accounted rather fortunate than the reverse. We come now to "holocaust," the use of which noun often betrays ignorance quite as gross. Thus, the dreadful loss of life by the sinking of an excursion steamboat on the Thames was recently spoken of as a "holocaust," by which remarkable misprision of etymology the Thames was set on fire indeed.

Few words are commoner in the language of the newspapers than the word "alleged." To allege anything, if the old meaning be good, is to affirm it with the exactness of a despatch. But the participle of this verb has found new service. Whenever any doubt is felt that a murder is a murder, the deed is softened to an "alleged" murder. Whenever a man loses his watch and his senses, and cannot tell exactly how they went, the lamentable occurrence is chronicled as an "alleged" robbery. According to these new linguistic lights, an allegation means a guess. "Phenomenon" applied to something wonderful and abnormal, is a common instance of high-flown vulgarity, much in the mouths and on the pens of persons who can hardly have compassed the truth that a shower of rain is just as positively a phenomenon as is a shower of frogs, a calf with six legs, Miss Crummies, or an enormous gooseberry. "Immense" is an adjective seldom used but in such a manner as to confute its own meaning. Thus in an account of some discovery beneath an ancient ruin, it was said that skeletons of great size were found, one of them being of "the immense length of seven feet ten inches." If the length of this skeleton was really seven feet ten inches, or ten feet seven

inches, how could it have been "immense"? So, too, we read of walls of "immense" thickness, and pumpkins of "immense" girth. Are there, then, no foot-rules or measuring-tapes to reduce these immensities? A "conflagration" is not the burning of one house; it is the meeting of flames, as when a street, town, or village is fired in several places. "Culminate" is a verb incorrectly used, unless in respect of something which has reached the limit of its possible height. When, therefore, the career of a wrong-doer is said to "culminate" in the lowest depths of degradation, the term is misapplied, even to being turned upside down. So is the term "assiduous," when employed to strengthen the idea of perseverance, if the particular kind of perseverance intimated be locomotive and not sedentary. So, too, is "preposterous," unless clearly denoting the figure which homely rhetoric describes as "putting the cart before the horse."

The word "ovation," from which many timid writers appear to have been frightened by a persistent course of ridicule, not always, or often, justly bestowed, was used with propriety whenever it signified a minor triumph, or anything that could, by a reasonable feat of imagination, be so designated. It is true that we do not sacrifice a sheep when we applaud a victorious general, a fine fiddler, or a favourite singing-woman; but the spirit of historic words survives their literal matter-of-fact signification, or language would be dry and colourless indeed. When this noun, "ovation," is uttered in any connection with imperial progress — when a sovereign, at some rare climax of popular enthusiasm, receives the homage of the nation in its one undivided voice — then, indeed, the word is out of time and tune with the event. It is precisely an emperor, empress, or head of a state, who can-