

## ENGLISH OR AMERICAN.

The notion of an American language distinct from the English is by no means absurd, as a comparison of differences in usage in the two countries will at once show. A tourist, giving his experiences in the *Portland Transcript*, thus notes the variations of usage which strike the attention. He observes that an American takes a passage on a boat, an Englishman takes his in it; *railroay* in America is *railwoag* in England; the American *locomotive* is the English *engine*; the former *switches off*, the latter is *shunted* to a side track; our *dépot* is the English *station*, for they use *dépot* only in its original sense, as a magazine where stores are deposited; we send by *mail*, they by *post*; the *baggage* of an American traveller is the *luggage* of an Englishman; one *buys a ticket* for the end of his journey, the other is *booked* for his destination. If we take a *hack* we mean a coach, but an English *hack* is a riding-horse. In shopping the same difference exists; an American *hardware merchant* is an English *ironmonger*; a specialty of our *dry goods* is their *haberdashery*, and though we may buy *calicoes* at our stores, we must not fail to ask for *prints* at our London shops.

In dress there is also a wide variance; the Englishman wears *trousers* and *braces*, the American *pantaloons* and *suspenders*; an English woman may appear in a *gown*, the American wears a *dress*; only a child in America puts on a frock, but in England it is the name of a man's garment. A *Levé* in England means—very correctly—only morning receptions; in America it may be attended at night.

The language of country life varies widely, or the same words are used with various meanings. *Lumber* in America is wood for building, or timber, and is a source of ample revenues; in England *lumber* is worthless, and is used merely for trash that is cumbersome and in the way, as the dismembered relics of old furniture in an unvisited lumber-room. The plain tables and shelves of *board* here are *deal* tables and shelves in the "old country." Our fields of *corn* are fields of *maize* there; and the somewhat riotous *tavern* of our cross-roads is the good old *inn* of English comfort.

"Shall I not take mine ease at mine inn?" The flower borders of our gardens become the *edging* of an English flower-bed; our creeks may be branches of a river—with water fresh as the woodland spring; in England they are the inlets of the salt sea running into the land. The English *autumn* has by a provincialism become the *fall*—a natural expression in a land of forests where the leaves whirl past from the tall trees in the autumn winds; and the same characteristic feature of our land has changed the English



wood to the far-stretching American woods, where you may wander all day without seeing the smoke of a human dwelling. The *brooks* and *streams* of England are the *branches* and *runs* of the Southern and Western States. The *sleighs* that dart swiftly along the smooth surface of a New England road are the English *sledges* of a Canadian winter.

*Homely* in England means domestic, and is associated with the virtues of the fireside and hearth by a home-staying people; in America where the poorest range farther afield, and the habitat is a varying one, it has the ungracious signification of ugly or displeasing. The *cleverness* of a quick wit has been transformed by our occidental country folk, to whom in their busy and rough life, an obliging temper appeals so strongly to good nature. "He's a clever kind of a man," refers to recollections of kindly words and civil behavior rather than to mental quickness. But there is another transformation of ideas in the South more alarming, for if an *angry* Englishman goes there, in common parlance, he gets *mad*. Perhaps in finding his anger deemed insanity, or *madness*, he may discover wholesome counsel against indulgence of passion. Strangest of all, on careless tongues the word "expect," which regards only the future, is turned backward to past, as "I expect he has done so."

We all recognize the ambition of fine speech in the New Englander who feels himself a possible President—a *probable* one, he might say if he were a native of Ohio—when he *notifies* us that his business *necessitates* a change, and he intends to *locate* where his old-fashioned English ancestor would have *settled*. Perhaps we also perceive somewhat of the spirit of *Topsy*, who "just *groued*," in the easy-going South, where children are *raised* like vegetables, or to put it more poetically, like flowers, instead of being *brought up*, or *reared* in the old severe and painstaking Puritan fashion.

Very often a distinctive word, or phrase, may hold, if not in history, a picture of social life. The *guessing* of a Yankee is eminently characteristic of the ready mind that finds life a conundrum—a puzzle—and sharpens his wits upon it forthwith; the *reckoning* of a Southerner is far slower and more deliberate. The word "tote" of the negroes expresses at once the peculiar way of bearing burdens, not upon the shoulders, nor by carrying them in the arms, but on the head, with the rest of the body in perfect equipoise, so that they may walk without touching them. As we study the dictionary we may find that the apparently dull looking book has much to tell us, and we may even stumble upon a moral, and receive a sermon from this unexpected source upon faults to which we had before been blind.

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