

FIFTY-TWO.

REFLECTIONS OF A CYNIC.

Bright is the morn, but I am blue,
Alas! this day I'm fifty-two.

What can a creature say or do
That's joyful, at grim fifty-two?

I'm cursed with corns, despite a shoe
As old and worn as fifty-two.

Rheumatic arrows pierce me through,
My back's a butt, at fifty-two.

Where once my unthinned grinders grew,
What dismal gaps at fifty-two!

Stern warnings—ah, how oft!—renew
My dread of gout at fifty-two.

Though all Muses I should sue,
They'd stint their fire to fifty-two.

Beauty and Grace may fill my view:
They tempt in vain: I'm fifty-two.

Nature! Alack! 'tis "mountain dew"
One prizes most at fifty-two.

Ideals!—pshaw! I marvel who
Dotes on the moon at fifty-two!

Taste! Art! One tries with racier *gout*
Pates de foie at fifty-two;

Or even a piquant Irish stew
(Just dashed with wine) at fifty-two.

Pass on, O world; your false ado
Moves not the phlegm of fifty-two.

Your sweets, soon changed to bitter rue,
Deceive no more at fifty-two.

Come, friend, a modest game of "loo;"
Mild stakes, mild port, at fifty-two.

Diversions not too flushed of hue
Just suit the nerves of fifty-two.

PAUL HAYNE, in *Harper's*.

THE BEAUTIES AND BLEMISHES OF SPEECH.*

During the last two decades there has been a decided movement toward a critical study of the English language, and many books have been published calling attention to prevalent errors in writing and speaking. A strong impetus was given in this direction by Dean (now Archbishop), Trench's interesting and suggestive lectures "On the Study of Words," subsequently reinforced by Max Muller's "Science of Language," and the works on the same subject by Professors Marsh, Whitney and De Vere. The almost simultaneous publication of our two great "unabridged" dictionaries, with the strong rivalry they awakened,—causing them to be pushed and "puffed" and criticized wherever the press extended its Briarean arms,—was another force exerted powerfully in the same direction. All these circumstances contributed to the study of the dictionary, and consequently to a better use of language. Much interest has also been awakened in the study of English by the publication of works devoted to verbal criticism. One of the first of these was "The Queen's English," by Dean Alford, followed, as the hound follows the hare, by "The Dean's English," by George Washington Moon. Afterwards came "Good English," by Edward S. Gould; "Vulgarism and Other Errors of Speech," by an anonymous author; "Words and their Uses," by Richard Grant White; "Words, their Use and Abuse," by William Matthews; and several others. These works, though, with one or two exceptions, unimportant in themselves, have collectively exercised an immense influence on the pronunciation and use of English words. To the same class of books belongs "Peabody's Hand-book of Conversation," a new edition of which has been lately issued. The present volume includes: "An Address to Young Ladies," by Dr. Peabody; "A Lecture on Conversation," by Francis Trench; "A Word to the Wise, or Hints on the Current Improvements of Speaking and Writing," by Parry Gwynne; and "Mistakes and Improvements of Speaking and Writing Corrected," compiled from two little English books whose authors are not mentioned.

Dr. Peabody's address, as he informs us, was delivered before a young ladies' school at Newburyport, Mass.; and the subject is happily chosen, for there is no part of a young lady's education that is more important than the acquisition of a correct and elegant use of her mother tongue, especially in conversation. In comparison with this art, all other accomplishments sink into insignificance. Says Dr. Peabody, truly and eloquently:—

"How large a portion of life does it fill up! How innumerable are its ministries and uses! It is the most refined species of recreation, the most sparkling source of merriment. It interweaves with a never-resting shuttle the bonds of domestic sympathy. It fastens the ties of friendship, and runs along the golden links of the chain of love. It enriches charity, and makes the gift twice blessed. . . . In our unmusical age and land, talking occupies the place which songs did among the melody-loving Greeks; and he who can tune the many-voiced harp of the social party need crave no higher office or more potent sway."

* 1. "Conversation, its Faults and its Graces." By Andrew P. Peabody, D.D., LL.D. New edition. Boston: Lee & Shepard.

2. "The Orthoepist: A Pronouncing Manual, containing Three Thousand and Five Hundred Words, including a considerable number of the names of Authors, Artists, &c., that are often mispronounced." New edition. New York: D. Appleton & Co.

Much of Dr. Peabody's address is of a very practical kind; and he points out many errors in conversation that are prevalent elsewhere, as well as in Newburyport. He advises his fair hearers to be good talkers, equally avoiding carelessness on the one hand, and undue precision on the other; to cultivate depth of tones, avoiding that harsh, nasal quality of voice which is prevalent, he says, in the Northern States; to shun ungrammatical vulgarisms, and to avoid gossip, scandal, and all shallow, superficial talk. This advice has been given again and again, but Dr. Peabody's manner of giving it is new and interesting, though some of his statements are rather surprising, and cannot tend to increase one's estimate of New England "culture."

Dr. Peabody justly denounces *ain't* as vulgar, and *hain't* as intolerable; but he goes too far when he includes *won't* in the same condemnation. Though irregular in its formation, it seems to be a necessary word in colloquial language, and has been accepted as such in good society. Such contractions as *don't*, *won't*, *hasn't*, *couldn't*, *isn't*, &c., though not allowable to the higher kinds of literature, are absolutely essential to that ease and vivacity in conversation that Dr. Peabody so forcibly recommends. The talk of a person who habitually says, "I do not think so," "It is not so," "You can not go," etc., is insufferably precise and pedantic. Care must be taken, however, not to use contractions improperly. They must not be used where the words would be improper if written out. *He don't*, for example, must not be used, for we cannot say *he do not*; but *he doesn't* is allowable and proper. We regret that Dr. Peabody did not specifically condemn the fashionable slang that prevails in many of our female seminaries and colleges; perhaps he intended to include this in what he calls "polite swearing." A few words might well have been said, also, in condemnation of the silly custom of girls, in schools and elsewhere, of discarding their own Christian names, and adopting such foolish substitutes as Mae, Mamie, Sadie, Maggie, Carrie, etc. Such pet names are very well for little girls in short clothes, but are inappropriate and in bad taste when applied to sensible young women. The remarks of Dr. Peabody upon the reflex influence of our words upon our character, the power of good and evil that lies in words, and the necessity of religion as the guiding, controlling element in conversation, are true and admirable.

The lecture by Mr. Trench (not Archbishop Trench) presents the subject of conversation in a more discursive and philosophical way, and forms—except as to style—a fitting continuation of Dr. Peabody's theme. The style is of the "popular science" order, perhaps intended for an audience composed chiefly of working people and appropriate for that use; but it seems to us needlessly redundant, and, though pleasant and gentlemanly, slightly patronizing.

The author of Part III., entitled "A Word to the Wise," states in his introduction that he writes for the educated; but education must be very defective in England, if it is necessary to call the attention of educated people to such mistakes as "his pulse are regular." This is similar to saying *a corp for a corpse, summon for a summons*. It arises from mistaking a singular noun ending with the sound of *s* for a plural noun—an error that is made, and can be made, only by illiterate persons. A *Chinese* and a *Portuguese* are other instances of the same kind. Here is an error, however, which is frequently committed by educated people—even in the editorials of leading journals: "The person whom I expected would purchase the estate," etc. Here *whom* (who) the subject of *would purchase*, is carelessly mistaken for the subject of *expected*. "I expected" is parenthetical, nearly equivalent to "as I expected." "Everybody has a right to look after their own interests," "One of the houses were sold," "Who are you looking for?"—are also familiar examples of error. As to the example last quoted, the expression seems so natural and lively as to almost justify its use, and it may be finally admitted as an idiom, like Milton's "than whom (who) none higher sat." In rapid conversation, "Whom are you looking for?" seems stiff and precise; and "For whom are you looking?" sounds like a sentence cut out of "Blair's Rhetoric."

Another word relating to errors in speaking is "The Orthoepist," which confines itself, as the title indicates, to pronunciation. On leaving it over, one is surprised to see how many orthoepical mistakes are made, even by men of culture; and there are few readers who will not find on nearly every page words that they have been mispronouncing all their lives, in blissful ignorance of their errors.

Mr. Ayres seems to have done his work with great care and thoroughness. He has consulted the recognized authorities, weighing their opinions, and deciding which is most worthy of acceptance. In some cases he ventures to differ from them all, claiming the right to fall back upon the *ultima ratio* of lexicographers, the best usage, and decide for himself. It is a delicate question how far we should rely upon the dictionaries in regard to pronunciation. Unfortunately, we have no supreme authority, as the French have, to ascertain and decide what is the best usage. London is generally regarded as the literary metropolis of our language, but even Londoners differ as to what is London usage. Walker and Smart, who both resided in London, and had perhaps equal opportunities for learning the usage of the better classes of people, differ greatly in regard to the pronunciation of many common words. Lexicographers may differ on account of imperfect information

or a defective ear, and many words are not heard at all in such a way as to determine usage. Besides, our language is a living thing, and is continually changing especially in regard to pronunciation. There are also, in regard to many words, different usages, each equally good. It is, therefore, impossible for any dictionary to represent the language with absolute correctness; and if it did so, it would cease to be correct as soon as published. Stereotype plates are not a flexible thing, as language is, and a dictionary, therefore, is slow to admit changes or corrections. There is thus, as to some words, a time when the dictionary is wrong, and a person may properly differ from it, and interpret usage for himself. As Dr. Worcester, himself a high authority, remarks:

"The usage of the best society in the place or district in which one resides is not to be disregarded. . . . A proper pronunciation is, indeed, a desirable accomplishment, and is indicative of correct taste and a good education; still it ought to be remembered that, in speech as in manners, he who is most precise is often the least pleasing, and that rusticity is more excusable than affectation."

There are numerous words as to which the dictionaries, even the revised editions with supplements, do not represent the usage of to-day. We all say *restorant* (*rant* as in current), but in the dictionary we find only the French pronunciation, *restorong*. Mr. Ayres very properly gives the Anglicized pronunciation. The noun *cement* is pronounced *cem'ent* by the orthoepists, but those who use the substance always say *cement*. We are taught to say "the *rice* (rise) of prices," but ninety-nine people out of a hundred say *rise*. In these and other similar cases a person who would persist in pronouncing the words strictly as marked in the dictionary would make himself as singular and affected as if he were to persist in dressing after the fashion of his grandsire. Mr. Ayres is right, therefore, in endeavoring to present actual usage in respect to such words, even when the authorities are against him; but he is not right in making changes for merely euphonic reasons. The genius of the language seems to ignore euphony altogether in many cases. Usage requires us to say *interesting*, and *vehemence*, while the old pronunciation, *interest'ing*, and *vehe'mence*, was certainly more euphonic. Mr. Ayres prefers *plethoric*, but usage undoubtedly favors *plethoric*. He prefers *dece'rous*, but usage says *dec'rous*. The irresistible tendency in the English language is to throw the accent back toward the beginning of the word. Some words have changed thus within our recollection, and others are changing before our eyes. *Restaurant*, *cement*, and *renaissance* are familiar examples. In the word *inquiry*, for instance, we are struggling to keep the accent on the penult, *qui*, but people will say *in'quiry*, and we shall probably be compelled to yield to them. *Penult* itself is an example of the same kind; those who are precise say *penult'* accentuating the last syllable, but most people say *pe'nult*. Climate seems to have something to do with this tendency, as it has been observed that Southern nations tend to accent the final syllable. Prof. Marsh says that "Many a Northern man has gone to Congress a dactyl or a trochee, and come back an amphibrach or an iambus; that is, the accent in his name has shifted toward the end. *Balcony* was formerly pronounced *bale'ony*. Rogers says, '*Con'template* is bad enough, but *bal'cony* makes me sick.' *Records* (noun) was formerly *rec'ords*." Shakespeare says:—

"Yea, from the tablets of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial, fond records."—*Hamlet*, Act I, Sc. 1.

Pope said *barreer* for *bar'rier*:—

"Twixt that and reason what a nice barrier!
Forever separate, yet forever near."—*Essay on Man*.

In regard to *revenue*, Mr. Ayres says, "*re'venu* in prose; *reven'yū* in verse," and quotes from Hamlet for illustration. This is not strictly correct. In Shakespeare's time the word was pronounced *reven'ue* in prose as well as in verse; and at the present time it is *re'venu* in verse as well as in prose. *Conversant* is another word of the same class. As Mr. Ayres remarks in his supplement (revised edition), all the dictionaries a hundred years ago gave *conversant*, while modern works give *con'versant*, as he himself gave it in his first edition. He now recommends, in the case of this and some other words, a return to the old pronunciation. But this, as we have shown, is impossible, as it is contrary to an irresistible tendency of the language. *Con'versant* is an erroneous pronunciation caused, perhaps, by associating the word with the verb *converse*; just as illiterate people say *pacify* for *pacify*, taking the English word *peace* as the root instead of the Latin *pax*. We wish Mr. Ayres had discarded the needless refinement insisted upon by orthoepists in regard to many words ending with *el* and *al*. They insist that we should say *bush'ell* for *bush'l*, *bev'ell* for *bev'l*, *trav'ell* for *trav'l*, etc.; while in *grovel* and several other similar words we must drop the *e* sound and say *grov'l*, etc. This distinction is founded upon no principle, and imposes an unnecessary tax upon the memory. Besides, it is practically ignored. People generally say *bush'l*, *bev'l*, etc., and, indeed, to sound the *e* in such words makes a person seem affected and pedantic. The same is true of *a* in such words as *mortal*, *mental*, *fatal*, etc. We had marked several other points for notice, but must refrain. To sum up, we will say, that, on the whole, Mr. Ayres has done his work with taste and judgment.—J. W. W.

VARIETIES.

"SIR," began a creditor who met one of his victims, "I sent a bill in June." "Yes, sir." "And again in September." "Yes, sir." "And again in December." "Yes, sir." "And I presume you received one the other day?" "I did, sir." "Well, sir—well, sir!" blustered the creditor. "Well, you needn't feel so proud about it," replied the other; "there are firms in this town who send me bills every two weeks in the year, and they never stop me in the street and brag about it either! I detest such egotism, sir! Good morning!"

AN Italian took an English friend to a masked ball in Naples. In a short time the latter missed a valuable gold snuff-box and strongly suspected that it had been abstracted by a mask who had been pressing close to him the greater part of the evening. Confiding his suspicions to his friend, the latter undertook to regain his property for him, and actually recovered the box before the close of the entertainment. "Did you tax the fellow with the theft, and so recover that box?" asked the Englishman in surprise. "No," answered the other; "I knew the man had your box, for I saw him take it; but I did not want to make a disturbance; so I waited my opportunity, and just picked his pocket of it."

A PROFESSOR was showing a party of ladies and gentlemen over some large works at Birmingham chiefly engaged in the manufacture of complicated optical instruments. The party came across a very ingenious instrument, the working of which the professor proceeded to explain. In the midst of his exposition a roughly-dressed young man standing near struck in, and civilly pointed out that the man of science was quite mistaken in his notions as to the instrument in question. The professor, whose weak point is not an excess of humility, angrily maintained his own view, but did not succeed in convincing his opponent, who finally shrugged his shoulders and walked off. "Who is that—that person?" asked the professor indignantly of a workman standing by. "Oh, that is Doctor X, I," was the reply. "He invented that instrument you have been looking at!" Tableau!

A USE FOR RICHES.—General Sheridan was recently coming over from Boston in a sleeping-car, where he had a whole section. He was sitting on the lower berth in the morning, about to put his shoes on, when he was accosted by kind-looking gentleman opposite, who was also putting on his shoes, with the inquiry, "My friend, are you a rich man?" George looked astonished, but answered the pleasant-faced, tired-looking gentleman with a "Yes, I'm tolerably rich." A pause occurred and then another question, "How rich are you?" "About \$700,000 or \$800,000. Why?" "Well," said the old man, "if I were as rich as you say you are, and snored as loud as I know you do, I would hire a whole sleeping car every time I travelled."

"Now, boys," said the teacher, "I need not tell you anything further of the duty of cultivating a kindly disposition; but I will tell you a little story about two dogs. George had a nice little dog that was as gentle as a lamb. He would sit by George's side quietly for an hour at a time. He would not bark at the passers-by nor at strange dogs, and would never bite anybody or anything. Thomas' dog, on the contrary, was always fighting other dogs, and would sometimes tear them quite cruelly. He would also fly at the hens and cats in the neighbourhood, and on several occasions had been known to seize a cow by the nostrils and throw her. He barked at all the strange men that came along, and would bite them unless somebody interfered. Now, boys, which was the dog you would like to own, George's or Thomas'?" Instantly came the answer in one eager shout.—"Thomas'!"

EMERSON AS A PRACTICAL MAN.—The racist testimony that ever came within my knowledge as to the soundness of Emerson in practical matters was delivered by a sturdy, stalwart Vermonter in a car on the Fitchburg Railroad. My journey was to be a tedious one of three hundred miles, and when I took my seat in the car I felt that my fellow-passengers would give me no such glimpses into their characters as would be afforded by a ride of ten miles in a stage-coach. In a railroad car the passengers are gloomily reticent, as if they expected to be launched into eternity at any moment; in a stage they indulge in all the fury of gossip, and reveal themselves while praising or censuring others. There were two persons in front of me, mighty in bulk, but too much absorbed in their own reflections to speak to each other. The train, as usual, stopped at Concord. Then one of the giants turned to the other, and lazily remarked, "Mr. Emerson, I hear, lives in this town." "Ya-as," was the drawing rejoinder; "and I understand that, in spite of his odd notions, he is a man of *con-sid-er-able* propiety." This apposite judgement was made when Emerson's essays had been translated into most of the languages of Europe, and when the recognition of his genius was even more cordial abroad than it was among his few thousands of appreciative admirers at home; but the shrewd Yankee who uttered it was more impressed by his thrift than by his thinking. He belonged to the respectable race of *descendentalists*, and was evidently puzzled to understand how a *transcendentalist* could acquire "*propiety*."—E. P. WHIPPLE, in *Harper's*.