JOHN HOTTEN

A DICTIONARY OF SLANG, CANT, AND VULGAR WORDS

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A Dictionary of Slang, Cant, and Vulgar Words / Used at the Present Day in the Streets of London; the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge; the Houses of Parliament; the Dens of St. Giles; and the Palaces of St. James.:
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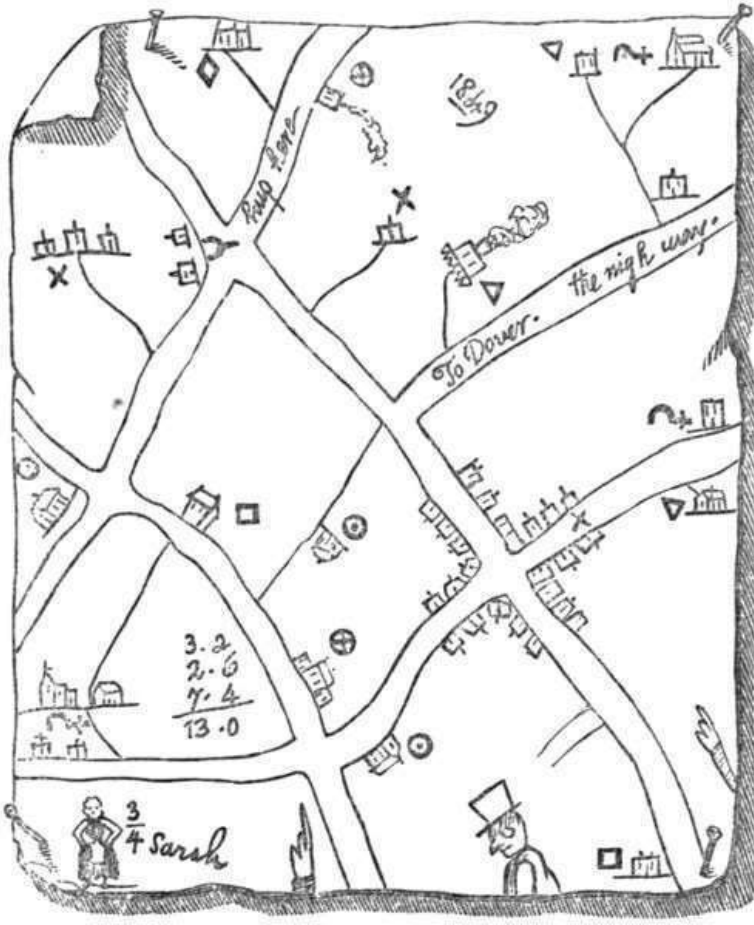
Содержание

A London Antiquary
A Dictionary of Slang, Cant, and Vulgar Words / Used at the Present Day in the Streets of London; the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge; the Houses of Parliament; the Dens of St. Giles; and the Palaces of St. James

A CADGER'S MAP OF A BEGGING DISTRICT.


To Dover. the high way.
3.2
2.6
7.4
13.0
3/4 Sarah

EXPLANATION OF THE HIEROGLYPHICS

 NO GOOD; too poor, and know too much.

 STOP, – if you have what they want, they will buy. They are pretty "*fly*" (knowing).

 GO IN THIS DIRECTION, it is better than the other road. Nothing that way.

 *BONE* (good). Safe for a "cold tatur," if for nothing else. "*Cheese your patter*" (don't talk much) here.

COOPER'D (spoilt), by too many tramps calling there.

GAMMY (unfavourable), likely to have you taken up. Mind the dog.

FLUMMUXED (dangerous), sure of a month in "*quod*" (prison).

RELIGIOUS, but tidy on the whole.

See page 37.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The First Edition of this work had a rapid sale, and within a few weeks after it was published the entire issue passed from the publisher's shelves into the hands of the public. A Second Edition, although urgently called for, was not immediately attempted. The First had been found incomplete and faulty in many respects, and the author determined to thoroughly revise and recast before again going to press. The present edition, therefore, will be found much more complete than the First; indeed, I may say that it has been entirely rewritten, and that, whereas the First contained but 3,000 words, this gives nearly 5,000, with a mass of fresh illustrations, and extended articles on the more important slang terms – HUMBUG, for instance. The notices of a *Lingua Franca* element in the language of London vagabonds is peculiar to this edition.

My best thanks are due to several correspondents for valuable hints and suggestions as to the probable etymologies of various colloquial expressions.

One literary journal of high repute recommended a division of cant from slang; but the annoyance of two indices in a small work appeared to me to more than counterbalance the benefit of a stricter philological classification, so I have for the present

adhered to the old arrangement; indeed, to separate cant from slang would be almost impossible.

Respecting the HIEROGLYPHICS OF VAGABONDS, I have been unable to obtain further information; but the following extract from a popular manual which I have just met with is worth recording, although, perhaps, somewhat out of place in a Preface.

> "Gipseys follow their brethren by numerous marks, such as strewing handfuls of grass in the day time at a four lane or cross roads; the grass being strewn down the road the gang have taken; also, by a cross being made on the ground with a stick or knife, the longest end of the cross denotes the route taken. In the night time a cleft stick is placed in the fence at the cross roads, with an arm pointing down the road their comrades have taken. The marks are always placed on the left-hand side, so that the stragglers can easily and readily find them." —*Snowden's Magistrate's Assistant*, 1852, p. 444.
>
> *Piccadilly, March 15th, 1860.*

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

If any gentleman of a studious turn of mind, who may have acquired the habit of carrying pencils and notebooks, would for one year reside in Monmouth Court, Seven Dials; six months in Orchard Street, Westminster; three months in Mint Street, Borough; and consent to undergo another three months on the extremely popular, but very much disliked treadmill (*vulgo* the "Everlasting Staircase"), finishing, I will propose, by a six months' tramp, in the character of a cadger and beggar, over England, I have not the least doubt but that he would be able to write an interesting work on the languages, secret and vulgar, of the lower orders.

In the matter of SLANG, our studious friend would have to divide his time betwixt observation and research. Conversations on the outsides of omnibuses, on steamboat piers, or at railway termini, would demand his most attentive hearing, so would the knots of semi-decayed cabmen, standing about in bundles of worn-out great-coats and haybands, betwixt watering pails, and conversing in a dialect every third word of which is without home or respectable relations. He would also have to station himself for hours near gatherings of ragged boys playing or fighting, but ever and anon contributing to the note-book a pure street term. He would have to "hang about" lobbies, mark the refined word-droppings of magniloquent flunkies, "run after" all the popular

preachers, go to the Inns of Court, be up all night and about all day – in fact, be a ubiquitarian, with a note-book and pencil in hand.

As for research, he would have to turn over each page of our popular literature, wander through all the weekly serials, wade through the newspapers, fashionable and unfashionable, and subscribe to Mudie's, and scour the novels. This done, and if he has been an observant man, I will engage to say, that he has made a choice gathering, and that we may reasonably expect an interesting little book.

I give this outline of preparatory study to show the reason the task has never been undertaken before. People in the present chase after respectability don't care to turn blackguards, and exchange cards with the Whitechapel Pecker or the Sharp's-alley Chicken, for the sake of a few vulgar, although curious words; and we may rest assured that it is quite impossible to write any account of vulgar or low language, and remain seated on damask in one's own drawing room. But a fortunate circumstance attended the compiler of the present work, and he has neither been required to reside in Seven Dials, visit the treadmill, or wander over the country in the character of a vagabond or a cadger.

In collecting old ballads, penny histories, and other printed street narratives, as materials for a *History of Cheap or Popular Literature*, he frequently had occasion to purchase in Seven Dials and the Borough a few old songs or dying speeches, from the

chaunters and patterers who abound in those neighbourhoods. With some of these men (their names would not in the least interest the reader, and would only serve the purpose of making this Preface look like a vulgar page from the London Directory) an arrangement was made, that they should collect the cant and slang words used by the different wandering tribes of London and the country. Some of these chaunters are men of respectable education (although filling a vagabond's calling), and can write good hands, and express themselves fluently, if not with orthographical correctness. To prevent deception and mistakes, the words and phrases sent in were checked off by other chaunters and tramps. Assistance was also sought and obtained, through an intelligent printer in Seven Dials, from the costermongers in London, and the pedlars and hucksters who traverse the country. In this manner the greater number of cant words were procured, very valuable help being continually derived from *Mayhew's London Labour and London Poor*, a work which had gone over much of the same ground. The slang and vulgar expressions were gleaned from every source which appeared to offer any materials; indeed the references attached to words in the Dictionary frequently indicate the channels which afforded them.

Although in the Introduction I have divided cant from slang, and treated the subjects separately, yet in the Dictionary I have only, in a few instances, pointed out which are slang, or which are cant terms. The task would have been a difficult one. Many

words which were once cant are slang now. The words PRIG and COVE are instances in point. Once cant and secret terms, they are now only street vulgarisms.

The etymologies attempted are only given as contributions to the subject, and the derivation of no vulgar term is guaranteed. The origin of many street words will, perhaps, never be discovered, having commenced with a knot of illiterate persons, and spread amongst a public that cared not a fig for the history of the word, so long as it came to their tongues to give a vulgar piquancy to a joke, or relish to an exceedingly familiar conversation. The references and authorities given in italics frequently show only the direction or probable source of the etymology. The author, to avoid tedious verbiage, was obliged, in so small a work, to be curt in his notes and suggestions.

He has to explain also that a few words will, probably, be noticed in the Slang and Cant Dictionary that are questionable as coming under either of those designations. These have been admitted because they were originally either vulgar terms, or the compiler had something novel to say concerning them. The makers of our large dictionaries have been exceedingly crotchety in their choice of what they considered respectable words. It is amusing to know that Richardson used the word HUMBUG to explain the sense of other words, but omitted it in the alphabetical arrangement as not sufficiently respectable and ancient. The word SLANG, too, he served in the same way.

Filthy and obscene words have been carefully excluded,

although street-talk, unlicensed and unwritten, abounds in these.

> "Immodest words admit of no defence,
> For want of decency is want of sense."

It appears from the calculations of philologists, that there are 38,000 words in the English language, including derivations. I believe I have, for the first time, in consecutive order, added at least 3,000 words to the previous stock, – vulgar and often very objectionable, but still terms in every-day use, and employed by thousands. It is not generally known, that the polite Lord Chesterfield once desired Dr. Johnson to compile a Slang Dictionary; indeed, it was Chesterfield, some say, who first used the word HUMBUG. Words, like peculiar styles of dress, get into public favour, and come and go in fashion. When great favourites and universal they truly become household words, although generally considered slang, when their origin or antecedents are inquired into.

A few errors of the press, I am sorry to say, may be noticed; but, considering the novelty of the subject, and the fact that no fixed orthography of vulgar speech exists, it will, I hope, be deemed a not uninteresting essay on a new and very singular branch of human inquiry; for, as Mayhew remarks, "the whole subject of cant and slang is, to the philologist, replete with interest of the most profound character."

The compiler will be much obliged by the receipt, through

Mr. Camden Hotten, the publisher, of any cant, slang, or vulgar words not mentioned in the dictionary. The probable origin, or etymology, of any fashionable or unfashionable vulgarism, will also be received by him with thanks.

Piccadilly, June 30th, 1859.

THE HISTORY OF CANT, OR, THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF VAGABONDS

Cant and Slang are universal and world-wide.

Nearly every nation on the face of the globe, polite and barbarous, may be divided into two portions, the stationary and the wandering, the civilised and the uncivilised, the respectable and the scoundrel, – those who have fixed abodes and avail themselves of the refinements of civilisation, and those who go from place to place picking up a precarious livelihood by petty sales, begging, or theft. This peculiarity is to be observed amongst the heathen tribes of the southern hemisphere, as well as the oldest and most refined countries of Europe. As Mayhew very pertinently remarks, "it would appear, that not only are all races divisible into wanderers and settlers, but that each civilised or settled tribe has generally some wandering horde intermingled with, and in a measure preying upon it." In South Africa, the naked and miserable Hottentots are pestered by the still more abject *Sonquas*; and it may be some satisfaction for us to know that our old enemies at the Cape, the Kafirs, are troubled with a tribe of rascals called *Fingoes*, – the former term, we are informed by travellers, signifying beggars, and the latter wanderers and outcasts. In South America, and among

the islands of the Pacific, matters are pretty much the same. Sleek and fat rascals, with not much inclination towards honesty, fatten, or rather fasten, like body insects, upon other rascals, who would be equally sleek and fat but for their vagabond dependents. Luckily for respectable persons, however, vagabonds, both at home and abroad, show certain outward peculiarities which distinguish them from the great mass of lawful people off whom they feed and fatten. Personal observation, and a little research into books, enable me to mark these external traits. The wandering races are remarkable for the development of the bones of the face, as the jaws, cheek-bones, &c., high crowned, stubborn-shaped heads, quick restless eyes,[1] and hands nervously itching to be doing;[2] for their love of gambling, – staking their very existence upon a single cast; for sensuality of all kinds; *and for their use of a* CANT *language with which to conceal their designs and plunderings*.

The secret jargon, or rude speech, of the vagabonds who hang upon the Hottentots is termed *cuze-cat*. In Finland, the fellows who steal seal skins, pick the pockets of bear-skin overcoats, and talk Cant, are termed Lappes. In France, the secret language of highwaymen, housebreakers, and pickpockets is named *Argot*.

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[1] "Swarms of vagabonds, whose eyes were so sharp as Lynx." —*Bullein's Simples and Surgery, 1562.*

[2] *Mayhew* has a curious idea upon the habitual restlessness of the nomadic tribes, *i. e.*, "Whether it be that in the mere act of wandering, there is a greater determination of blood to the surface of the body, and consequently a less quantity sent to the brain." —*London Labour*, vol. i., p. 2.

The brigands and more romantic rascals of Spain, term their private tongue *Germania*, or Robbers' Language. *Rothwalsch*, or Red Italian, is synonymous with Cant and thieves' talk in Germany. The vulgar dialect of Malta, and the Scala towns of the Levant – imported into this country and incorporated with English cant – is known as the *Lingua Franca*, or bastard Italian. And the crowds of lazy beggars that infest the streets of Naples and Rome, and the brigands that Albert Smith used to describe near Pompeii – stopping a railway train, and deliberately rifling the pockets and baggage of the passengers – their secret language is termed *Gergo*. In England, as we all know, it is called *Cant*– often improperly *Slang*.

Most nations, then, may boast, or rather lament, a vulgar tongue, formed principally from the national language, the hereditary property of thieves, tramps, and beggars, – the pests of civilised communities. The formation of these secret tongues vary, of course, with the circumstances surrounding the speakers. A writer in *Notes and Queries*,[3] has well remarked, that "the investigation of the origin and principles of Cant and Slang language opens a curious field of enquiry, replete with considerable interest to the philologist and the philosopher. It affords a remarkable instance of lingual contrivance, which, without the introduction of much arbitrary matter, has developed a system of communicating ideas, having all the advantages of

[3] Mr. Thos. Lawrence, who promised an *Etymological, Cant, and Slang Dictionary*. Where is the book?

a foreign language."

An inquiry into the etymology of foreign vulgar secret tongues, and their analogy with that spoken in England, would be curious and interesting in the extreme, but neither present space nor personal acquirements permit of the task, and therefore the writer confines himself to a short account of the origin of English Cant.

The terms CANT and CANTING were doubtless derived from *chaunt* or *chaunting*, – the "whining tone, or modulation of voice adopted by beggars, with intent to coax, wheedle, or cajole by pretensions of wretchedness."[4] For the origin of the other application of the word CANT, pulpit hypocrisy, we are indebted to a pleasant page in the Spectator (No. 147): – "*Cant* is by some people derived from one Andrew Cant, who, they say, was a Presbyterian minister in some illiterate part of Scotland, who by exercise and use had obtained the faculty, alias gift, of talking in the pulpit in such a dialect that 'tis said he was understood by none but his own congregation, – and not by all of them. Since Master *Cant's* time it has been understood in a larger sense, and signifies all exclamations, whinings, unusual tones, and, in fine, all praying and preaching like the unlearned of the Presbyterians." This anecdote is curious, if it is not correct. It was the custom in Addison's time to have a fling at the blue Presbyterians, and the mention made by *Whitelocke* of Andrew Cant, a fanatical Scotch preacher, and the squib upon

[4] *Richardson's Dictionary.*

the same worthy, in *Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence Displayed*, may probably have started the whimsical etymology. As far as we are concerned, however, in the present inquiry, CANT was derived from *chaunt*, a beggar's whine; CHAUNTING being the recognised term amongst beggars to this day for begging orations and street whinings; and CHAUNTER, a street talker and tramp, the very term still used by strollers and patterers. The use of the word CANT, amongst beggars, must certainly have commenced at a very early date, for we find "TO CANTE, to speake," in Harman's list of Rogues' Words in the year 1566; and Harrison about the same time,[5] in speaking of beggars and Gipseys, says, "they have devised a language among themselves which they name CANTING, but others Pedlars' Frenche."

Now the word CANT in its old sense, and SLANG[6] in its modern application, although used by good writers and persons of education as synonymes, are in reality quite distinct and separate terms. Cant, apart from religious hypocrisy, refers to the old secret language, by allegory or distinct terms, of Gipseys, thieves, tramps, and beggars. Slang represents that evanescent, vulgar language, ever changing with fashion and taste, which has principally come into vogue during the last seventy or eighty years, spoken by persons in every grade of life, rich and poor,

[5] *Description of England*, prefixed to *Holinshed's Chronicle*.

[6] The word Slang, as will be seen in the chapter upon that subject, is purely a Gipsey term, although now-a-days it refers to low or vulgar language of any kind, – other than cant. Slang and Gibberish in the Gipsey language are synonymous; but, as English adoptions, have meanings very different from that given to them in their original.

honest and dishonest.[7] Cant is old; Slang is always modern and changing. To illustrate the difference: a thief in *Cant* language would term a horse a PRANCER or a PRAD, – while in *slang*, a man of fashion would speak of it as a BIT OF BLOOD, or a SPANKER, or a NEAT TIT. A handkerchief, too, would be a BILLY, a FOGLE, or a KENT RAG, in the secret language of low characters, – whilst amongst vulgar persons, or those who aped their speech, it would be called a RAG, a WIPE, or a CLOUT. Cant was formed for purposes of secrecy. Slang is indulged in from a desire to appear familiar with life, gaiety, town-humour, and with the transient nick names and street jokes of the day. Both Cant and Slang, I am aware, are often huddled together as synonymes, but they are distinct terms, and as such should be used.

To the Gipseys, beggars and thieves are undoubtedly indebted for their Cant language. The Gipseys landed in this country early in the reign of Henry the Eighth. They were at first treated as conjurors and magicians, – indeed they were hailed by the populace with as much applause as a company of English theatricals usually receive on arriving in a distant colony. They came here with all their old Eastern arts of palmistry, fortune-telling, doubling money by incantation and burial, – shreds of pagan idolatry; and they brought with them, also, the dishonesty

[7] The vulgar tongue consists of two parts: the first is the Cant Language; the second, those burlesque phrases, quaint allusions, and nick names for persons, things, and places, which, from long uninterrupted usage, are made classical by prescription. —*Grose's Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, 1st edition, 1785.

of the lower caste of Asiatics, and the vagabondism they had acquired since leaving their ancient dwelling places in the East, many centuries before. They possessed, also, a *language* quite distinct from anything that had been heard in England, and they claimed the title of Egyptians, and as such, when their thievish wandering propensities became a public nuisance, were cautioned and proscribed in a royal proclamation by Henry VIII.[8] The Gipseys were not long in the country before they found native imitators. Vagabondism is peculiarly catching. The idle, the vagrant, and the criminal outcasts of society, caught an idea from the so called Egyptians – soon corrupted to Gipseys. They learned from them how to tramp, sleep under hedges and trees, to tell fortunes, and find stolen property for a consideration – frequently, as the saying runs, before it was lost. They also learned the value and application of a *secret tongue*, indeed all the accompaniments of maunding and imposture, except thieving and begging, which were well known in this country long before the Gipseys paid it a visit, – perhaps the only negative good that can be said in their favour.

Harman, in the year 1566, wrote a singular, not to say droll book, entitled, *A Caveat for commen Cvrsetors, vulgarley called Vagabones, newly augmented and inlarged*, wherein the history and various descriptions of rogues and vagabonds are given, together with their canting tongue. This book, the earliest of the kind, gives the singular fact that within a dozen years

[8] "Outlandish people calling themselves *Egyptians*." 1530.

after the landing of the Gipseys, companies of English vagrants were formed, places of meeting appointed, districts for plunder and begging operations marked out, and rules agreed to for their common management. In some cases Gipseys joined the English gangs, in others English vagrants joined the Gipseys. The fellowship was found convenient and profitable, as both parties were aliens to the laws and customs of the country, living in a great measure in the open air, apart from the lawful public, and often meeting each other on the same bye-path, or in the same retired valley; – but seldom intermarrying, and entirely adopting each other's habits. The common people, too, soon began to consider them as of one family, – all rogues, and from Egypt. The secret language spoken by the Gipseys, principally Hindoo and extremely barbarous to English ears, was found incomprehensible and very difficult to learn. The Gipseys, also, found the same difficulty with the English language. A rude, rough, and most singular compromise was made, and a mixture of Gipsey, Old English, newly-coined words, and cribbings from any foreign, and therefore secret language, mixed and jumbled together, formed what has ever since been known as the CANTING LANGUAGE, or PEDLER'S FRENCH; or, during the past century, ST. GILES' GREEK.

Such was the origin of CANT; and in illustration of its blending with the Gipsey or Cingari tongue, dusky and Oriental from the sunny plains of Central Asia, I am enabled to give the accompanying list of Gipsey, and often Hindoo words, with, in

many instances, their English adoptions.

Gipsey.	*English.*
BAMBOOZLE, to perplex or mislead by hiding. *Mod Gip.*	BAMBOOZLE, to delude, cheat, or make a fool of any one.
BOSH, rubbish, nonsense, offal. *Gipsey and Persian.*	BOSH, stupidity, foolishness.
CHEESE, thing or article, "that's the CHEESE," or thing. *Gipsey and Hindoo.*	CHEESE, or CHEESY, a first-rate or very good article.
CHIVE, the tongue. *Gipsey.*	CHIVE, or CHIVEY, a shout, or loud-tongued.
DADE, or Dadi, a father. *Gipsey.*	DADDY, nursery term for father.[9]
DISTARABIN, a prison. *Gipsey.*	STURABIN, a prison.
GAD, or Gadsi, a wife. *Gipsey.*	GAD, a female scold; a woman who tramps over the country with a beggar or hawker.
GIBBERISH, the language of Gipseys, synonymous with Slang. *Gipsey.*	GIBBERISH, rapid and unmeaning speech.
ISCHUR, Schur, or Chur, a thief. *Gipsey and Hindoo.*	CUR, a mean or dishonest man.
LAB, a word. *Gipsey.*	LOBS, words.
LOWE, or Lowr, money. *Gipsey and Wallachian.*	LOWRE, money. *Ancient Cant.*
MAMI, a grandmother. *Gipsey.*	MAMMY, or Mamma, a mother, formerly sometimes used for grandmother.
MANG, or Maung, to beg. *Gipsey and Hindoo.*	MAUND, to beg.
MORT, a free woman, — one for common use amongst the male Gipseys, so appointed by Gipsey custom. *Gipsey.*	MORT, or Mott, a prostitute.
MU, the mouth. *Gipsey and Hindoo.*	MOO, or Mun, the mouth.
MULL, to spoil or destroy. *Gipsey.*	MULL, to spoil, or bungle.
PAL, a brother. *Gipsey.*	PAL, a partner, or relation.
PANÉ, water. *Gipsey. Hindoo*, PAWNEE.	PARNEY, rain.
RIG, a performance. *Gipsey.*	RIG, a frolic, or "spree."
ROMANY, speech or language. *Spanish Gipsey.*	ROMANY, the Gipsey language.
ROME, or Romm, a man. *Gipsey and Coptick.*	RUM, a good man, or thing. In the Robbers' language of Spain (partly Gipsey) RUM signifies a harlot.
ROMEE, a woman. *Gipsey.*	RUMY, a good woman or girl.
SLANG, the language spoken by Gipseys. *Gipsey.*	SLANG, low, vulgar, unauthorised language.
TAWNO, little. *Gipsey.*	TANNY, Teeny, little.
TSCHIB, or Jibb, the tongue. *Gipsey and Hindoo.*	JIBB, the tongue; Jabber,[10] quick-tongued, or fast talk.

9 In those instances, indicated by a *, it is impossible to say whether or not we are indebted to the Gipseys for the terms. Dad, in *Welsh*, also signifies a father. Cur is stated to be a mere term of reproach, like "Dog," which in all European languages has been applied in an abusive sense. Objections may also be raised against Gad and Maund.

10 Jabber, I am reminded, may be only another form of GABBER, GAB, very common in Old English, from the *Anglo-*

Saxon, GÆBBAN.

Here then we have the remarkable fact of several words of pure Gipsey and Asiatic origin going the round of Europe, passing into this country before the Reformation, and coming down to us through numerous generations purely in the mouths of the people. They have seldom been written or used in books, and simply as vulgarisms have they reached our time. Only a few are now cant, and some are household words. The word JOCKEY, as applied to a dealer or rider of horses, came from the Gipsey, and means in that language a whip. Our standard dictionaries give, of course, none but conjectural etymologies. Another word, BAMBOOZLE, has been a sore difficulty with lexicographers. It is not in the old dictionaries, although extensively used in familiar or popular language for the last two centuries; in fact, the very word that Swift, Butler, L'Estrange, and Arbuthnot would pick out at once as a telling and most serviceable term. It is, as we have seen, from the Gipsey; and here I must state that it was Boucher who first drew attention to the fact, although in his remarks on the dusky tongue, he has made a ridiculous mistake by concluding it to be identical with its offspring, CANT. Other parallel instances, with but slight variations from the old Gipsey meanings, could be mentioned, but sufficient examples have been adduced to show that Marsden, the great Oriental scholar in the last century, when he declared before the Society of Antiquaries that the Cant of English thieves and

beggars had nothing to do with the language spoken by the despised Gipseys, was in error. Had the Gipsey tongue been analysed and committed to writing three centuries ago, there is every probability that many scores of words now in common use could be at once traced to its source. Instances continually occur now-a-days of street vulgarisms ascending to the drawing-rooms of respectable society. Why, then, may not the Gipsey-vagabond alliance three centuries ago have contributed its quota of common words to popular speech?

I feel confident there is a Gipsey element in the English language hitherto unrecognised; slender it may be, but not, therefore, unimportant.

"Indeed," says Moore the poet, in a humorous little book, *Tom Crib's Memorial to Congress*, 1819, "the Gipsey language, with the exception of such terms as relate to their own peculiar customs, differs but little from the regular Flash or Cant language." But this was magnifying the importance of the alliance. Moore knew nothing of the Gipsey tongue other than the few Cant words put into the mouths of the beggars, in *Beaumont and Fletcher's Comedy of the Beggar's Bush*, and *Ben Jonson's Masque of the Gipseys Metamorphosed*, – hence his confounding Cant with Gipsey speech, and appealing to the Glossary of Cant for so called "Gipsey" words at the end of the *Life of Bamfylde Moore Carew*, to bear him out in his assertion. Still his remark bears much truth, and proof would have been found long ago if any scholar had taken

the trouble to examine the "barbarous jargon of Cant," and to have compared it with Gipsey speech. As George Borrow, in his *Account of the Gipseys in Spain*, eloquently concludes his second volume, speaking of the connection of the Gipseys with Europeans: – "Yet from this temporary association were produced two results: European fraud became sharpened by coming into contact with Asiatic craft; whilst European tongues, by imperceptible degrees, became recruited with various words (some of them wonderfully expressive), many of which have long been stumbling-blocks to the philologist, who, whilst stigmatising them as words of mere vulgar invention, or of unknown origin, has been far from dreaming that a little more research or reflection would have proved their affinity to the Sclavonic, Persian, or Romaic, or perhaps to the mysterious object of his veneration, the Sanscrit, the sacred tongue of the palm-covered regions of Ind; words originally introduced into Europe by objects too miserable to occupy for a moment his lettered attention, – the despised denizens of the tents of Roma."

But the Gipseys, their speech, their character – bad enough as all the world testifies – their history and their religious belief, have been totally disregarded, and their poor persons buffeted and jostled about until it is a wonder that any trace of origin or national speech exists in them. On the continent they received better attention at the hands of learned men. Their language was taken down, their history traced, and their extraordinary customs and practice of living in the open air, and eating raw

or putrid meat, explained. They ate reptiles and told fortunes, because they had learnt it through their forefathers centuries back in Hindostan, and they devoured carrion because the Hindoo proverb – "*that which God kills is better than that killed by man*,"[11]– was still in their remembrance. Grellman, a learned German, was their principal historian, and to him we are almost entirely indebted for the little we know of their language.[12]

Gipsey then started, and partially merged into CANT, and the old story told by Harrison and others, that the first inventor of canting was hanged for his pains, would seem to be a fable, for jargon as it is, it was, doubtless, of gradual formation, like all other languages or systems of speech. The Gipseys at the present day all know the *old cant* words, as well as their own tongue, – or rather what remains of it. As Borrow states, "the dialect of the English Gipseys is mixed with English words."[13] Those of the tribe who frequent fairs, and mix with English tramps, readily learn the new words, as they are adopted by what Harman calls, "the fraternity of vagabonds." Indeed, the old CANT is a common language to vagrants of all descriptions and origin scattered over the British Isles.

Ancient English CANT has considerably altered since the

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[11] This very proverb was mentioned by a young Gipsey to Crabb, a few years ago. —*Gipseys' Advocate*, p. 14.

[12] I except, of course, the numerous writers who have followed Grellman, and based their researches upon his labours.

[13] *Gipseys of Spain*, vol. i., p. 18.

first dictionary was compiled by Harman, in 1566. A great many words are unknown in the present tramps' and thieves' vernacular. Some of them, however, bear still their old definitions, while others have adopted fresh meanings, – to escape detection, I suppose. "Abraham man" is yet seen in our modern SHAM ABRAHAM, or PLAY THE OLD SOLDIER, *i. e.*, to feign sickness or distress. "Autum" is still a church or chapel amongst Gipseys; and "BECK," a constable, is our modern cant and slang BEEK, a policeman or magistrate. "Bene," or BONE, stands for *good* in Seven Dials, and the back streets of Westminster; and "BOWSE" is our modern BOOZE, to drink or fuddle. A "BOWSING KEN" was the old cant term for a public house, and BOOZING KEN, in modern cant, has precisely the same meaning. "Bufe" was then the term for a dog, now it is BUFFER, – frequently applied to men. "Cassan" is both old and modern cant for cheese; the same may be said of "CHATTES" or CHATTS, the gallows. "Cofe," or COVE, is still the vulgar synonyme for a man. "Drawers" was hose, or "hosen," – now applied to the lining for trousers. "Dudes" was cant for clothes, we now say DUDDS. "Flag" is still a fourpenny piece; and "FYLCHE" means to rob. "Ken" is a house, and "LICK" means to thrash; "PRANCER" is yet known amongst rogues as a horse; and "to PRIG," amongst high and low, is to steal. Three centuries ago, if one beggar said anything disagreeable to another, the person annoyed would say "STOW YOU," or hold your peace; low people now say STOW IT, equivalent to "be

quiet." "Trine" is still to hang; "WYN" yet stands for a penny. And many other words, as will be seen in the glossary, still retain their ancient meaning.

As specimens of those words which have altered their original cant signification, I may instance "CHETE," now written CHEAT. Chete was in ancient cant what *chop* is in the Canton-Chinese, – an almost inseparable adjunct. Everything was termed a CHETE, and qualified by a substantive-adjective, which showed what kind of a CHETE was meant; for instance, "CRASHING CHETES" were teeth; a "MOFFLING CHETE," a napkin; a "GRUNTING CHETE," a pig, &c. &c. Cheat now-a-days means to defraud or swindle, and lexicographers have tortured etymology for an original – but without success. *Escheats* and *escheatours* have been named, but with great doubts; indeed, Stevens, the learned commentator on Shakespere, acknowledged that he "did not recollect to have met with the word *cheat* in our ancient writers."[14] Cheat, to defraud, then, is no other than an old Cant term, somewhat altered in its meaning,[15] and as such it should be described in the next Etymological Dictionary. Another instance of a change in the meaning of the old Cant, but the retention of the word is seen in "CLY," formerly to take or steal, now a pocket; – remembering a certain class of low characters, a curious connection between the

[14] *Shakes.* Hen. IV., part 2, act ii, scene 4.

[15] It is easy to see how *cheat* became synonymous with "fraud," when we remember that it was one of the most common words of the greatest class of cheats in the country.

two meanings will be discovered. “Make” was a halfpenny, we now say MAG, – MAKE being modern Cant for appropriating, – “convey the wise it call.” “Milling” stood for stealing, it is now a pugilistic term for fighting or beating. “Nab” was a head, – low people now say NOB, the former meaning, in modern Cant, to steal or seize. “Pek” was meat, – we still say PECKISH, when hungry. “Prygges, *dronken Tinkers or beastly people*,” as old Harman wrote, would scarcely be understood now; a PRIG, in the 19th century, is a pickpocket or thief. “Quier,” or QUEER, like *cheat*, was a very common prefix, and meant bad or wicked, – it now means odd, curious, or strange; but to the ancient cant we are indebted for the word, which etymologists should remember.[16] “Rome,” or RUM, formerly meant good, or of the first quality, and was extensively used like *cheat* and *queer*, – indeed as an adjective it was the opposite of the latter. Rum now means curious, and is synonymous with queer, thus, – a “RUMMY old fellow,” or a “QUEER old man.” Here again we see the origin of an every day word, scouted by lexicographers and snubbed by respectable persons, but still a word of frequent and popular use. “Yannam” meant bread, PANNUM is the word now. Other instances could be pointed out, but they will be observed in the dictionary.

[16] I am reminded by an eminent philologist that the origin of QUEER is seen in the *German*, QUER, crooked, – hence “odd.” I agree with this etymology, but still have reason to believe that the word was *first* used in this country in a cant sense. Is it mentioned any where as a respectable term before 1500? If not, it had a vulgar or cant introduction into this country.

Several words are entirely obsolete. “Alybbeg” no longer means a bed, nor “ASKEW” a cup. “Booget,”[17] now-a-days, would not be understood for a basket; neither would “GAN” pass current for mouth. “Fullams” was the old cant term for false or loaded dice, and although used by Shakespere in this sense, is now unknown and obsolete. Indeed, as Tom Moore somewhere remarks, the present Greeks of St. Giles, themselves, would be thoroughly puzzled by many of the ancient canting songs, – taking for example, the first verse of an old favourite:

> Bing out, bien Morts, and toure and toure,
> Bing out, bien Morts, and toure;
> For all your duds are bing’d awast;
> The bien cove hath the loure.[18]

But I think I cannot do better than present to the reader at once an entire copy of the first Canting Dictionary ever compiled. As before mentioned, it was the work of one Thos. Harman, a gentleman who lived in the days of Queen Elizabeth. Some writers have remarked that Decker[19] was the first to compile

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[17] Booget properly signifies a leathern wallet, and is probably derived from the *low Latin*, BULGA. A tinker’s budget is from the same source.

[18] Which, literally translated, means:Go out, good girls, and look and see,Go out, good girls, and see;For all your clothes are carried away,And the good man has the money.

[19] Who wrote about the year 1610.

a Dictionary of the vagabonds' tongue; whilst Borrow,[20] and Moore, the poet, stated that Richard Head performed that service in his *Life of an English Rogue*, published in the year 1680. All these statements are equally incorrect, for the first attempt was made more than a century before the latter work was issued. The quaint spelling and old-fashioned phraseology are preserved, and the reader will quickly detect many vulgar street words, old acquaintances, dressed in antique garb.[21]

ABRAHAM-MEN, be those that fayn themselves to have beene mad, and have bene kept either in Bethelem, or in some other pryson a good time.

ALYBBEG, a bedde.

ASKEW, a cuppe.

AUTEM, a churche.

AUTEM MORTES, married wemen as chaste as a cowe.

BAUDYE BASKETS, bee women who goe with baskets and capcases on their armes, wherein they have laces, pinnes, nedles, whyte inkel, and round sylke gyrdels of all colours.

BECK [Beek], a constable.

BELLY-CHETE, apron.

BENE, good. *Benar*, better.

BENSHIP, very good.

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[20] *Gipseys of Spain*, vol. i., p. 18. Borrow further commits himself by remarking that "Head's Vocabulary has always been accepted as the speech of the English Gipseys." Nothing of the kind. Head professed to have lived with the Gipseys, but in reality filched his words from *Decker* and *Brome*.

[21] The *modern* meanings of a few of the old cant words are given in brackets.

BLETING CHETE, a calfe or sheepe.

BOOGET, a travelling tinker's baskete.

BORDE, a shilling.

BOUNG, a purse [*Friesic*, pong].

BOWSE, drink.

BOWSING-KEN, a alehouse.

BUFE [buffer, a man], a dogge.

BYNGE A WASTE, go you hence.

CACKLING-CHETE, a coke [cock], or capon.

CASSAN [cassam], cheese.

CASTERS, a cloake.

CATETH, "the vpright Cofe *cateth* to the Roge" [probably a shortening or misprint of *Canteth*].

CHATTES, the gallowes.

CHETE [see what has been previously said about this word].

CLY [a pocket], to take, receive, or have.

COFE [cove], a person.

COMMISSION [mish], a shirt.

COUNTERFET CRANKE, these that do counterfet the Cranke be yong knaves and yonge harlots, that deeply dissemble the falling sicknes.

CRANKE [cranky, foolish], falling evil [or wasting sickness].

CRASHING-CHETES, teeth.

CUFFEN, a manne [a *cuif* in Northumberland and Scotland signifies a lout or awkward fellow].

DARKEMANS, the night.

DELL, a yonge wench.
DEWSE-A-VYLE, the countrey.
DOCK, to deflower.
DOXES, harlots.
DRAWERS, hosen.
DUDES [or dudds], clothes.
FAMBLES, handes.
FAMBLING-CHETE, a ring on one's hand.
FLAGG, a groat.
FRATER, a beggar wyth a false paper.
FRESHE-WATER-MARINERS, these kind of caterpillers counterfet great losses on the sea: – their shippes were drowned in the playne of Salisbury.
FYLCHE, to robbe: *Fylch-man* [a robber].
GAGE, a quart pot.
GAN, a mouth.
GENTRY COFE, a noble or gentle man.
GENTRY-COFES-KEN, a noble or gentle man's house.
GENTRY MORT, a noble or gentle woman.
GERRY, excrement.
GLASYERS, eyes.
GLYMMAR, fyer.
GRANNAM, corne.
GRUNTING-CHETE, a pygge.
GYB, a writing.
GYGER [jigger], a dore.

HEARING-CHETES, eares.

JARKE, a seale.

JARKEMAN, one who make writings and set seales for [counterfeit] licences and pasports.

KEN, a house.

KYNCHEN CO [or *cove*], a young boye trained up like a "*Kynching Morte*." [From the German diminutive *Kindschen*.]

KYNCHING MORTE, is a little gyrle, carried at their mothers' backe in a slate, or sheete, who brings them up sauagely.

LAG, water.

LAG OF DUDES, a bucke [or basket] of clothes.

LAGE, to washe.

LAP, butter, mylke, or whey.

LIGHTMANS, the day.

LOWING-CHETE, a cowe.

LOWRE, money.

LUBBARES, – "sturdy *Lubbares*," country bumpkins, or men of a low degree.

LYB-BEG, a bed.

LYCKE [lick], to beate.

LYP, to lie down.

LYPKEN, a house to lye in.

MAKE [mag], a halfpenny.

MARGERI PRATER, a hen.

MILLING, to steale [by sending a child in at the window].

MOFLING-CHETE, a napkin.

MORTES [motts], harlots.

MYLL, to robbe.

MYNT, gold.

NAB [nob], a heade.

NABCHET, a hat or cap.

NASE, dronken.

NOSEGENT, a nunne.

PALLYARD, a borne beggar [who counterfeits sickness, or incurable sores. They are mostly Welshmen, Harman says].

PARAM, mylke.

PATRICO, a priest.

PATRICOS KINCHEN, a pygge [a satirical hit at the church, *Patrico* meaning a parson or priest, and *Kinchen* his little boy or girl].

PEK [peckish], meat.

POPPELARS, porrage.

PRAT, a buttocke.

PRATLING-CHETE, a toung.

PRAUNCER, a horse.

PRIGGER OF PRAUNCERS, be horse stealers, for to prigge signifieth in their language to steale, and a Prauncer is a horse, so being put together, the matter was playn. [Thus writes old Thomas Harman, who concludes his description of this order of "pryggers," by very quietly saying, "I had the best gelding stolen out of my pasture, that I had amongst others, whyle this book was first a printing."]

PRYGGES, dronken Tinkers, or beastly people.

QUACKING-CHETE, a drake or duck.

QUAROMES, a body.

QUIER [queer], badde [see what has been previously said about this word].

QUYER CRAMP-RINGES, boltes or fetters.

QUIER CUFFIN, the iustice of peace.

QUYER-KYN, a pryson house.

RED SHANKE, a drake or ducke.

ROGER, a goose.

ROME, goode [now curious, noted, or remarkable in any way. *Rum* is the modern orthography].

ROME BOUSE [rum booze], wyne.

ROME MORT, the Queene [Elizabeth].

ROME VYLE [or Rum-ville], London.

RUFF PECK, baken [short bread, common in old times at farm houses].

RUFFMANS, the woods or bushes.

SALOMON, a alter or masse.

SKYPPER, a barne.

SLATE, a sheete or shetes.

SMELLING CHETE, a nose.

SMELLING CHETE, a garden or orchard.

SNOWT FAYRE [said of a woman who has a pretty face or is comely].

STALL [to initiate a beggar or rogue into the rights and

privileges of the canting order. Harman relates, that when an upright-man, or initiated, first-class rogue, "mete any beggar, whether he be sturdy or impotent, he will demand of him whether ever he was '*stalled to the roge*' or no. If he say he was, he will know of whom, and his name yt stalled him. And if he be not learnedly able to show him the whole circumstance thereof, he will spoyle him of his money, either of his best garment, if it be worth any money, and haue him to the bowsing ken: which is, to some typpling house next adjoyninge, and layth there to gage the best thing that he hath for twenty pence or two shillings: this man obeyeth for feare of beatinge. Then dooth this upright man call for a gage of bowse, which is a quarte potte of drink, and powres the same vpon his peld pate, adding these words, – I, *G. P.* do stalle the, *W. T.* to the Roge, and that from henceforth it shall be lawfull for thee to cant, that is to aske or begge for thi liuiug in al places." Something like this treatment is the popular idea of Freemasonry, and what schoolboys term "freeing."]

STAMPES, legges.
STAMPERS, shoes.
STAULING KEN, a house that will receyue stollen wares.
STAWLINGE-KENS, tippling houses.
STOW YOU [stow it], hold your peace.
STRIKE, to steale.
STROMMELL, strawe.
SWADDER, or *Pedler* [a man who hawks goods].
THE HIGH PAD, the highway.
THE RUFFIAN CLY THEE, the devil take thee.

TOGEMANS [togg], a cloake.

TOGMAN, a coate.

TO BOWSE, to drinke.

TO CANTE, to speake.

TO CLY THE GERKE, to be whipped.

TO COUCH A HOGSHEAD, to lie down and slepe.

TO CUTTE, to say [*cut it* is modern slang for "be quiet"].

TO CUT BENE WHYDDES, to speake or give good words.

TO CUTTE QUYER WHYDDES, to giue euil words or euil language.

TO CUT BENLE, to speak gentle.

TO DUP YE GYGER [jigger], to open the dore.

TO FYLCHE, to robbe.

TO HEUE A BOUGH, to robbe or rifle a boweth [booth].

TO MAUNDE, to aske or require.

TO MILL A KEN, to robbe a house.

TO NYGLE [coition].

TO NYP A BOUNG [nip, to steal], to cut a purse.

TO SKOWER THE CRAMPRINGES, to weare boltes or fetters.

TO STALL, to make or ordain.

TO THE RUFFIAN, to the Devil.

TO TOWRE, to see.

TRYNING [trine], hanging.

TYB OF THE BUTERY, a goose.

WALKING MORTE, womene [who pass for widows].

WAPPING [coition].

WHYDDES, wordes.

WYN, a penny.
YANNAM, bread.

Turning our attention more to the Cant of modern times, in connection with the old, we find that words have been drawn into the thieves' vocabulary from every conceivable source. Hard or infrequent words, vulgarly termed *crack-jaw*, or *jaw-breakers*, were very often used and considered as cant terms. And here it should be mentioned that at the present day the most inconsistent and far-fetched terms are often used for secret purposes, when they are known to be caviare to the million. It is really laughable to know that such words as *incongruous*, *insipid*, *interloper*, *intriguing*, *indecorum*, *forestal*, *equip*, *hush*, *grapple*, &c. &c., were current Cant words a century and a half ago; but such was the case, as any one may see in the *Dictionary of Canting Words*, at the end of *Bacchus and Venus*,[22] 1737. They are inserted not as jokes or squibs, but as selections from the veritable pocket dictionaries of the Jack Sheppards and Dick Turpins of the day. If they were safely used as unknown and cabalistic terms amongst the commonalty, the fact would form a very curious illustration of the ignorance of our poor ancestors. One piece of information is conveyed to us, *i. e.*, that the "Knights" or "Gentlemen of the road," using these polite words in those days of highwaymen,

[22] This is a curious volume, and is worth from one to two guineas. The Canting Dictionary was afterwards reprinted, word for word, with the title of *The Scoundrel's Dictionary*, in 1751. It was originally published, without date, about the year 1710 by B. E., under the title of a *Dictionary of the Canting Crew*.

were really well educated men, – which heretofore has always been a hard point of belief, notwithstanding old novels and operas.

Amongst those Cant words which have either altered their meaning, or have become extinct, I may cite LADY, formerly the Cant for "a very crooked, deformed, and ill-shapen woman;"[23] and HARMAN, "a pair of stocks, or a constable." The former is a pleasant piece of satire, whilst the latter indicates a singular method of revenge. Harman was the first author who specially wrote against English vagabonds, and for his trouble his name became synonymous with a pair of stocks, and a policeman of the olden time.

Apart from the Gipsey element, we find that Cant abounds in terms from foreign languages, and that it exhibits the growth of most recognised and completely formed tongues, – the gathering of words from foreign sources. In the reign of Elizabeth and of King James I., several Dutch, Spanish, and Flemish words were introduced by soldiers who had served in the Low Countries, and sailors who had returned from the Spanish Main, who like "mine ancient Pistol" were fond of garnishing their speech with outlandish phrases. Many of these were soon picked up and adopted by vagabonds and tramps in their Cant language. The Anglo-Norman and the Anglo-Saxon, the Scotch, the French, the Italian, and even the classic languages of ancient Italy and Greece, have contributed to its list of words, – besides the various

[23] *Bacchus and Venus*, 1737.

provincial dialects of England. Indeed, as Mayhew remarks, English Cant seems to be formed on the same basis as the *Argot* of the French, and the *Roth-Spræc* of the Germans, – partly metaphorical, and partly by the introduction of such corrupted foreign terms as are likely to be unknown to the society amid which the Cant speakers exist. Argot is the London thieves' word for their secret language, – it is, of course, from the French, but that matters not so long as it is incomprehensible to the police and the mob. Booze, or BOUSE, I am reminded by a friendly correspondent, comes from the Dutch, BUYSEN. Domine, a parson, is from the Latin; and DON, a clever fellow, has been filched from the Spanish. Donna and feeles, a woman and children, is from the Lingua Franca, or bastard Italian, although it sounds like an odd mixture of Spanish and French; whilst DUDDS, the vulgar term for clothes, may have been pilfered either from the Gaelic or the Dutch. Feele, a daughter, from the French; and FROW, a girl or wife, from the German – are common tramps' terms. So are GENT, silver, from the French, *Argent*; and VIAL, a country town, also from the French. Horrid-horn, a fool, is believed to be from the Erse; and GLOAK, a man, from the Scotch. As stated before, the Dictionary will supply numerous other instances.

There is one source, however, of secret street terms, which, in the first edition of this work, was entirely overlooked, – indeed, it was unknown to the editor until pointed out by a friendly correspondent, – the *Lingua Franca*, or bastard Italian, spoken

at Genoa, Trieste, Malta, Constantinople, Smyrna, Alexandria, and all Mediterranean seaport towns. The ingredients of this imported Cant are many. Its foundation is Italian, with a mixture of modern Greek, German (from the Austrian ports), Spanish, Turkish, and French. It has been introduced to the notice of the London wandering tribes by the sailors, foreign and English, who trade to and from the Mediterranean seaports, by the swarms of organ players from all parts of Italy, and by the makers of images from Rome and Florence, – all of whom, in dense thoroughfares, mingle with our lower orders. It would occupy too much space here to give a list of these words. They are all noted in the Dictionary.

"There are several Hebrew terms in our Cant language, obtained, it would appear, from the intercourse of the thieves with the Jew *fences* (receivers of stolen goods); many of the Cant terms, again, are Sanscrit, got from the Gipseys; many Latin, got by the beggars from the Catholic prayers before the Reformation; and many, again, Italian, got from the wandering musicians and others; indeed the showmen have but lately introduced a number of Italian phrases into their Cant language."[24] The Hindostanèe also contributes several words, and these have been introduced by the Lascar sailors, who come over here in the East Indiamen, and lodge during their stay in the low tramps' lodging houses at the East end of London. Speaking of the learned tongues, I may mention that, precarious and abandoned as the vagabond's

[24] Mayhew's *London Labour and London Poor*, vol. iii., No. 43, Oct. 4th, 1851.

existence is, many persons of classical or refined education have from time to time joined the ranks, – occasionally from inclination, as in the popular instance of Bamfylde Moore Carew, but generally through indiscretion, and loss of character.[25] This will in some measure account for numerous classical and learned words figuring as Cant terms in the vulgar Dictionary.

In the early part of the last century, when highwaymen were by all accounts so plentiful, a great many new words were added to the canting vocabulary, whilst several old terms fell into disuse. Cant, for instance, as applied to thieves' talk, was supplanted by the word FLASH.

A singular feature, however, in vulgar language, is the retention and the revival of sterling old English words, long since laid up in ancient manuscripts, or the subject of dispute among learned antiquaries. Disraeli somewhere says, "the purest source of *neology* is in the revival of *old words*" —

"Words that wise Bacon or brave Rawleigh spake,"

and Dr. Latham honours our subject by remarking that "the thieves of London are the conservators of Anglo-Saxonisms." Mayhew, too, in his interesting work, *London Labour and*

[25] *Mayhew* (vol. i., p. 217), speaks of a low lodging-house, "in which there were at one time five university men, three surgeons, and several sorts of broken down clerks." But old Harman's saying, that "a wylde Roge is he that is *borne* a roge," will perhaps explain this seeming anomaly.

London Poor, admits that many Cant and Slang phrases are merely old English terms, which have become obsolete through the caprices of fashion. And the reader who looks into the Dictionary of the vagabonds' lingo, will see at a glance that these gentlemen were quite correct, and that we are compelled to acknowledge the singular truth that a great many old words, once respectable, and in the mouths of kings and fine ladies, are now only so many signals for shrugs and shudders amongst exceedingly polite people. A Belgravian gentleman who had lost his watch or his pocket-handkerchief, would scarcely remark to his mamma that it had been BONED – yet BONE, in old times, meant to steal amongst high and low. And a young lady living in the precincts of dingy, but aristocratic May-Fair, although enraptured with a Jenny Lind or a Ristori, would hardly think of turning back in the box to inform papa that she, Ristori or Lind, "made no BONES of it" – yet the phrase was most respectable and well-to-do, before it met with a change of circumstances. "A CRACK article," however first-rate, would, as far as speech is concerned, have greatly displeased Dr. Johnson and Mr. Walker – yet both CRACK, in the sense of excellent, and CRACK UP, to boast or praise, were not considered vulgarisms in the time of Henry VIII. Dodge, a cunning trick, is from the Anglo-Saxon; and ancient nobles used to "get each other's DANDER UP" before appealing to their swords, – quite FLABERGASTING (also a respectable old word) the half score of lookers-on with the thumps and cuts of their heavy weapons. Gallavanting, waiting

upon the ladies, was as polite in expression as in action; whilst a clergyman at Paule's Crosse, thought nothing of bidding a noisy hearer to "hold his GAB," or "shut up his GOB." Gadding, roaming about in an idle and trapesing manner, was used in an old translation of the Bible; and "to do anything GINGERLY" was to do it with great care. Persons of modern tastes will be shocked to know that the great Lord Bacon spoke of the lower part of a man's face as his GILLS.

Shakespere, or as the French say, "the divine William," also used many words which are now counted as dreadfully vulgar. "Clean gone," in the sense of out of sight, or entirely away; "you took me all A-MORT," or confounded me; "it won't FADGE," or suit, are phrases taken at random from the great dramatist's works. A London costermonger, or inhabitant of the streets, instead of saying "I'll make him yield," or "give in," in a fight or contest, would say, "I'll make him BUCKLE under." Shakespere, in his *Henry the Fourth* (Part 2, Act i., Scene 1) has the word, and Mr. Halliwell, one of the greatest and most industrious of living antiquaries, informs us, that "the commentators do not supply another example." How strange, then, that the Bard of Avon, and the Cockney costermongers, should be joint partners and sole proprietors of the vulgarism. If Shakespere was not a pugilist, he certainly anticipated the terms of the prize ring – or they were respectable words before the prize ring was thought of – for he has PAY, to beat or thrash, and PEPPER, with a similar meaning; also FANCY, in the sense of pets and favourites, – pugilists are

often termed *the* FANCY. The cant word PRIG, from the Saxon, *priccan*, to filch, is also Shakesperian; so indeed is PIECE, a contemptuous term for a young woman. Shakespere was not the only vulgar dramatist of his time. Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Brome, and other play-writers, occasionally put cant words into the mouths of their low characters, or employed old words which have since degenerated into vulgarisms. Crusty, poor tempered; "two of a KIDNEY," two of a sort; LARK, a piece of fun; LUG, to pull; BUNG, to give or pass; PICKLE, a sad plight; FRUMP, to mock, are a few specimens casually picked from the works of the old histrionic writers.

One old English mode of canting, simple and effective when familiarised by practice, was the inserting a consonant betwixt each syllable; thus, taking *g*, "How do you do?" would be "Hou*g* do*g* you*g* do*g*?" The name very properly given to this disagreeable nonsense, we are informed by Grose, was *Gibberish*.

Another Cant has recently been attempted by transposing the initial letters of words, so that a mutton chop becomes a *c*utton *m*op, a pint of stout a *s*tint of *p*out; but it is satisfactory to know that it has gained no ground. This is called *Marrowskying*, or *Medical Greek*, from its use by medical students at the hospitals. Albert Smith terms it the *Gower-street Dialect*.

The *Language of Ziph*, I may add, is another rude mode of disguising English, in use among the students at Winchester College.

ACCOUNT OF THE HIEROGLYPHICS USED BY VAGABONDS

One of the most singular chapters in a *History of Vagabondism* would certainly be an account of the Hieroglyphic signs used by tramps and thieves. The reader may be startled to know that, in addition to a secret language, the wandering tribes of this country have private marks and symbolic signs with which to score their successes, failures, and advice to succeeding beggars; in fact, that the country is really dotted over with beggars' finger posts and guide stones. The assertion, however strange it may appear, is no fiction. The subject was not long since brought under the attention of the Government by Mr. Rawlinson.[26] "There is," he says in his report, "a sort of blackguards' literature, and the initiated understand each other by slang [cant] terms, by pantomimic signs, *and by* HIEROGLYPHICS. *The vagrant's mark may be seen in Havant, on corners of streets, on door posts, and on house steps. Simple as these chalk lines appear, they inform the succeeding vagrants of all they require to know; and a few white scratches may say, 'be importunate,' or 'pass on.'*"

Another very curious account was taken from a provincial

[26] *Mr. Rawlinson's Report to the General Board of Health, Parish of Havant, Hampshire.*

newspaper, published in 1849, and forwarded to *Notes and Queries*,[27] under the head of Mendicant Freemasonry. "Persons," remarks the writer, "indiscreet enough to open their purses to the relief of the beggar tribe, would do well to take a readily learned lesson as to the folly of that misguided benevolence which encourages and perpetuates vagabondism. Every door or passage is pregnant with instruction as to the error committed by the patron of beggars, as the beggar-marks show that a system of freemasonry is followed, by which a beggar knows whether it will be worth his while to call into a passage or knock at a door. Let any one examine the entrances to the passages in any town, and there he will find chalk marks, unintelligible to him, but significant enough to beggars. If a thousand towns are examined, the same marks will be found at every passage entrance. The passage mark is a cypher with a twisted tail: in some cases the tail projects into the passage, in others outwardly; thus seeming to indicate whether the houses down the passage are worth calling at or not. Almost every door has its marks: these are varied. In some cases there is a cross on the brick work, in others a cypher: the figures 1, 2, 3, are also used. Every person may for himself test the accuracy of these statements by the examination of the brick work near his own doorway – thus demonstrating that mendicity is a regular trade, carried out upon a system calculated to save time, and realise the largest profits." These remarks refer mainly to provincial towns, London being looked upon as the tramps'

[27] Vol. v., p. 210.

home, and therefore too FLY, or experienced, to be duped by such means.

The only other notice of the hieroglyphics of vagabonds that I have met with, is in *Mayhew's London Labour and London Poor*.[28] Mayhew obtained his information from two tramps, who stated that hawkers employ these signs as well as beggars. One tramp thus described the method of WORKING[29] a small town. "Two hawkers (PALS29) go together, but separate when they enter a village, one taking one side of the road, and selling different things; and so as to inform each other as to the character of the people at whose houses they call, *they chalk certain marks on their door posts*." Another informant stated that "if a PATTERER29 has been CRABBED (that is, offended) at any of the CRIBS (houses), *he mostly chalks a signal at or near the door*."

Another use is also made of these hieroglyphics. Charts of successful begging neighbourhoods are rudely drawn, and symbolical signs attached to each house to show whether benevolent or adverse.[30] "In many cases there is over the

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[28] Vol. i., pages 218 and 247.

[29] See Dictionary.

[30] Sometimes, as appears from the following, the names of persons and houses are written instead. "In almost every one of the padding-kens, or low lodging-houses in the country, there is a list of walks pasted up over the kitchen mantel piece. Now at St. Albans, for instance, at the – , and at other places, there is a paper stuck up in each of the kitchens. This paper is headed "Walks out of this Town," and underneath it is set down the names of the villages in the neighbourhood at which a beggar may call

kitchen mantel-piece" of a tramps' lodging-house "*a map of the district*, dotted here and there with memorandums of failure or success."[31] A correct facsimile of one of these singular maps has been placed as a frontispiece. It was obtained from the patterers and tramps who supplied a great many words for this work, and who have been employed by me for some time in collecting Old Ballads, Christmas Carols, Dying Speeches, and Last Lamentations, as materials for a *History of Popular Literature*. The reader will no doubt be amused with the drawing. The locality depicted is near Maidstone, in Kent, and I am informed that it was probably sketched by a wandering SCREEVER[32] in payment for a night's lodging. The English practice of marking everything, and scratching names on public property, extends itself to the tribe of vagabonds. On the map, as may be seen in the left hand corner, some TRAVELLER32 has drawn a favourite or noted female, singularly nick-named *Three-quarter Sarah*. What were the peculiar accomplishments of this lady to demand so uncommon a name, the reader will be at a loss to discover, but a

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when out on his walk, and they are so arranged as to allow the cadger to make a round of about six miles each day, and return the same night. In many of these papers there are sometimes twenty walks set down. No villages that are in any way "gammy" [bad] are ever mentioned in these papers, and the cadger, if he feels inclined to stop for a few days in the town, will be told by the lodging-house keeper, or the other cadgers that he may meet there, what gentlemen's seats or private houses are of any account on the walk that he means to take. The names of the good houses are not set down in the paper for fear of the police." —*Mayhew*, vol. i., p. 418.

[31] *Mayhew*, vol. i., p. 218.

[32] See Dictionary.

patterer says it probably refers to a shuffling dance of that name, common in tramps' lodging-houses, and in which "¾ Sarah" may have been a proficient. Above her, three beggars or hawkers have reckoned their day's earnings, amounting to 13s.; and on the right a tolerably correct sketch of a low hawker, or costermonger, is drawn. "To Dover, the *nigh* way," is the exact phraseology; and "hup here," a fair specimen of the self-acquired education of the tribe of cadgers. No key or explanation to the hieroglyphics was given in the original, because it would have been superfluous, when every inmate of the lodging-house knew the marks from their cradle – or rather their mother's back.

Should there be no map, "in most lodging-houses there is an old man who is guide to every 'WALK' in the vicinity, and who can tell each house on every round, that is 'good for a cold tatur.'"[33] The hieroglyphics that are used are: —


NO GOOD; too poor, and know too much.


STOP, – if you have what they want, they will buy. They are pretty "*fly*" (knowing).

[33] *Mayhew*, vol. i., p. 218.

GO IN THIS DIRECTION, it is better than the other road. Nothing that way.

BONE (good). Safe for a "cold tatur," if for nothing else. "*Cheese your patter*" (don't talk much) here.

COOPER'D (spoilt), by too many tramps calling there.

GAMMY (unfavourable), likely to have you taken up. Mind the dog.

FLUMMUXED (dangerous), sure of a month in "*quod*" (prison).

RELIGIOUS, but tidy on the whole.

Where did these signs come from, and when were they first used? are questions which I have asked myself again and again, whilst endeavouring to discover their history. Knowing the character of the Gipseys, and ascertaining from a tramp that they are well acquainted with the hieroglyphics, "and have been as long ago as ever he could remember," I have little hesitation in ascribing the invention to them. And strange it would be if some modern Belzoni, or Champollion, discovered in these beggars' marks fragments of ancient Egyptian or Hindoo hieroglyphical writing! But this, of course, is a simple vagary of the imagination.

That the Gipseys were in the habit of leaving memorials of the road they had taken, and the successes that had befallen them, there can be no doubt. In an old book, *The Triumph of Wit*, 1724, there is a passage which appears to have been copied from some older work, and it runs thus: – "The Gipseys set out twice a year, and scatter all over England, each parcel having their appointed stages, that they may not interfere, nor hinder each other; and for that purpose, when they set forward in the country, *they stick up boughs in the way of divers kinds, according as it is agreed among them, that one company may know which way another is gone, and so take a different road*." The works of *Hoyland* and *Borrow* supply other instances.

I cannot close this subject without drawing attention to the extraordinary fact, that actually on the threshold of the gibbet the sign of the vagabond is to be met with! “The murderer’s signal is even exhibited from the gallows; as a red handkerchief held in the hand of the felon about to be executed is a token that he dies without having betrayed any professional secrets.”[34]

Since the first edition of this work was published the author has received from various parts of England numerous evidences of the still active use of beggars’ marks, and mendicant hieroglyphics. One gentleman writes from Great Yarmouth to say that only a short time since, whilst residing in Norwich, he used frequently to see them on the houses and street corners. From another gentleman, a clergyman, I learn that he has so far made himself acquainted with the meanings of the signs employed, that by himself marking the characters  (*Gammy*) or  (*Flummuxed*) on the gate posts of his parsonage, he enjoys a singular immunity from alms-seekers of all orders.

[34] *Mr. Rawlinson’s Report to the General Board of Health, – Parish of Havant, Hampshire.*

THE HISTORY OF SLANG, OR THE VULGAR LANGUAGE OF FAST LIFE

Slang is the language of street humour, of fast, high, and low life. Cant, as was stated in the chapter upon that subject, is the vulgar language of secrecy. They are both universal and ancient, and appear to have been the peculiar concomitants of gay, vulgar, or worthless persons in every part of the world, at every period of time. Indeed, if we are to believe implicitly the saying of *the* wise man, that "there is nothing new under the sun," the "fast" men of buried Nineveh, with their knotty and door-matty looking beards, may have cracked Slang jokes on the steps of Sennacherib's palace; and the stocks and stones of Ancient Egypt, and the bricks of venerable and used-up Babylon, may, for aught we know, be covered with Slang hieroglyphics unknown to modern antiquarians, and which have long been stumbling-blocks to the philologist; so impossible is it at this day to say what was then authorised, or what then vulgar language. Slang is as old as speech and the congregating together of people in cities. It is the result of crowding, and excitement, and artificial life. Even to the classics it was not unknown, as witness the pages of Aristophanes and Plautus, Terence and Athenæus. Martial, the epigrammatist, is full of Slang. When an uninvited guest

accompanied his friend, the Slang of the day styled him his UMBRA; when a man was trussed, neck and heels, it called him jocosely QUADRUPUS.

Old English Slang was coarser, and depended more upon downright vulgarity than our modern Slang. It was a jesting speech, or humorous indulgence for the thoughtless moment, or the drunken hour, and it acted as a vent-peg for a fit of temper or irritability; but it did not interlard and permeate every description of conversation as now. It was confined to nicknames and improper subjects, and encroached but to a very small extent upon the domain of authorised speech. Indeed, it was exceedingly limited when compared with the vast territory of Slang in such general favour and complete circulation at the present day. Still, although not an alarming encumbrance, as in our time, Slang certainly did exist in this country centuries ago, as we may see if we look down the page of any respectable History of England. Cromwell was familiarly called OLD NOLL, – just the same as Buonaparte was termed BONEY, and Wellington CONKEY, or NOSEY, only a few years ago. His Legislature, too, was spoken of in a high-flavoured way as the BAREBONES, or RUMP Parliament, and his followers were nicknamed ROUNDHEADS, and the peculiar religious sects of his protectorate were styled PURITANS and QUAKERS.[35] The Civil War pamphlets, and the satirical hits of the Cavaliers and

[35] This term, with a singular literal downrightness, which would be remarkable in any other people than the French, is translated by them as the sect of *Trembleurs*.

the Commonwealth men, originated numerous Slang words and vulgar similes, in full use at the present moment. Here is a field of inquiry for the Philological Society, indeed I may say a territory, for there are thirty thousand of these partisan tracts. Later still, in the court of Charles the Second, the naughty ladies and the gay lords, with Rochester at their head, talked Slang; and very naughty Slang it was too! Fops, in those days, when "over head and ears" in debt, and in continual fear of arrest, termed their enemies, the bailiffs, PHILISTINES[36] or MOABITES. At a later period, when collars were worn detached from shirts, in order to save the expense of washing – an object it would seem with needy "swells" in all ages – they obtained the name of JACOBITES. One half of the coarse wit in Butler's Hudibras lurks in the vulgar words and phrases which he was so fond of employing. They were more homely and forcible than the mild and elegant sentences of Cowley, and the people, therefore, hurrah'd them, and pronounced Butler one of themselves, – or, as we should say, in a joyful moment, a jolly good fellow. Orator Henley preached and prayed in Slang, and first charmed and then swayed the dirty mobs in Lincoln's Inn Fields by vulgarisms. Burly Grose mentions Henley, with the remark that we owe a great many Slang phrases to him. Swift, and old Sir Roger L'Estrange, and Arbuthnot, were all fond of vulgar or Slang language; indeed, we may see from a Slang word used by the latter how curious is the gradual adoption of vulgar terms in our standard dictionaries.

[36] Swift alludes to this term in his *Art of Polite Conversation*, p. 14. 1738.

The worthy doctor, in order to annihilate (or, as we should say with a fitting respect to the subject under consideration, SMASH) an opponent, thought proper on an occasion to use the word CABBAGE, not in the ancient and esculentary sense of a flatulent vegetable of the kitchen garden, but in the at once Slang sense of purloining or cribbing. Johnson soon met with the word, looked at it, examined it, weighed it, and shook his head, but out of respect to a brother doctor inserted it in his dictionary, labelling it, however, prominently "*Cant*;" whilst Walker and Webster, years after, when *to cabbage* was to *pilfer* all over England, placed the term in their dictionaries as an ancient and very respectable word. Another Slang term, GULL, to cheat, or delude, sometimes varied to GULLY, is stated to be connected with the Dean of St. Patrick. Gull, a dupe, or a fool, is often used by our old dramatists, and is generally believed to have given rise to the verb; but a curious little edition of *Bamfylde Moore Carew*, published in 1827, says that TO GULL, or GULLY, is derived from the well known *Gulliver*, the hero of the famous *Travels*. How crammed with Slang are the dramatic works of the last century! The writers of the comedies and farces in those days must have lived in the streets, and written their plays in the public-houses, so filled are they with vulgarisms and unauthorised words. The popular phrases, "I owe you one," "that's one for his nob," and "keep moving, dad," arose in this way.[37] The second of these sayings was, doubtless, taken from

[37] See *Notes and Queries*, vol. i., p. 185. 1850.

the card table, for at cribbage the player who holds the knave of the suit turned up counts "one for his nob," and the dealer who turns up a knave counts "two for his heels."

In Mrs. Centlivre's admirable comedy of *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, we see the origin of that popular street phrase, THE REAL SIMON PURE. Simon Pure is the Quaker name adopted by Colonel Feignwell as a trick to obtain the hand of Mistress Anne Lovely in marriage. The veritable Quaker, the "real Simon Pure," recommended by Aminadab Holdfast, of Bristol, as a fit sojourner with Obadiah Prim, arrives at last to the discomfiture of the Colonel, who, to maintain his position and gain time, concocts a letter in which the real Quaker is spoken of as a housebreaker who had travelled in the "leather conveniency" from Bristol, and adopted the garb and name of the Western Quaker in order to pass off as the "REAL SIMON PURE," but only for the purpose of robbing the house and cutting the throat of the perplexed Obadiah. The scene in which the two Simon Pures, the *real* and the *counterfeit*, meet, is one of the best in the comedy.

Tom Brown, of "facetious memory," as his friends were wont to say, and Ned Ward, who wrote humorous books, and when tired drew beer for his customers at his ale-house in Long Acre,[38] were both great producers of Slang in the last century, and to them we owe many popular current phrases and household words.

[38] He afterwards kept a tavern at Wapping, mentioned by Pope in the *Dunciad*.

Written Slang was checked rather than advanced by the pens of Addison, Johnson, and Goldsmith, although John Bee, the bottle-holder and historiographer of the pugilistic band of brothers in the youthful days of flat-nosed Tom Crib, has gravely stated that Johnson, when young and rakish, contributed to an early volume of the *Gentleman's Magazine* a few pages, by way of specimen, of a Slang dictionary, the result, Mr. Bee says, "of his midnight ramblings!"[39] And Goldsmith, I must not forget to remark, certainly coined a few words, although, as a rule, his pen was pure and graceful, and adverse to neologisms. The word FUDGE, it has been stated, was first used by him in literary composition, although it originated with one Captain Fudge, a notorious fibber, nearly a century before. Street-phrases, nicknames, and vulgar words were continually being added to the great stock of popular Slang up to the commencement of the present century, when it received numerous additions from pugilism, horse-racing, and "fast" life generally, which suddenly came into great public favour, and was at its height when the Prince Regent was in his rakish minority. Slang in those days was generally termed FLASH language. So popular was it with the "bloods" of high life that it constituted the best paying literary capital for certain authors and dramatists. Pierce Egan issued *Boxiana*, and *Life in London*, six portly octavo volumes, crammed with Slang; and Moncrieff wrote the most popular

[39] *Sportsman's Dictionary*, 1825, p. 15. I have searched the venerable magazine in vain for this Slang glossary.

farce of the day, *Tom and Jerry* (adapted from the latter work), which, to use newspaper Slang, "took the town by storm," and, with its then fashionable vulgarisms, made the fortune of the old Adelphi Theatre, and was, without exception, the most wonderful instance of a continuous theatrical RUN in ancient or modern times. This, also, was brimful of Slang. Other authors helped to popularise and extend Slang down to our own time, when it has taken a somewhat different turn, dropping many of the Cant and old vulgar words, and assuming a certain quaint and fashionable phraseology – Frenchy, familiar, utilitarian, and jovial. There can be no doubt but that common speech is greatly influenced by fashion, fresh manners, and that general change of ideas which steals over a people once in a generation. But before I proceed further into the region of *Slang*, it will be well to say something on the etymology of the word.

The word Slang is only mentioned by two lexicographers – Webster and Ogilvie. Johnson, Walker, and the older compilers of dictionaries, give *slang* the preterite of *sling*, but not a word about Slang in the sense of low, vulgar, or unrecognised language. The origin of the word has often been asked for in literary journals and books, but only one man, as far as I can learn, has ever hazarded an etymology – Jonathan Bee, the vulgar chronicler of the prize-ring.[40] With a recklessness peculiar to pugilism, Bee stated that Slang was derived from "the *slangs* or fetters worn by prisoners, having acquired that name from the

[40] Introduction to *Bee's Sportsman's Dictionary*, 1825.

manner in which they were worn, as they required a sling of string to keep them off the ground." Bee had just been nettled at Pierce Egan producing a new edition of *Grose's Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, and was determined to excel him in a vulgar dictionary of his own, which should be more racy, more pugilistic, and more original. How far he succeeded in this latter particular his ridiculous etymology of Slang will show. Slang is not an English word, it is the Gipsey term for their secret language, and its synonyme is GIBBERISH – another word which was believed to have had no distinct origin.[41] Grose – stout and burly Captain Grose – who we may characterise as the greatest antiquary, joker, and drinker of porter of his day, was the first author who put the word Slang into print. It occurs in his *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, of 1785, with the signification that it implies "Cant or vulgar language." Grose, I may remark in passing, was a great favourite with the poet Burns, and so pleased by his extensive powers of story-telling and grog-imbibing, that the companionable and humour-loving Scotch bard wrote for his fat friend – or, to use his own words, "the fine, fat, fodgel wight" – the immortal poem of "Tam O'Shanter."

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[41] The Gipseys use the word Slang as the Anglican synonyme for Romany, the continental (or rather Spanish) term for the Cingari or Gipsey tongue. *Crabb*, who wrote the *Gipsies' Advocate* in 1831, thus mentions the word: – "This language [Gipsey] *called by themselves Slang*, or *Gibberish*, invented, as they think, by their forefathers for secret purposes, is not merely the language of one or a few of these wandering tribes, which are found in the European nations, but is adopted by the vast numbers who inhabit the earth."

Without troubling the reader with a long account of the transformation into an English term of the word Slang, I may remark in passing that it is easily seen how we obtained it from the Gipseys. Hucksters and beggars on tramp, or at fairs and races, associate and frequently join in any rough enterprise with the Gipseys. The word would be continually heard by them, and would in this manner soon become Cant;[42] and, when carried by "fast" or vulgar fashionables from the society of thieves and low characters to their own drawing-rooms, would as quickly become Slang, and the representative term for all vulgar or Slang language.

Any sudden excitement, peculiar circumstance, or popular literary production, is quite sufficient to originate and set going a score of Slang words. Nearly every election or public agitation throws out offshoots of the excitement, or scintillations of the humour in the shape of Slang terms – vulgar at first, but at length adopted as semi-respectable from the force of habit and custom. There is scarcely a condition or calling in life that does not possess its own peculiar Slang. The professions, legal and medical, have each familiar and unauthorised terms for peculiar circumstances and things, and I am quite certain that the clerical calling, or "*the cloth*," is not entirely free from this peculiarity. Every workshop, warehouse, factory, and mill throughout the

[42] The word Slang assumed various meanings amongst costermongers, beggars, and vagabonds of all orders. It was, and is still, used to express cheating by false weights, a raree show, for retiring by a back door, for a watch-chain, and for their secret language.

country has its Slang, and so have the public schools of Eton, Harrow, and Westminster, and the great Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Sea Slang constitutes the principal charm of a sailor's "yarn," and our soldiers and officers have each their peculiar nicknames and terms for things and subjects proper and improper. A writer in *Household Words* (No. 183) has gone so far as to remark, that a person "shall not read one single parliamentary debate, as reported in a first-class newspaper, without meeting scores of Slang words;" and "that from Mr. Speaker in his chair, to the Cabinet Ministers whispering behind it – from mover to seconder, from true blue Protectionist to extremest Radical – Mr. Barry's New House echoes and re-echoes with Slang." Really it seems as if our boasted English tongue was a very paltry and ill-provided contrivance after all; or can it be that we are the most vulgar of people?

The universality of Slang is extraordinary. Let any person for a short time narrowly examine the conversation of their dearest and nearest friends, aye, censor-like, even slice and analyse their own supposed correct talk, and they shall be amazed at the numerous unauthorised, and what we can only call vulgar, words they continually employ. It is not the number of new words that we are ever introducing that is so reprehensible, there is not so much harm in this practice (frequently termed in books "the license of expression") if neologisms are really required, but it is the continually encumbering of *old* words with fresh and strange meanings. Look at those simple and useful verbs, *do*, *cut*, *go*, and

take, and see how they are hampered and overloaded, and then let us ask ourselves how it is that a French or German gentleman, be he ever so well educated, is continually blundering and floundering amongst our *little* words when trying to make himself understood in an ordinary conversation. He may have studied our language the required time, and have gone through the usual amount of "grinding," and practised the common allotment of patience, but all to no purpose as far as accuracy is concerned. I am aware that most new words are generally regarded as Slang, although afterwards they may become useful and respectable additions to our standard dictionaries. Jabber and HOAX were Slang and Cant terms in Swift's time; so indeed were MOB and SHAM.[43] Words directly from the Latin and Greek, and Carlyleisms, are allowed by an indulgent public to pass and take their places in books. Sound contributes many Slang words – a source that etymologists too frequently overlook. Nothing pleases an ignorant person more than a high-sounding term "full of fury." How melodious and drum-like are those vulgar coruscations RUMBUMPTIOUS, SLANTINGDICULAR, SPLENDIFEROUS, RUMBUSTIOUS, and FERRICADOUZER. What a "pull" the sharp-nosed lodging-house keeper thinks she has over her victims if she can

[43] *North*, in his *Examen*, p. 574, says, "I may note that the rabble first changed their title, and were called the mob in the assemblies of this [Green Ribbon] club. It was their beast of burden, and called first *mobile vulgus*, but fell naturally into the contraction of one syllable, and ever since is become proper English." In the same work, p. 231, the disgraceful origin of SHAM is given.

but hurl such testimonies of a liberal education at them when they are disputing her charges, and threatening to ABSQUATULATE! In the United States the vulgar-genteel even excel the poor "stuck-up" Cockneys in their formation of a native fashionable language. How charming to a refined ear are ABSKIZE, CATAWAMPOUSLY, EXFLUNCTIFY, OBSCUTE, KESLOSH, KESOUSE, KESWOLLOP, and KEWHOLLUX! Vulgar words representing action and brisk movement often owe their origin to sound. Mispronunciation, too, is another great source of vulgar or slang words – RAMSHACKLE, SHACKLY, NARY-ONE for neither, or neither one, OTTOMY for anatomy, RENCH for rinse, are specimens. The commonalty dislike frequently occurring words difficult of pronunciation, and so we have the street abridgments of BIMEBY for by and by, CAZE for because, GIN for given, HANKERCHER for handkerchief, RUMATIZ for rheumatism, BACKY for tobacco, and many others, not perhaps Slang, but certainly all vulgarisms. Archbishop Whately, in his interesting *Remains of Bishop Copleston*, has inserted a leaf from the Bishop's note-book on the popular corruption of names, mentioning among others KICKSHAWS, as from the French, *quelques choses*; BEEFEATER, the lubberly guardian of royalty in a procession, and the supposed devourer of enormous beefsteaks, as but a vulgar pronunciation of the French, *buffetier*; and GEORGE and CANNON, the sign of a public-house, as nothing but a corruption (although so soon!) of the popular

premier of the last generation, *George Canning*. Literature has its Slang terms; and the desire on the part of writers to say funny and startling things in a novel and curious way (the late *Household Words*,[44] for instance), contributes many unauthorised words to the great stock of Slang.

Fashionable, or *Upper-class Slang*, is of several varieties. There is the Belgravian, military and naval, parliamentary, dandy, and the reunion and visiting Slang. Concerning the Slang of the fashionable world, a writer in *Household Words* curiously, but not altogether truthfully, remarks, that it is mostly imported from France; and that an unmeaning gibberish of Gallicisms runs through English fashionable conversation, and fashionable novels, and accounts of fashionable parties in the fashionable newspapers. Yet, ludicrously enough, immediately the fashionable magnates of England seize on any French idiom, the French themselves not only universally abandon it to us, but positively repudiate it altogether from their idiomatic vocabulary. If you were to tell a well-bred Frenchman that such and such an aristocratic marriage was on the *tapis*, he would stare with astonishment, and look down on the carpet in the startled endeavour to find a marriage in so unusual a place. If you were to talk to him of the *beau monde*, he would imagine you meant the world which God made, not half-a-dozen streets and squares between Hyde Park Corner and Chelsea Bun House.

[44] It is rather singular that this popular journal should have contained a long article on *Slang* a short time ago.

The *thé dansante*[45] would be completely inexplicable to him. If you were to point out to him the Dowager Lady Grimguffin acting as *chaperon* to Lady Amanda Creamville, he would imagine you were referring to the *petit Chaperon rouge*– to little Red Riding Hood. He might just understand what was meant by *vis-a-vis*, *entremets*, and some others of the flying horde of frivolous little foreign slangisms hovering about fashionable cookery and fashionable furniture; but three-fourths of them would seem to him as barbarous French provincialisms, or, at best, but as antiquated and obsolete expressions, picked out of the letters of Mademoiselle Scuderi, or the tales of Crebillon the "younger." Servants, too, appropriate the scraps of French conversation which fall from their masters' guests at the dinner table, and forthwith in the world of flunkeydom the word "know" is disused, and the lady's maid, in doubt on a particular point, asks John whether or no he SAVEYS it?[46] What, too, can be more abominable than that heartless piece of fashionable newspaper Slang, regularly employed when speaking of the successful courtship of young people in the fashionable world: —

> Marriage in high life. – We understand that a marriage is ARRANGED (!) betwixt the Lady, &c. &c., and the Honourable, &c. &c.

Arranged! Is that cold-blooded Smithfield or Mark-lane term

[45] The writer is quite correct in instancing this piece of fashionable twaddle. The mongrel formation is exceedingly amusing to a polite Parisian.

[46] Savez vous cela?

for a sale or a purchase the proper word to express the hopeful, joyous, golden union of young and trustful hearts? Which is the proper way to pronounce the names of great people, and what the correct authority? Lord Cowper, we are often assured, is Lord *Cooper*– on this principle Lord Cowley would certainly be Lord *Cooley*– and Mr. Carew, we are told, should be Mr. *Carey*, Ponsonby should be *Punsunby*, Eyre should he *Aire*, Cholmondeley should be *Chumley*, St. John *Singen*, Majoribanks *Marshbanks*, Derby *Darby* (its ancient pronunciation), and Powell should always be *Poel*. I don't know that these lofty persons have as much cause to complain of the illiberality of fate in giving them disagreeable names as did the celebrated Psyche (as she was termed by Tom Moore), whose original name, through her husband, was *Teague*, but which was afterwards altered to Tighe.

Parliamentary Slang, excepting a few peculiar terms connected with "*the* House" (scarcely Slang, I suppose), is mainly composed of fashionable, literary, and learned Slang. When members, however, get excited and wish to be forcible, they are often not very particular which of the street terms they select, providing it carries, as good old Dr. South said, plenty of wild-fire in it. Sir Hugh Cairns very lately spoke of "that homely but expressive phrase, DODGE." Out of "the House," several Slang terms are used in connection with Parliament or members of Parliament. If Lord Palmerston is known by name to the tribes of the Caucasus and Asia Minor as a great foreign diplomatist,

when the name of our Queen Victoria is an unknown title to the inhabitants of those parts – as was stated in the *Times* a short time ago, – I have only to remark that amongst the costers and the wild inhabitants of the streets he is better known as PAM. I have often heard the cabmen on the "ranks" in Piccadilly remark of the late Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he has been going from his residence at Grosvenor Gate, to Derby House in St. James's Square, – "hollo, there! de yer see old DIZZY doing a stump?" A PLUMPER is a single vote at an election, – not a SPLIT-TICKET; and electors who have occupied a house, no matter how small, and boiled a pot in it, thus qualifying themselves for voting, are termed POT-WOLLOPERS. A quiet WALK OVER is a re-election without opposition and much cost. A CAUCUS meeting refers to the private assembling of politicians before an election, when candidates are chosen and measures of action agreed upon. The term comes from America. A JOB, in political phraseology, is a government office or contract obtained by secret influence or favouritism. Only the other day the *Times* spoke of "the patriotic member of Parliament POTTED OUT in a dusty little lodging somewhere about Bury-street." The term QUOCKERWODGER, although referring to a wooden toy figure which jerks its limbs about when pulled by a string, has been supplemented with a political meaning. A pseudo-politician, one whose strings of action are pulled by somebody else, is now often termed a QUOCKERWODGER. The term RAT, too, in allusion to rats deserting vessels about to sink,

has long been employed towards those turncoat politicians who change their party for interest. Who that occasionally passes near the Houses of Parliament has not often noticed stout or careful M.P.s walk briskly through the Hall and on the curb-stone in front, with umbrella or walking cane uplifted, shout to the cabmen on the rank, FOUR-WHEELER! The term is a useful one, but I am afraid we must consider it Slang, until it is stamped with the mint mark of lexicographical authority.[47]

Military, or *Officers' Slang* is on a par, and of a character with *Dandy Slang*. Inconvenient friends, or elderly and lecturing relatives, are pronounced DREADFUL BORES. Four-wheel cabs are called BOUNDERS; and a member of the Four-in-hand Club, driving to Epsom on the Derby day, would, using fashionable slang phraseology, speak of it as TOOLING HIS DRAG DOWN TO THE DERBY. A vehicle, if not a DRAG (or dwag) is a TRAP, or a CASK; and if the TURN OUT happens to be in other than a trim condition, it is pronounced at once as not DOWN THE ROAD. Your city swell would say it is not UP TO THE MARK; whilst the costermonger would call it WERY DICKEY. In the army a barrack or military station is known as a LOBSTER-BOX; to "cram" for an examination is to MUG-

[47] From an early period politics and partyism have attracted unto themselves quaint Slang terms. Horace Walpole quotes a party nickname of February, 1742, as a Slang word of the day: – "The Tories declare against any further prosecution, if Tories there are, for now one hears of nothing but the BROAD-BOTTOM; it is the reigning Cant word, and means the taking all parties and people, indifferently, into the ministry." Thus BROAD-BOTTOM in those days was Slang for *coalition*.

UP; to reject from the examination is to SPIN; and that part of the barrack occupied by subalterns is frequently spoken of as the ROOKERY. In dandy or swell Slang, any celebrity, from Robson of the Olympic, to the Pope of Rome, is a SWELL. Wrinkled faced old professors, who hold dress and fashionable tailors in abhorrence, are called AWFUL SWELLS, – if they happen to be very learned or clever. I may remark that in this upper class Slang a title is termed a HANDLE; trousers, INEXPRESSIBLES; or when of a large pattern, or the inflated Zouave cut, HOWLING BAGS; a superior appearance, EXTENSIVE; a four-wheeled cab, a BIRDCAGE; a dance, a HOP; dining at another man's table, "sitting under his MAHOGANY;" anything flashy or showy, LOUD; the peculiar make or cut of a coat, its BUILD; full dress, FULL-FIG; wearing clothes which represent the very extreme of fashion, "dressing to DEATH;" a reunion, a SPREAD; a friend (or a "good fellow"), a TRUMP; a difficulty, a SCREW LOOSE; and everything that is unpleasant, "from bad sherry to a writ from a tailor," JEUCED INFERNAL. The military phrase, "to send a man to COVENTRY," or permit no person to speak to him, although an ancient saying, must still be considered Slang.

The *Universities of Oxford and Cambridge*, and the great public schools, are the hotbeds of fashionable Slang. Growing boys and high-spirited young fellows detest restraint of all kinds, and prefer making a dash at life in a Slang phraseology of their own, to all the set forms and syntactical rules of *Alma Mater*.

Many of the most expressive words in a common chit-chat, or free-and-easy conversation, are old University vulgarisms. Cut, in the sense of dropping an acquaintance, was originally a Cambridge form of speech; and HOAX, to deceive or ridicule, we are informed by Grose, was many years since an Oxford term. Among the words that fast society has borrowed from our great scholastic [I was going to say *establishments*, but I remembered the linen drapers' horrid and habitual use of the word] institutions, I find CRIB, a house or apartments; DEAD-MEN, empty wine bottles; DRAWING TEETH,[48] wrenching off knockers; FIZZING, first-rate, or splendid; GOVERNOR, or RELIEVING OFFICER, the general term for a male parent; PLUCKED, defeated or turned back; QUIZ, to scrutinise, or a prying old fellow; and ROW, a noisy disturbance. The Slang words in use at Oxford and Cambridge would alone fill a volume. As examples I may instance SCOUT, which at Oxford refers to an undergraduate's valet, whilst the same menial at Cambridge is termed a GYP, – popularly derived by the Cantabs from the Greek, GYPS (γυψ), a vulture; SCULL, the head, or master of a college; BATTLES, the Oxford term for rations, changed at Cambridge into COMMONS. The term DICKEY, a half shirt, I am told, originated with the students of Trinity College, Dublin, who at first styled it a TOMMY, from the Greek, τομη, a section. Crib, a literal translation, is now universal; GRIND

[48] This is more especially an amusement with medical students, and is comparatively unknown out of London.

refers to a walk, or "constitutional;" HIVITE is a student of St. Begh's (St. Bee's) College, Cumberland; to JAPAN, in this Slang speech, is to ordain; MORTAR-BOARD is a square college cap; SIM a student of a Methodistical turn, – in allusion to the Rev. Charles Simeon; SLOGGERS, at Cambridge, refers to the second division of race boats, known at Oxford as TORPIDS; SPORT is to show or exhibit; TROTTER is the jocose term for a tailor's man who goes round for orders; and TUFTS are wealthy students who dine with the DONS, and are distinguished by golden *tufts*, or tassels, in their caps. There are many terms in use at Oxford not known at Cambridge; and such Slang names as COACH, GULF, HARRY-SOPH, POKER, or POST-MORTEM, common enough at Cambridge, are seldom or never heard at the great sister University. For numerous other examples of college Slang, the reader is referred to the Dictionary.

Religious Slang, strange as the compound may appear, exists with other descriptions of vulgar speech at the present day. *Punch*, a short time since, in one of those half-humorous, half-serious articles in which he is so fond of lecturing any national abuse or popular folly, remarked that Slang had "long since penetrated into the Forum, and now we meet it in the Senate, *and even the Pulpit itself is no longer free from its intrusion*." I would not, for one moment, wish to infer that the practice is general. On the contrary, and in justice to the clergy, it must be said that the principal disseminators of pure English throughout the country are the ministers of our Established Church. Yet it

cannot be denied but that a great deal of Slang phraseology and disagreeable vulgarism have gradually crept into the very pulpits which should give forth as pure speech as doctrine.

Dean Conybeare, in his able *Essay on Church Parties*,[49] has noticed this wretched addition to our pulpit speech. As stated in his Essay, the practice appears to confine itself mainly to the exaggerated forms of the High and Low Church – the Tractarians and the "Recordites."[50] By way of illustration, the Dean cites the evening parties, or social meetings, common amongst the wealthier lay members of the Recordite (exaggerated Evangelical) Churches, where the principal topics discussed – one or more favourite clergymen being present in a quasi-official manner – are "the merits and demerits of different preachers, the approaching restoration of the Jews, the date of the Millennium, the progress of the 'Tractarian heresy,' and the anticipated 'perversion' of High Church neighbours." These subjects are canvassed in a dialect differing considerably from common English. The words FAITHFUL, TAINTED, ACCEPTABLE, DECIDED, LEGAL, and many others, are used in a technical sense. We hear that Mr. A. has been more OWNED than Mr. B; and that Mr. C. has more SEALS[51] than

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[49] *Edinburgh Review*, October, 1853.

[50] A term derived from the *Record Newspaper*, the exponent of this singular section of the Low, or so called Evangelical Church.

[51] A preacher is said, in this phraseology, to be OWNED, when he makes many converts, and his converts are called his SEALS.

Mr. D. Again, the word GRACIOUS is invested with a meaning as extensive as that attached by young ladies to *nice*. Thus, we hear of a "GRACIOUS sermon," a "GRACIOUS meeting," a "GRACIOUS child," and even a "GRACIOUS whipping." The word DARK has also a new and peculiar usage. It is applied to every person, book, or place, not impregnated with Recordite principles. We once were witnesses of a ludicrous misunderstanding resulting from this phraseology. "What did you mean (said A. to B.) by telling me that – was such a very DARK village? I rode over there to day, and found the street particularly broad and cheerful, and there is not a tree in the place." "*The Gospel is not preached there*," was B.'s laconic reply. The conclusion of one of these singular evening parties is generally marked by an "*exposition*" – an unseasonable sermon of nearly one hour's duration, circumscribed by no text, and delivered from the table by one of the clerical visitors with a view to "improve the occasion." In the same Essay, the religious Slang terms for the two great divisions of the Established Church, receive some explanation. The old-fashioned High Church party, rich and "stagnant," noted for its "sluggish mediocrity, hatred of zeal, dread of innovation, abuse of dissent, blundering and languid utterance," is called the HIGH AND DRY; whilst the corresponding division, known as the Low Church, equally stagnant with the former, but poorer, and more lazily inclined (from absence of education), to dissent, receives the nickname of the LOW AND SLOW. Already have these terms become so

familiar that they are shortened, in ordinary conversation, to the DRY and the SLOW. The so-called "Broad Church," I should remark, is often spoken of as the BROAD AND SHALLOW.

What can be more objectionable than the irreverent and offensive manner in which many of the dissenting ministers continually pronounce the names of the Deity, God and Lord. God, instead of pronouncing in the plain and beautifully simple old English way, G-O-D, they drawl out into GORDE or GAUDE; and Lord, instead of speaking in the proper way, they desecrate into LOARD or LOERD, – lingering on the *u*, or the *r*, as the case may be, until an honest hearer feels disgusted, and almost inclined to run the gauntlet of beadles and deacons, and pull the vulgar preacher from his pulpit. I have observed that many young preachers strive hard to acquire this peculiar pronunciation, in imitation of the older ministers. What can more properly, then, be called Slang, or, indeed, the most objectionable of Slang, than this studious endeavour to pronounce the most sacred names in a uniformly vulgar and unbecoming manner. If the old-fashioned preacher whistled Cant through his nose, the modern vulgar reverend whines Slang from the more natural organ. These vagaries of speech will, perhaps, by an apologist, he termed "pulpit peculiarities," and the writer dared to intermeddle with a subject that is or should be removed from his criticisms. The terms used by the mob towards the Church, however illiberal and satirically vulgar, are within his province in such an inquiry as the present. A

clergyman, in vulgar language, is spoken of as a CHOKER, a CUSHION THUMPER, a DOMINE, an EARWIG, a GOSPEL GRINDER, a GRAY COAT PARSON – if he is a lessee of the great tithes, ONE IN TEN, PADRE – if spoken of by an Anglo-Indian, a ROOK, a SPOUTER, a WHITE CHOKER, or a WARMING PAN RECTOR, if he only holds the living *pro tempore*, or is simply keeping the place warm for his successor. If a Tractarian, his outer garment is rudely spoken of as a PYGOSTOLE, or M.B. (MARK OF THE BEAST) COAT. His profession is termed THE CLOTH, and his practice TUB THUMPING. Should he belong to the dissenting body, he is probably styled a PANTILER, or a PSALM SMITER, or, perhaps, a SWADDLER. His chapel, too, is spoken of as a SCHISM SHOP. A Roman Catholic, I may remark, is coarsely named a BRISKET BEATER.

Particular as lawyers generally are about the meaning of words, they have not prevented an unauthorised phraseology from arising, which we may term *Legal Slang*. So forcibly did this truth impress a late writer, that he wrote in a popular journal, "You may hear Slang every day in term from barristers in their robes, at every mess-table, at every bar-mess, at every college commons, and in every club dining-room." Swift, in his *Art of Polite Conversation* (p. 15), published a century and a half ago, states that VARDI was the Slang in his time for "verdict." A few of the most common and well-known terms used out of doors, with reference to legal matters, are COOK, to hash

or make up a balance-sheet; DIPPED, mortgaged; DUN, to solicit payment; FULLIED, to be "*fully* committed for trial;" LAND-SHARK, a sailor's definition of a lawyer; LIMB OF THE LAW, a milder term for the same "professional;" MONKEY WITH A LONG TAIL, a mortgage – phrase used in the well-known case for libel, Smith *v.* Jones; MOUTHPIECE, the coster's term for his counsel; "to go through the RING," to take advantage of the Insolvency Act; SMASH, to become bankrupt; SNIPE, an attorney with a long bill; and WHITEWASHED, said of any debtor who has taken the benefit of the Insolvent Act. Lawyers, from their connection with the police courts, and transactions with persons in every grade of society, have ample opportunities for acquiring street Slang, which in cross-questioning and wrangling they frequently avail themselves of.

It has been said there exists a *Literary Slang*, or "the *Slang of Criticism*– dramatic, artistic, and scientific. Such words as 'æsthetic,' 'transcendental,' the 'harmonies,' the 'unities,' a 'myth:' such phrases as 'an exquisite *morceau* on the big drum,' a 'scholarlike rendering of John the Baptist's great toe,' 'keeping harmony,' 'middle distance,' 'ærial perspective,' 'delicate handling,' 'nervous chiaroscuro,' and the like." More than one literary journal that I could name are fond of employing such terms in their art criticisms, but it is questionable, after all, whether they are not allowable as the generous inflections and bendings of a bountiful language, for the purpose of expressing fresh phases of thought, and ideas not yet provided with

representative words.[52] The well-known and ever-acceptable *Punch*, with his fresh and choice little pictorial bits by Leech, often employs a Slang term to give point to a joke, or humour to a line of satire. A short time since (4th May, 1859) he gave an original etymology of the school-boy-ism SLOG. Slog, said the classical and studious *Punch*, is derived from the Greek word SLOGO, to baste, to wallop, to slaughter. And it was not long ago that he amused his readers with two columns on *Slang and Sanscrit*: —

> "The allegory which pervades the conversation of all Eastern nations," remarked the philosophical *Punch*, "is the foundation of Western Slang; and the increased number of students of the Oriental languages, especially since Sanscrit and Arabic have been made subjects for the Indian Civil Service Examinations, may have contributed to supply the English language with a large portion of its new dialect. While, however, the spirit of allegory comes from the East, there is so great a difference between the brevity of Western expression and the more cumbrous diction of the Oriental, that the origin of a phrase becomes difficult to trace. Thus, for instance, whilst the Turkish merchant might address his friend somewhat as follows – 'That which seems good to my father is to his servant as the perfumed breath of the west

[52] "All our newspapers contain more or less colloquial words; in fact, there seems no other way of expressing certain ideas connected with passing events of every-day life, with the requisite force and piquancy. In the English newspapers the same thing is observable, and certain of them contain more of the class denominated Slang words than our own." —*Bartlett's Americanisms*, p. x., 1859.

> wind in the calm night of the Arabian summer;' the Western negociator observes more briefly, 'ALL SERENE!'"

But the vulgar term, BRICK, *Punch* remarks in illustration,

> "must be allowed to be an exception, its Greek derivation being universally admitted, corresponding so exactly as it does in its rectangular form and compactness to the perfection of manhood, according to the views of *Plato* and *Simonides*; but any deviation from the simple expression, in which locality is indicated, – as, for instance, 'a genuine Bath,' – decidedly breathes the Oriental spirit."

It is singular that what *Punch* says, unwittingly and in humour, respecting the Slang expression, BOSH, should be quite true. Bosh, remarks *Punch*, after speaking of it as belonging to the stock of words pilfered from the Turks, "is one whose innate force and beauty the slangographer is reluctantly compelled to admit. It is the only word which seems a proper appellation for a great deal which we are obliged to hear and to read every day of our life." Bosh, nonsense or stupidity, is derived from the *Gipsey* and the *Persian*. The universality of Slang, I may here remark, is proved by its continual use in the pages of *Punch*. Whoever thinks, unless belonging to a past generation, of asking a friend to explain the stray vulgar words employed by the *London Charivari*?

The *Athenæum*, the most learned and censor-like of all the "weeklies," often indulges in a Slang word, when force of expression or a little humour is desired, or when the writer wishes

to say something which is better said in Slang, or so-called vulgar speech, than in the authorised language of Dr. Johnson or Lindley Murray. It was but the other day that a writer in its pages employed an old and favourite word, used always when we were highly pleased with any article at school, – STUNNING. *Bartlett*, the compiler of the *Dictionary of Americanisms*, continually cites the *Athenæum* as using Slang and vulgar expressions; – but the magazine the American refers to is not the excellent literary journal which is so esteemed at the present day, it was a smaller, and now defunct "weekly." Many other highly respectable journals often use Slang words and phrases. The *Times* (or, in Slang, the THUNDERER) frequently employs unauthorised terms; and, following a "leader"[53] of the purest and most eloquent English composition, may sometimes be seen another "article"53 on a totally different subject, containing, perhaps, a score or more of exceedingly questionable words. Among the words and phrases which may be included under the head of Literary Slang are, – BALAAM, matter kept constantly in type about monstrous productions of nature, to fill up spaces in newspapers; BALAAM BOX, the term given in *Blackwood* to the depository for rejected articles; and SLATE, to pelt with abuse, or CUT UP in a review. The Slang names given to newspapers are curious; – thus, the *Morning Advertiser* is known as the TAP-TUB, the TIZER, and the GIN AND GOSPEL

[53] The terms *leader* and *article* can scarcely be called Slang, yet it would be desirable to know upon what authority they were first employed in their present peculiar sense.

GAZETTE. The *Morning Post* has obtained the suggestive *soubriquet* of JEAMES; whilst the *Morning Herald* has long been caricatured as MRS. HARRIS, and the *Standard* as MRS. GAMP.[54]

The *Stage*, of course, has its Slang – "both before and behind the curtain," as a journalist remarks. The stage manager is familiarly termed DADDY; and an actor by profession, or a "professional," is called a PRO. A man who is occasionally hired at a trifling remuneration to come upon the stage as one of a crowd, or when a number of actors are wanted to give effect, is named a SUP, – an abbreviation of "supernumerary." A SURF is a third-rate actor who frequently pursues another calling; and the band, or orchestra between the pit and the stage, is generally spoken of as the MENAGERY. A BEN is a benefit; and SAL is the Slang abbreviation of "salary." Should no wages be forthcoming on the Saturday night, it is said that the GHOST DOESN'T WALK. The travelling or provincial theatricals, who perform in any large room that can be rented in a country village, are called BARN STORMERS. A LENGTH is forty-two lines of any dramatic composition; and a RUN is the good or bad success of a performance. A SADDLE is the additional charge made by a manager to an actor or actress upon their benefit night. To MUG UP is to paint one's face, or arrange the person to represent a particular character; to CORPSE, or to STICK, is

[54] For some account of the origin of these nicknames see under Mrs. Harris in the Dictionary.

to balk, or put the other actors out in their parts by forgetting yours. A performance is spoken of as either a GOOSER or a SCREAMER, should it be a failure or a great success; – if the latter, it is not infrequently termed a HIT. To STAR IT is to perform as the centre of attraction, with none but subordinates and indifferent actors in the same performance. The expressive term CLAP-TRAP, high-sounding nonsense, is nothing but an ancient theatrical term, and signified a TRAP to catch a CLAP by way of applause. "Up amongst the GODS," refers to being among the spectators in the gallery, – termed in French Slang PARADIS.

There exists, too, in the great territory of vulgar speech what may not inappropriately be termed *Civic Slang*. It consists of mercantile and Stock Exchange terms, and the Slang of good living and wealth. A turkey hung with sausages is facetiously styled AN ALDERMAN IN CHAINS; and a half-crown, perhaps from its rotundity, is often termed an ALDERMAN. A BEAR is a speculator on the Exchange; and a BULL, although of another order, follows a like profession. There is something very humorous and applicable in the slang term LAME DUCK, a defaulter in stock-jobbing speculations. The allusion to his "waddling out of the Alley," as they say, is excellent. Breaking shins, in City slang, is borrowing money; a rotten or unsound scheme is spoken of as FISHY; "RIGGING the market" means playing tricks with it; and STAG was a common term during the railway mania for a speculator without capital, a seller of

"scrip" in "Diddlesex Junction" and other equally safe lines. In Lombard-street a MONKEY is £500, a PLUM £100,000, and a MARYGOLD is one million sterling. But before I proceed further in a sketch of the different kinds of Slang, I cannot do better than to speak here of the extraordinary number of Cant and Slang terms in use to represent money, – from farthings to bank notes the value of fortunes. *Her Majesty's coin, collectively or in the piece, is insulted, by no less than one hundred and thirty distinct Slang words*, from the humble BROWN (a halfpenny) to FLIMSIES, or LONG-TAILED ONES (bank notes).

"Money," it has been well remarked, "the bare, simple word itself, has a sonorous, significant ring in its sound," and might have sufficed, one would have imagined, for all ordinary purposes. But a vulgar or "fast" society has thought differently, and so we have the Slang synonymes BEANS, BLUNT, (*i. e.*, specie, – not *stiff* or *rags*, bank notes), BRADS, BRASS, BUSTLE, COPPERS (copper money, or mixed pence), CHINK, CHINKERS, CHIPS, CORKS, DIBBS, DINARLY, DIMMOCK, DUST, FEATHERS, GENT (silver, – from *argent*), HADDOCK (a purse of money), HORSE NAILS, LOAVER, LOUR (the oldest Cant term for money), MOPUSSES, NEEDFUL, NOBBINGS (money collected in a hat by street performers), OCHRE (gold), PEWTER, PALM OIL, QUEEN'S PICTURES, QUIDS, RAGS (bank notes), READY, or READY GILT, REDGE (gold), RHINO, ROWDY, SHINERS (sovereigns), SKIN (a purse of money), STIFF

(paper, or bill of acceptance), STUFF, STUMPY, TIN (silver), WEDGE (silver), and YELLOW-BOYS (sovereigns); – just forty-two vulgar equivalents for the simple word *money*. So attentive is Slang speech to financial matters, that there are seven terms for bad, or "bogus" coin (as our friends, the Americans, call it): a CASE is a counterfeit five-shilling piece; HALF A CASE represents half that sum; GRAYS are halfpence made double for gambling purposes; QUEER-SOFT is counterfeit or lead coin; SCHOFEL refers to coated or spurious coin; SHEEN is bad money of any description; and SINKERS bears the same and not inappropriate meaning. Flying the kite, or obtaining money on bills and promissory notes, is a curious allusion to children tossing about a paper kite; and RAISING THE WIND is a well-known phrase for procuring money by immediate sale, pledging, or a forced loan. In winter or in summer any elderly gentleman who may have prospered in life is pronounced WARM; whilst an equivalent is immediately at hand in the phrase "his pockets are well LINED." Each separate piece of money has its own Slang term, and often half a score of synonymes. To begin with that extremely humble coin, a *farthing*: first we have FADGE, then FIDDLER, then GIG, and lastly QUARTEREEN. A *halfpenny* is a BROWN or a MADZA SALTEE (Cant), or a MAG, or a POSH, or a RAP, – whence the popular phrase, "I don't care a *rap*." The useful and universal *penny* has for Slang equivalents a COPPER, a SALTEE (Cant), and a WINN. *Two-pence* is a DEUCE, and *three-pence* is either a THRUMS or

a THRUPS. *Four-pence*, or a *groat*, may in vulgar speech he termed a BIT, a FLAG, or a JOEY. *Six-pence* is well represented in street talk, and some of the Slangisms are very comical, for instance, BANDY, BENDER, CRIPPLE, and DOWNER; then we have FYE-BUCK, HALF A HOG, KICK (thus "two and a kick," or 2s. 6d.), LORD OF THE MANOR, PIG, POT (the price of a *pot* of beer), SNID, SPRAT, SOW'S BABY, TANNER, TESTER, TIZZY, – sixteen vulgar words to one coin. *Seven-pence* being an uncommon amount has only one Slang synonyme, SETTER. The same remark applies to *eight-pence* and *nine-pence*, the former being only represented by OTTER, and the latter by the Cant phrase, NOBBA-SALTEE. *Ten-pence* is DACHA-SALTEE, and *eleven-pence* DACHA-ONE, – both Cant expressions. *One shilling* boasts ten Slang equivalents; thus we have BEONG, BOB, BREAKY-LEG, DEANER, GEN (either from *argent*, silver, or the back slang), HOG, PEG, STAG, TEVISS, and TWELVER. *Half-a-crown* is known as an ALDERMAN, HALF A BULL, HALF A TUSHEROON, and a MADZA CAROON; whilst a *crown* piece, or *five shillings*, may be called either a BULL, or a CAROON, or a CARTWHEEL, or a COACHWHEEL, or a THICK-UN, or a TUSHEROON. The next advance in Slang money is *ten shillings*, or *half-a-sovereign*, which may be either pronounced as HALF A BEAN, HALF A COUTER, a MADZA POONA, or HALF A QUID. A *sovereign*, or *twenty shillings*, is a BEAN, CANARY, COUTER, FOONT, GOLDFINCH, JAMES, POONA, QUID, a THICK-

UN, or a YELLOW-BOY. *Guineas* are nearly obsolete, yet the terms NEDS, and HALF NEDS, are still in use. Bank notes are FLIMSIES, LONG-TAILED ONES, or SOFT. A FINUF is a five-pound note. One hundred pounds (or any other "round sum") quietly handed over as payment for services performed is curiously termed "a COOL hundred." Thus ends, with several omissions, this long list of Slang terms for the coins of the realm, which for copiousness, I will engage to say, is not equalled by any other vulgar or unauthorised language in Europe.

The antiquity of many of these Slang names is remarkable. Winn was the vulgar term for a penny in the days of Queen Elizabeth; and TESTER, a sixpence (formerly a shilling), was the correct name in the days of Henry the Eighth. The reader, too, will have remarked the frequency of animals' names as Slang terms for money. Little, as a modern writer has remarked, do the persons using these phrases know of their remote and somewhat classical origin, which may, indeed, be traced to the period antecedent to that when monarchs monopolised the surface of coined money with their own image and superscriptions. They are identical with the very name of money among the early Romans, which was *pecunia*, from *pecus*, a flock. The collections of coin dealers amply show that the figure of a HOG was anciently placed on a small silver coin; and that that of a BULL decorated larger ones of the same metal. These coins were frequently deeply crossed on the reverse; this was for the convenience of easily breaking them into two or more pieces,

should the bargain for which they were employed require it, and the parties making it had no smaller change handy to complete the transaction. Thus we find that the HALF BULL of the itinerant street seller, or "traveller,"[55] so far from being a phrase of modern invention, as is generally supposed, is in point of fact referable to an era extremely remote. There are many other Cant words directly from a classic source, as will be seen in the Dictionary.

Shopkeepers' Slang is, perhaps, the most offensive of all Slang. It is not a casual eyesore, as newspaper Slang, neither is it an occasional discomfort to the ear, as in the case of some vulgar byeword of the street; but it is a perpetual nuisance, and stares you in the face on tradesmen's invoices, on labels in the shop-windows, and placards on the hoardings, in posters against the house next to your own door – if it happens to be empty for a few weeks, – and in bills thrust into your hand, as you peaceably walk through the streets. Under your doors, and down your area, Slang hand-bills are dropped by some PUSHING tradesman, and for the thousandth time you are called upon to learn that an ALARMING SACRIFICE is taking place in the next street, that prices are DOWN AGAIN, that in consequence of some other tradesman not DRIVING a ROARING TRADE, being in fact SOLD UP, and for the time being a resident in BURDON'S HOTEL (Whitecross-street Prison), the PUSHING tradesman wishes to sell out at AWFULLY LOW PRICES, "to the kind

[55] See Dictionary.

patrons, and numerous customers," &c. &c., "that have on every occasion," &c. &c. In this Slang any occupation or calling is termed a LINE, – thus the "Building-LINE." A tailor usurps to himself a good deal of Slang. Amongst operatives he is called a SNIP, or a STEEL BAR DRIVER; by the world, a NINTH PART OF A MAN; and by the young collegian, or "fast" man, a SUFFERER. If he takes army contracts, it is SANK WORK; if he is a SLOP tailor, he is a SPRINGER UP, and his garments are BLOWN TOGETHER. Perquisites with him are SPIFFS, and remnants of cloth, PEAKING. The percentage he allows to his assistants (or COUNTER JUMPERS) on the sale of old-fashioned articles, is termed TINGE. If he pays his workmen in goods, or gives them tickets upon other tradesmen, with whom he shares the profit, he is soon known as a TOMMY MASTER. If his business succeeds, it TAKES; if neglected, it becomes SHAKY, and GOES TO POT; if he is deceived by a creditor (a not by any means unusual circumstance) he is LET IN, or, as it is sometimes varied, TAKEN IN. I need scarcely remark that any credit he may give is termed TICK.

Operatives' or Workmen's Slang, in quality, is but slightly removed from tradesmen's Slang. When belonging to the same shop or factory, they GRAFT there, and are BROTHER CHIPS. They generally dine at SLAP BANG SHOPS, and are often paid at TOMMY SHOPS. At the nearest PUB, or public-house, they generally have a SCORE CHALKED UP against them, which has to be WIPED OFF regularly on the Saturday night. When

out of work, they borrow a word from the flunkey vocabulary, and describe themselves as being OUT OF COLLAR. They term each other FLINTS and DUNGS, if they are "society" or "non-society" men. Their salary is a SCREW, and to be discharged is to GET THE SACK. When they quit work, they KNOCK OFF; and when out of employ, they ask if any HANDS are wanted. Fat is the vulgar synonyme for perquisites; ELBOW-GREASE signifies labour; and SAINT MONDAY is the favourite day of the week. Names of animals figure plentifully in the workman's vocabulary; thus we have GOOSE, a tailor's smoothing iron; SHEEP'S-FOOT, an iron hammer; SOW, a receptacle for molten iron, whilst the metal poured from it is termed PIG. I have often thought that many of the Slang terms for money originally came from the workshop, thus – BRADS, from the ironmonger; CHIPS, from the carpenter; DUST, from the goldsmith; FEATHERS, from the upholsterer; HORSE NAILS, from the farrier; HADDOCK, from the fishmonger; and TANNER, from the leather-dresser. The subject is curious. Allow me to call the attention of numismatists to it.

There yet remain several distinct divisions of Slang to be examined; – the Slang of the *stable*, or *jockey* Slang; the Slang of the *prize ring*; the Slang of *servitude*, or *flunkeydom*; vulgar, or *street* Slang; the Slang of *softened oaths*; and the Slang of *intoxication*. I shall only examine the last two. If society, as has been remarked, is a sham, from the vulgar foundation of commonalty to the crowning summit of royalty, especially do

we perceive the justness of the remark in the Slang makeshifts for oaths, and sham exclamations for passion and temper. These apologies for feeling are a disgrace to our vernacular, although it is some satisfaction to know that they serve the purpose of reducing the stock of national profanity. "You BE BLOWED," or "I'll BE BLOWED IF," &c., is an exclamation often heard in the streets. Blazes, or "like BLAZES," came probably from the army. Blast, too, although in general vulgar use, may have had a like origin; so may the phrase, "I wish I may be SHOT, if," &c. Blow me tight, is a very windy and common exclamation. The same may be said of STRIKE ME LUCKY, NEVER TRUST ME, and SO HELP ME DAVY; the latter derived from the truer old phrase, I'LL TAKE MY DAVY ON'T, *i. e.*, my *affidavit*, DAVY being a corruption of that word. By golly, GOL DARN IT, and SO HELP ME BOB, are evident shams for profane oaths. Nation is but a softening of *damnation*; and OD, whether used in OD DRAT IT, or OD'S BLOOD, is but an apology for the name of the Deity. The Irish phrase, BAD SCRAN TO YER! is equivalent to wishing a person bad food. "I'm SNIGGERED if you will," and "I'm JIGGERED," are other stupid forms of mild swearing, – fearful of committing an open profanity, yet slyly nibbling at the sin. Both DEUCE and DICKENS are vulgar old synonymes for the devil; and ZOUNDS is an abbreviation of GOD'S WOUNDS, – a very ancient catholic oath.

In a casual survey of the territory of Slang, it is curious to observe how well represented are the familiar wants and

failings of life. First, there's money, with one hundred and twenty Slang terms and synonymes; then comes drink, from small beer to champagne; and next, as a very natural sequence, *intoxication*, and fuddlement generally, with some half a hundred vulgar terms, graduating the scale of drunkenness from a slight inebriation, to the soaky state of gutterdom and stretcherdom, – I pray the reader to forgive the expressions. The Slang synonymes for mild intoxication are certainly very choice, – they are BEERY, BEMUSED, BOOZY, BOSKY, BUFFY, CORNED, FOGGY, FOU, FRESH, HAZY, ELEVATED, KISKY, LUSHY, MOONY, MUGGY, MUZZY, ON, SCREWED, STEWED, TIGHT, and WINEY. A higher or more intense state of beastliness is represented by the expressions, PODGY, BEARGERED, BLUED, CUT, PRIMED, LUMPY, PLOUGHED, MUDDLED, OBFUSCATED, SWIPEY, THREE SHEETS IN THE WIND, and TOP-HEAVY. But the climax of fuddlement is only obtained when the DISGUISED individual CAN'T SEE A HOLE IN A LADDER, or when he is all MOPS AND BROOMS, or OFF HIS NUT, or with his MAIN-BRACE WELL SPLICED, or with the SUN IN HIS EYES, or when he has LAPPED THE GUTTER, and got the GRAVEL RASH, or on the RAN-TAN, or on the RE-RAW, or when he is SEWED UP, or regularly SCAMMERED, – then, and not till then, is he entitled in vulgar society to the title of LUSHINGTON, or recommended to PUT IN THE PIN.

A DICTIONARY OF MODERN SLANG, CANT, & VULGAR WORDS; MANY WITH THEIR ETYMOLOGIES TRACED

A 1, first rate, the very best; “she’s a prime girl she is; she is A 1.“ —*Sam Slick.* The highest classification of ships at Lloyd’s; common term in the United States, also at Liverpool and other English seaports. Another, even more intensitive form, is “first-class, letter A, No. 1.”

ABOUT RIGHT, “to do the thing ABOUT RIGHT,” *i. e.*, to do it properly, soundly, correctly; “he guv it ’im ABOUT RIGHT,” *i. e.*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.