

KING'S ENGLISH VS. "SLANGUAGE"

SAY, BO, LOOSEN UP AND SLIP ME AN IRON MAN. I'VE GOT TO DRAG MY FRILL TO A SHINDIG

FAT CHANCE! THAT APPLE-SAUCE IS NO GO WITH THIS WEISENHEIMER. YOU WANT TO GET PICKLED

MY WORD! WE NEVER TALKED THAT WAY IN THE DAYS OF THE GOOD QUEEN, WHAT?



Drawing by Ray Walters.

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

HERE are the slang words of yesterday? Gone, most of them, back into the vacuity from which they came, and then into oblivion. Some of them may survive for a few weeks or a few months before they disappear. A still smaller number will persist for a year or more, then find their way into new editions of our dictionaries. But they will be labeled thus: (Slang) or (colloq.), for the king's English is as conservative as the English king, referred to in that designation of our language, and no upstart word need apply for admission unless it can show some kind of ancestry to justify its breaking into Word Society. Eventually, of course, it may appear in Diction's Blue Book without the stigma of (Slang) or (Colloq.) attached to it, but the period of probation is usually a long one. And thus are new words born.

Who remembers the favorite slang words or expressions of ten years ago, or five years ago, or even a year ago? How long has it been since you told a friend to "skiddoo" or exclaimed "oh, you kid!" or declared that your plans has gone "bloody"? Or, for that matter, how recently have you retorted "So's your old man"? To say that fashions in slang change as rapidly as fashions in women's dress is an inadequate statement of the speed with which we Americans add to the bright lexicon of youth and then discard the new extravaganza as worn-out and trite.

That applies, of course, to the majority of the current slang phrases. They are the ones which can offer no etymological ancestry to justify their existence. But for such a word as cootie, which the lexicographer labels: (British soldiers' slang) and which can point back to the ancient Sanskrit "kutti," meaning "body," or to the Urdu, an obscure eastern dialect, "khuthi," meaning "scab," there is a good chance that it will become an English word in good and regular standing. The same is true of hootch, a word of Alaskan origin which came from hoochinoo, a spirituous drink made by the Indians of that territory, and savvy, which has a double ancestry, the French savoir faire, meaning ability or skill, and the Spanish sabe, meaning understand.

Why do we use slang, anyway? There are at least three good reasons, according to one scholar who has made a special study of the subject. The first is for relief from monotony, and no matter how lacking in real meaning the slang word or phrase is,

it offers a welcome change from the stale, customary words of our everyday speech. The second motive is usually humorous intent, and bits of slang which contain some element of humor have more chance to persist than others. An example is the word "flivver" which was coined less than fifteen years ago, but which seems to persist and to be gaining general acceptance as a word in common usage which leads to good usage and to eventual incorporation in the language because it is intrinsically an amusing word. The third motive for use of slang, according to this scholar, is to avoid clumsy words, and a short, one-syllable word, even though it is slangy, becomes a recognized synonym for a longer, two or three-syllable word. To many persons it is easier to say "bean," "bone" or "plunk," than to say "dollar," and to refer to a crazy person as a "nut" rather than as a "lunatic."

But slang at its best is exemplified in the coining of a new word, or the adaptation of an old one, to utter a striking, picturesque characterization, and the slang word often provides the exact shade of meaning which the more proper word would utterly fail to do. A pioneer expression for an inefficient and useless person was, "he's a do-less fellow." Modern slang has improved upon that. Could there be any more apt and to-the-point characterization of an ineffectual individual than to borrow two words from the realm of motordom and say that he is a "flat tire"? Isn't that about the ultimate in expressing the acme of uselessness?

It is traditional that American slang should be troublesome to England, the home of the mother tongue and with the increasing interchange of American and English literature and drama the English have become more and more concerned about it. An American play in London has been a failure because there was so much American slang in it, and in issuing some of our novels English publishers have found it necessary to print a glossary of American slang phrases so that English readers can understand them. This, however, leads to some amusing blunders, as witness the explanations given in the English edition of Sinclair Lewis' "Babbitt." Here the English reader is informed that "heck" in "by heck" is the "familiar for Hecuba, a New England deity," a "go-getter" is "one who pursues business or information," a "hoodlum" is a "crank," a "once-over" is a "trial," and a "freshman hop" is a "college dancing club."

But the English are valiantly trying to understand us. An English society, the "S. P. E." (Society for Preservation of English or Society for Purity of English, perhaps), has secured the services of an American professor to help them "get hep to our lingo." Prof. Fred Newton Scott of the University of Michigan, an authority on rhetoric, has compiled a dictionary of American slang phrases which has been published as "S. P. E. Tract No. XXIV" to aid English readers who are struggling with American novels. Here are the first 33 of the expressions. There are approximately 200 more, but these will give us some idea of the sort of "slanguage" which our British cousins puzzled:

- All in—exhausted.
- Applesauce—(noun or interjection). One of the latest pieces of slang in this country. It has two quite distinct meanings: (1) nonsense; and (2) flattery. It is commonly used as a term of jocular contempt in reply to effusive but unjustifiable flattery. Atsiboy (from baby-talk for "that's a boy")—fine! bravo!
- Bawled up—stalled; confused, and so unable to go on.
- Beat—spend, good time.
- Beat round—have a good time, go from place to place (in quest of pleasure).
- Bawl out—to rebuke sharply, scold violently (transitive verb).
- Bean—head.
- Beat to hit on the head.
- Beat it—go, get out!
- Beat the living tar out of—give a good drubbing to.
- Believe me (sometimes expanded to "believe you me")—take my word for it.
- Bellhop—a page in a hotel.
- That's the berries—that's just right.
- Blas. (blas)—blunder, foolish talk.
- Blab-mouth—indiscreetly loquacious person.
- Blowhard—boaster (not unknown).
- Blow in—spend.
- Blow to a dinner—give a dinner to.
- Blurb (a noun) is a term applied to any publisher's announcement, especially to passages of fulsome laudation on the jackets of newly-published books. The word is now used broadly to cover the brief summaries, analyses, and appreciations (usually in smaller type) that often precede magazine stories and articles. Admirable word, indispensable.
- Bo (from hobo)—friend, pal.
- Bone—dollar.
- Bonehead—stupid person.
- Boob—dunce, one easily misled.
- Boost—to promote, to push, to laud.
- Booster—indefatigable promoter.
- Bootlegger—one who smuggles strong drink. Now well known.
- Booze-fighter—drunkard.
- Booze-holster—drinking liquor.
- Bring home the bacon—secure results.
- Buck—oppose.
- Buck—dollar.
- Bulldoze—to compel by a show of force, to bully.

Twentieth-century word for "swelled head." A third, "The highbrow is a highly developed specimen of the genus homo, species sapiens. He is more sapiens than homo. He remembers Mark Twain's definition of cauliflower as 'cabbage with a college education' and considers himself a cauliflower in the human cabbage patch." None of which is as clever a definition as the old and oft-repeated one: "A highbrow is a person educated beyond his intellect."—Boston Transcript.

Inexpensive Art

Children should grow up familiar with the great art paintings of the world, yet one cannot often have frequent contact with the art institutes. The pictures will become more a part of the child life if they are seen every day about the home. Fine art pictures can often be cut out of magazines or prints can be purchased at a very small price and framed in artistic frames from the 10-cent store.

What is a Highbrow?

The Forum's prize definitions of a "highbrow" are rather disappointing. "A 'highbrow,' one competitor says, "is a chap who has evolved and knows about it." Another says it is the



WHAT PRICE ARMS?

An elderly negro had been hired to dust off the works of art in a southern museum. At the end of his first day he was found by the overseer very much dejected near a reproduction of the familiar statue of Venus. "What's the matter, Sam?" he asked. "Job too much for you?" "No, sah," said Sam, "but Ah hopes yo-all won't think Ah busted this monument."

DISCUSSING STYLES



Mr. Pester—Did you notice Mrs. Instyle's new coat.
Mrs. P.—Some new furbelaw, eh?
Mr. Pester—No, there was no fur below. It was all in the collar.

Misleading Adage

"You have served your country many years."
"Yes," answered Senator Sorghum. "I have figured up the advantages I have enjoyed and I have decided the man who said 'Republics are ungrateful' was one of these people who have large ideas, but don't know how to play politics."—Washington Star.

Slow

"The man who wins," she said, "is the man who is prompt in embracing an opportunity."
"Well," he whispered, after he had slipped his arm around her, "how do I strike you as a winner?"
"Only fair," she answered. "This could have happened a month ago."

Obscuration

"Your speech was rather a long affair."
"I made it so on purpose," answered Senator Sorghum. "I put in a whole lot of words, same as they do in an insurance policy, so as to make it hard to remember anything in particular."—Washington Star.

Careless Chap!

Traveler—My! But the ocean looks beautiful!
His Wife—John! Do you realize that your head is hanging out of the port-hole? You must want to get your brains knocked out!

Gracious, Yes!

Alice—Jim certainly plays the violin beautifully.
Freddie—Zat so? Why, I didn't even know he could blow one!

HER EXCUSE



"Why did you strike your husband with a rolling pin?"
"Well, you see, Judge, I wanted to try to make him level-headed."

Like an Audience

An actress was passing a shop where a score of fish lay staring with glassy eyes.
"Good gracious," she said; "that reminds me. I've got a matinee today."—Tit-Bits.

Okeh With Her

Miss Pitt—How'd you like to take a nice long walk in the park?
Caller (enthusiastically)—Oh, fine!
M. F.—Then don't let me hold you back.

Looking Forward

Irate Papa—What! You want to marry my daughter—why, you don't make enough to pay the rent!
Dumbissimo—Well, Eloise and I hadn't expected you to charge us any rent.

Court Procedure

He drew her to him. She objected. "See here," he said, "isn't this the drawing room?"
Objection withdrawn. —Capper's Weekly.

It's an all-day food SHREDDED WHEAT

For any meal, in any season Ready-cooked, easy-to-serve

A Veteran
Clerk—"That is a grandfather's clock." Customer—"Quite an old timer, isn't it?"—Good Hardware.

Signs
Madge—Helen must have been talking about me.
Marie—Why do you think so?
Madge—When I met her she kissed me twice.

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Aspirin Marked With "Bayer Cross" Has Been Proved Safe by Millions.
Warning! Unless you see the name "Bayer" on package or on tablets you are not getting the genuine Bayer Aspirin proved safe by millions and prescribed by physicians for 26 years. Say "Bayer" when you buy Aspirin. Imitations may prove dangerous.—Adv.

Spender
"Why do you never trust your wife with any money?"
"She has no sales resistance."

Just as Good
"Does your wife know the traffic rules?"
"No, but, then, she's good looking."

"DANDELION BUTTER COLOR"
A harmless vegetable butter color used by millions for 50 years. Drug stores and general stores sell bottles of "Dandelion" for 35 cents.—Adv.
In moderating, not in satisfying, desires lies peace.—Heber.

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The Fresh Thing!
Sue—Look at that silly chap over there. He's trying to flirt with you! I'd like to give him a good punch in the jaw!
Mae—So would I! That's my husband.
Habit is an every-day affair.

Long and Short
"Your new butler is quite tall, isn't he?"
"Yes, but we can't keep him long."
People who enjoy peripatetics are people that don't mind perspiration.
Old reckonings breed new disputes.



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