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SAY NOW SHIBBOLETH

A BIT OF WORDLY WISDOM

*"I will not tell you where he lived; too
much
Already has been said: it would be
spiteful.*

*Many unkind remarks are made by such
As live in places far, far less delightful.
Be this enough: it may be plainly stated,
His mind was very highly cultivated."*

While yet a small boy I was persuaded to earnest and painstaking study of language by hearing a report of a memorable examination. Some of you may have seen it:

"And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites; and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay: Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth; and he said Sibboleth; for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan."

They were purists, I take it.

Forty-and-two thousand failed to pass. The Gileadites were a strong and vigorous stock.

Their spiritual descendants still keep sleepless watch at the passes of Jordan. True, they do not now hold to the strict letter of the olden penalty for lingual error, but they observe the spirit of it. It is still so.

There will be need now for care to avoid misconstruction of the few and heartfelt ensuing remarks. Take the "shortened Italian a" for example — our old friend "å." For my single self, I like that sound. One of my earliest ambitions was to have graven upon my tombstone this epitaph: "Påss, traveler, nor åsk who lies beneath the gråss."

I do not foolishly dote upon either "ä" or its variant "å," you understand; but it seems to me that either of them is intrinsically a more pleasing sound than the flat "ǣ"—as in this same word "flat." There are many who use this "Italian a" sound naturally. Also properly. In such cases it is good hearing. But when its use — or misuse — requires visible effort by the speaker and its delivery leaves him with a startled air — makes him gâsp, in fact — the effect is spoiled. It has become a mincing affectation. And, in any case, I must and do hereby respectfully but firmly decline to consider that, if a man should ask me for a flask*, when he might say "flåsk," he is thereby branded by either moral turpitude or social impossibility. Nor will the reverse hold true. Yet we have seen the statement that "when a man speaks of a båd it may properly be inferred that he seldom

* Ammonia: for snakebite.

uses a bath."—And he said Sibboleth. And they slew him.—You hear just such inferences every day, based on similar premises.

It cannot be set forth too plainly, too early or too often, that the grievance which some of us hold against the Gileadite is not for what he says, but for the — objectionable — way he says it. He is frequently right in his contention. But wanton and offensive sneers do not precisely warm our heart to him or yet lead us to mend our ways. Just resentment for the precisian's contemptuous treatment of the erring but too often fosters a fond attachment for the error. I think these passwords will wither, most of them; not because they deserve to perish, but because their proponents, with a singular want of tact, urge them by heaping vituperation, abuse and insult upon the luckless tribesman. There is an old injunction that we must "hate the sin and not the sinner." I fear we are in danger of reversing this by hating the virtue as well as the virtuous. We are joined to our idols; let us alone.

True, it is only a small minority of educated people that exhibits this Gileaditish spirit — else we uncultivated would grease the loud tumbrel and burn the colleges forthwith. But it is a voluble minority — a minority that loves to speak of itself as "cultured." The disdain of this paroxysmal minority is not here exaggerated. It can hardly be exaggerated. Before we go on to consider some other test words, commonly propounded at the passes of Jordan, let

me prove to you that this arrogance is past exaggeration.

On my desk are three books. They are there by chance and not chosen to edge this feeble remonstrance. On the contrary, a careful second reading of them convinced me that it was high time some one rose to a point of order, like Abner Dean, of Angel's. For these books are typical of the Gileadite. If there were no more of their kind they might be attributed to personal misfortune. But there are thousands of the kind; and the kind is recklessly mischievous.

The three authors are scholars and gentlemen of repute — one, at least, a name of nation-wide distinction. The books, one and all, are full of valuable and interesting matter, ably set forth; one and all, they are marred by unbelievable narrowness, by malignant rancor, by a haughty intolerance — not only for verbal error, be it marked, but for any usage differing from their own and for any mode of life not conforming to their habits. One book deals with English, severely; one with Words; and the third is a Life of Lincoln. Let us now take a worm's-eye view of the Essays on English, by the chiefest among these three.

You are at once struck by the frequent recurrence of "this sort of person" — our sort — and "enlightened" — his sort; in fact, he writes "Enlightened" with a capital after he gets well warmed to his work; "The Enlightened," who have a "sixth sense . . . and that sublimated

taste which makes of its possessors a very special class."

"This sort of person is almost as low as the one . . . with whom men and women are always ladies and gentlemen." He explains about ladies and gentlemen, then, adding naively that these are matters that "the unenlightened will not understand, even after they have been explained." So there's no need of puzzling our poor heads over it. There is one phrase that seems pretty plain, however: "Whereas, if a man says that he was lunching with a 'woman,' there is a dangerous little implication which could not exist did he use the word 'lady' instead."

There is another little implication that might be made; but let it pass. I must say, however, that some of us judge a man by his character as much as by his words; and when a man's character cannot stand the strain of lunching with a "woman," he is in a parlous state.

He has tolerant spells, however. "The slang of the clubs and of university men is also quite consistent with good taste." It may be mentioned — but perhaps you have already guessed it — that he is notably a university man and a clubman.

Just so. The metaphorical use of the phrases "to cross swords" and "to parry a thrust" are elegant, reminiscent of the days when homicide was a fashionable recreation. But the metaphorical use of "bed-rock," "rolling-hitch," "cinch" and "balance" carry with them low

suggestions — of work. I do not wish to misrepresent our author or to garble his words. So I hasten to state that the distinctions made in this paragraph are quoted from another writer and that our own author may not approve of them. Judge for yourself.

Here is a little extract in his happiest manner — and by this foot you may know Hercules.

“A slight provincial touch is given by the frequent use of ‘minister’ instead of ‘clergyman,’ and when one refers to a clergyman as a ‘preacher,’ the case is hopeless.” Nothing provincial about that, is there? Yet if one, hearing this single sentence and having no knowledge of the author save that sentence, could not go to the ten-acre map in the Pennsylvania Station and put his unhesitating finger within one inch of that author’s home, one’s case would then be hopeless indeed.

“There is another provincial usage out of which it is to be hoped the American people will, in the course of time, be educated.”— Did you get that? The usage of the American people is provincial; the use of an insular or peninsular corner of America is not provincial. The part is greater than the whole.—“They”— newspaper men —“spoke of his wife, of course, as ‘Mrs. McKinley,’ but they always mentioned his aged mother as ‘Mother McKinley.’ This was provincial and disgusting to a degree; and it is surprising that no one ever reverted to the dignified New England usage, which would have mentioned the dowager as ‘Madam McKinley.’”

There! He told you himself! I was afraid he would. Anyhow, I didn't tell. And we have gained one advantage. After this, we can have no doubt as to the exact meaning of the word "provincial." Anything is "provincial" that does not conform to New England usage. We have it from his own mouth. We are on firm ground now.

"I should hardly have thought it necessary to recall this detestable bit of social ignorance," he proceeds, "had not President McKinley himself been guilty of it during a journey of his through the South. . . . Now this form of speech is not only crude and wholly alien to the little touches which give distinction, but its mental suggestions are unpleasant, since it is a form of speech that suggests Mother Goose and Mother Bunch, and brings to mind some wrinkled, blear-eyed beldam — a wizened crone, a raucous hag."

These be wild and whirling words, my masters! It doesn't matter so much about us. You and I are no better than we should be, and our shoulders are broad. But Uncle John, and Aunt Mary, and Mother Anderson, who helped us when little Jimmie died — to have them and their speech held up to contempt and derision — it hurts, I tell you! It rankles. They were kind and good and loving; they are not "disgusting" to our memories. Nor is Mother Goose, for that matter.

If it is not long since clear that I, now remonstrating, am but a rude, crude, rough, low and brutal person, unmistakably plebeian — just

a plain, provincial American of no sublimated, very special caste — the fact is now expressly declared. I will also here state and proclaim that, if any healthy and sane he-Gileadite, between the ages of twenty and fifty, not more than ten pounds lighter or over forty pounds heavier than myself, shall, in my presence, venture to direct his insolence at these kindly, dim-eyed Ephraimite kindred of mine, I'm going to hit him once. That's the sort of person I am. If I subsequently have to say "Good Mawnin', judge!" or "Doctor, how long do you s'pose it'll be before I can get around again?" — why, I'll try to say it cheerfully.

Yes, sir. Not going to make any little declamation before I rebuke him, either. Folks that use that kind of wit should expect fitting repartee. He may strut and swell all he wants to, he may abuse me as long as it amuses him; but those "blear eyes" are faded with tears, those wrinkles are scars of Armageddon fight: he must teach his tongue to speak respectfully of them, or teach his hands to keep his head. It doesn't matter about the rest of us. Curiously enough, however much a person of this sort looks down on us, we never look up to him; it doesn't occur to us.

"Mother" called out all his rancor. Here is some more about it. Mr. McKinley said "mother" himself — "Mother" Hobson. "And when Mr. McKinley adopted it, it was so out of keeping . . . as to resemble the speech of one whose evenings in early youth were spent in some small, backwoods country 'store,' in the society

of those who pendulously dangle their loutish legs over the sides of an empty cracker barrel.”

Let us get back to earth. It may be well to remember that in just such a small country store Abraham Lincoln was wont to pendulously dangle his loutish legs; and that the work well done for their country and for all humanity by those who, in their early youth so dangled — pendulously dangled — their loutish legs in just such detestable places, so far outweighs anything done by dilettante, pendulously dangling their loutish legs from easy chairs in any club or any university, that none — not even themselves — have ever felt the necessity of comparison.

By-the-way, how could one dangle his or her loutish legs except pendulously? I have pendulously dangled my loutish legs frequently, both from easy chairs and cracker barrels, empty or full — full cracker barrels, I mean — in large stores and small; but never, to my knowledge, have I dangled my loutish legs like a steeple, for instance, or a yardarm, or a nebular hypothesis. I must try it, sometime. Always to dangle one’s loutish legs pendulously shows deplorable lack of initiative.

This saddens one. It is enough to sadden a dozen. If the net result of a college education is to have erected, by the toil of years, and possibly by the self-denial of one’s father and mother — of one’s paternal and maternal ancestors — a tall, giddy and tolerably useless pedestal, whereon one is to sit for the remainder of one’s life in close observation of one’s personal

pulehritude, like an introspective bronze Buddha, then, if sending our boys to college leads to such self-loving attitude, in Heaven's name let's not send 'em! No — that would be a cowardly evasion. Foolish, too, remembering the millions of kindly folk who remain kindly, fair-minded, considerate and just, though educated. Rather let us club together, we rough men, to endow in every school Chairs of Common Sense and of The Relative Proportion of Things — and get the best men to fill them.

The junior editor, reading this MS. as he dangles his loutish legs from the window-seat, says that I am all wrong; that the critic doesn't object to the word "mother," save as applied to dowagers, in lieu of "madam." But I maintain that there is not and never can be anything "disgusting" in any use of the word mother; that it is the noblest and sweetest word in the language. "Mother is growing old," says a man of his wife; or, to her, "Mother, how long is it since Charley Hilman went West?" So misused, the word is the final endearment.

It is even conceivable that a general — a general who protected his soldiers against embalmed meats and pasteboard shoes and their own weakness, for example — might be called "mother" by campfires; just as certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, who stood with Thomas at Chicamauga, spoke of that gallant soldier as "Pap" Thomas. You would infer, in such a case, that "mother" was a symbol of trust and affection —

not of disgust or belittlement. But, if the general were called "Madam" . . . ?

"A person who addresses a physician affably as 'Doc,' and who . . . will speak of him as being 'raised' in such-and-such a place — this is the sort of person who also . . . wears a celluloid collar and eats peas with a knife."

Missed me that time! I never eat peas. But, if a man who wears celluloid collars addresses a physician affably as "Doc," what would a man who wears a flannel shirt be affably apt to call him? Sawbones, maybe. Yet the best-loved man of this generation said, as he lay dying: "Pull up the curtain, Doc; I'm afraid to go home in the dark."

"The unenlightened"—(and uncapitalized)—"person . . . may use the expression 'Between you and I,' just as he may, if he is very benighted, say 'You was.' These slips are to be expected from those . . . who describe a housemaid as 'the girl,' which is, of course, not quite so bad as to speak of her as 'the help,' but is, nevertheless, the linguistic earmark of a class — the class that splits its infinitives and thinks that Fonetik Refawm is scholarly." This is respectfully referred to the Fonetik Refawmers, with the query whether a "help" is really a housemaid unless she wears a cap as a sort of badge of servility.

"The enlightened person may, however, speak of 'those sort of things'." Here follows a list of things that an enlightened person may say, end-

ing with: "when very colloquial indeed, 'It is me!'" I judge that he does these permissible things himself, maybe.

"A vulgarism, '-hä-ouse-' which, when they use it in the presence of a cultivated Englishman, ranks them at once in his mind with the caddish and the ignorant." Caddishness and ignorance are one and inseparable, it seems. We had not known this.

"Persons of this sort present as pathetic a spectacle to the Enlightened as do those who, in employing the broad "a" because it is so English, introduce it ignorantly into words where the English never use it; saying, for example, 'fawncy' for 'fancy,' in which the educated Englishman always sounds the "a" as flatly as any Philadelphian." Philadelphia is provincial, you see. Pretty much all the United States is provincial, south and west of a given point. As you now note, that point is north of Philadelphia. My own idea is that the given point lies somewhere between Stepleton and St. George — or at the Statue of Liberty, maybe. That would be a good place to fix it. Even so, there would be many unrefined people within the pale.

"To receive a letter containing such words as 'Xmas,' 'tho,' 'photo' and 'rec'd' affects one"—It affects one very badly indeed. I spare you the unpleasant details. Such letters "are usually written by the sort of men who sign their names in such abbreviated forms as 'Geo.,' 'Wm.,' 'Chas.,' 'Jas.' and 'Jno.'"

This is the method of Lady Grove, to quote

Mr. Chesterton: "To terrify people from doing quite harmless things by telling them that if they do they are the kind of people who would do other things, equally harmless."

Let us look into this. I find, from the volume nearest at hand — and I mean by that the first and only work consulted — that of the fifty-five who pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor to the Declaration of Independence, no less than thirty signed with just such atrocious and detestable contractions. That is the sort of persons they were. Jefferson signed "Th.," Franklin wrote it "Benja." Of the Constitution framers, the immortal Geo. did not even stop at Geo. He signed it "Go." — just like that! Seventeen of the thirty-nine followed his noxious example by other low abbreviations. One even stooped to "Dan'l."

We are reminded of the devil demanding credentials from Tomlinson — and that is another pathetic spectacle:

" 'You have read, you have heard, you have thought,' quoth he.
'God's mercy! what ha' y' done!'"

You see plainly, Jas., that our author was trying to impose upon us merely his personal preference about "Wm." and "Chas." It is not a matter of good taste or poor taste; it is only a matter of his taste or your taste. It is not always so easy to see that such is the case as in this instance; but that is about what he aims at all along. Even when he is right, his ferocity

defeats his purpose — if his purpose were indeed to better our speech, which is hereby doubted. Take this paper, for instance — which might have been the most limpid Addisonian English, had it not been — were it not — only he got me all roiled up.

Another little footprint. He says:

“I have always felt a genuine admiration for those among my correspondents who write everything out in full; as, for example, ‘January the twenty-eighth’, ‘Seven hundred and sixty-three, Albemarle Avenue,’ and so on. There is a certain aristocratic suggestion of leisure about this sort of thing that appeals to me and that is thoroughly consistent.”

You see? Nobility and gentry — that sort of thing. People of leisure, uncontaminated by work.

I don't think I am unfair to this man. This book of his — which might otherwise have been valuable — is stained throughout by like narrowness and intolerance. /

Here is a bit of unconscious autobiography:

“But who among us would not be willing to spend three hours a day in dining properly *chez Voisin*, rather than to save two hours and fifty-five minutes of that time by furtively gobbling a plate of corned-beef hash in a John Street beanery?”

He spells it out in full, you notice — even John Street. There is a certain air of aristocratic leisure about this sort of thing that appeals to one — doesn't it? John Street, I gather, is a

very low place indeed. People work there, possibly. Don't turn away, Wm. . . . Look me in the eye. I trust you have never furtively gobbled a plate of corned-beef hash in a Jno. St. beanery. I never have. But I will. If ever I find out where Jno. St. is — information is hereby requested — I will hie me to a beanery, pendulously dangle my loutish legs from a stool, and furtively gobble a plate of corned-beef hash. Just to preserve my self-respect. I do not like corned-beef hash.

“Very likely there are members of the American Philological Association who habitually eat peas with their knives and perhaps drink out of finger bowls; but their example will hardly result in the establishment of a new social canon.”

You mustn't cross him; he was raised a pet. He does not wait to find out your name, your station, your dwelling place or your destination — or even if you are a real person. A purely supposititious person who supposititiously fails to agree with his notions on any subject, however unimportant, is at once questioned as to motives, breeding, morals, family and color, and becomes the target for the cheap and easy satire which belittles its object less than it degrades the user; and that displays precisely so much wit as is shown withal by pressing the tip of one's thumb to the tip of one's nose and wiggling one's derisive fingers with a certain aristocratic suggestion of leisure.

He doesn't like this Philological Association.

On questions of taste, he says, it is "entitled to speak with no more weight than the Ancient Order of Hibernians or the Knights of Labor." To prove it he tells this anecdote;

"Some time ago one of our most distinguished classical professors was asked why he never attended the meetings of the American Philological Association; and he replied, with an air of unutterable boredom: 'Oh, because, if I go, I shall have to meet so many persons who wear black trousers!'"

This is conclusive. We may now pass on to settle other vexed subjects.

"I used to open it and put it aside under the impression that it was a publication in the Magyar or Polish or Czechish tongue, brought out for the benefit of those interesting aliens who inhabit that portion of the country; and who, when they are not engaged in organizing strikes, amuse themselves by assassinating one another—a most laudable occupation, in which I am sure no judicious person would ever be anxious to discourage them."

It was *not* a publication in any of these tongues, mind you. That was merely his impression. He was not discussing Magyars, Poles or Czechs. He was discussing simplified spelling. But he was not one to let his light be hidden under a bushel. Accordingly he abandoned his discourse to give us his profound and well-considered views on those aliens and upon the labor question.

And yet, Thos., there are times when I realize

how this sort of person feels, and sympathize with him. There is a Spanish adjective, "bronco," meaning rough, coarse, crusty, crabbed, rude—and also hoarse, harsh to the ear. On the English tongue it becomes a noun, meaning a horse; a rough, coarse, crusty, crabbed, rude and boisterous horse—a horse of no refinement. And there is a sort of person who spells it "broncho". There are some ninety-nine millions of such persons in this country alone. Probably the secondary meaning of the word, of hoarse or harsh, deceived them. They seem to think that a bronco is a horse afflicted with bronchitis, hay fever, or pth—oh, well, asthma, then. It is very annoying to me that this obstinate, unreasonable ninety-nine million will persist in this provincial and disgusting usage, instead of conforming to the New Mexican standard. I do not hesitate to infer, believe and affirm that this sort of person eats peas with his knife; wears a celluloid collar and black trousers; is guilty of perjury, piracy on the high seas, bribery and corruption; does not write out his name, date and address in full; beats the hotels and his wife; tips his glass but not the waiter; gambles, wins; quotes Mother Goose; pendulously dangles his legs and furtively gobbles a plate of corned-beef hash in a John Street beanery—and works, maybe!

If one turns one's eyes from the Astors and the little asteroids to consider carefully in what desert corner of the universe our petty provincial system wanders darkling on the dim

frontier of chaos, a fleeting spark for one brief split-second of Eternity — one would hardly think it worth one's while to be such an insufferable, unmitigated, complicated and complacent ass as I am about that "bronco" word — would one? For consider, that in the worlds beyond Aldebaran and Antares they may not use the word bronco at all. Or madam, either.

The book on Words is written in a more tolerant spirit. It is fair to believe that the writer's honest purpose was to help his readers to better usage. But inherent superiority cannot be completely suppressed. It peeps out: "Abominable;" "execrable;" "ignoramus;" "no one but a low fellow will say that;" "a vulgar colloquialism befitting a clodhopper."

A clodhopper is one who hops clods — in plowing. The term seems to be a euphemism for "farmer." That he who hops a clod is necessarily a low and despicable fellow is, for many, not the least of those truths which they hold to be self-evident. I think the inference is hasty. I think that never to have hopped a clod is but a negative virtue at best. I have known men who hopped clods with nimbleness and precision, but who, nevertheless, were estimable men, who personally knew what their own thoughts and opinions were without consulting the authorities or looking in the morning paper.

His instruction is right in the main, but he slips sometimes. "View-point is the correct and elegant expression, unless we would countenance such vulgar words as washtub, cookstove

and the like." He does not give us the elegant word for washtub. I wish he had supplied it. I would like to get one.

"The masses. This expression is thought by some to be as vulgar as the object it describes."

Let us pass over the implausibility of such reference to some one hundred and nine and a half millions — some say more — of our people, as "the object," or even "objects." For a question arises in our minds — if an object may be said to have a mind — whether this wholesale scorn is not at least as disrespectful to the Creator of that object, or objects, as to the object, or objects, which He created? Either this sweeping disdain is unjustified or He erred in not calling expert advice before creating this object, or objects. He might have heard of something to His advantage.

On the whole, I believe "objects" is the better word. It seems to concede to us a certain amount of personal identity.

Paste this in your hat, please. "Vulgar" means "of or pertaining to the mass or multitude of the people: common, general, ordinary, public; hence, in general use: vernacular." The evil meaning attached to the word has been forced upon it by such scornful patricians as have felt it needful systematically to advise the world that *they* were not common or ordinary. That a word or a man is vulgar is no more proof that such word or man is vile than that a vulgar fraction is vile. A vulgar man may be objectionable — but not because he is one of a

multitude of people. That is not a criminal matter. It is not even a matter for sorrow. When you meet a man overgiven to the use of "vulgar," in its deprecating sense, shun him. He is a Gileadite; he will slay you. If it is not feasible to avoid him, at least let him do all the talking. Keep your mouth shut. You are safe then — unless you wear black trousers.

"He married his wife in Honoulu. Well, such a man is only fit to live on some far sea-island." Far from — er — where? I wonder. What has the place where a man lives to do with his fitness? Where is the moral Meridian of Greenwich? Honolulu is no farther away from any place whatever — *and I make no exceptions* — than any place whatever is from Honolulu. I say it deliberately; and I will maintain it with my life. I seem to have a dim remembrance of a parable wherein it is said: "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." But the Giver of that parable lived in a far land Himself.

Surely this is literalism gone mad. To "marry" originally meant to take a husband; true. It means to wed, now — and has meant just that any time these four centuries. There is no such thing as the "sanctity" of language: a word means what it means, not what is once meant or what it might mean. So cruelly to exile a man, or even a person, for using a word in its universally accepted sense throws a strong sidelight on the animus of the hyper-critic. True, in the strictest literal sense a man who

marries a wife thereby assists her to commit bigamy. A bride is not a wife until she is married. Theoretically, a man marries a maid, widow or divorcee; in practice we may say "he marries a wife" just as we say "he takes a wife." "Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan." No misunderstanding results. It seems hard to be consigned to outer darkness for using a term so convenient and so unambiguous.

The *Life of Lincoln*, which we now take up, is in many respects a valuable work. Its usefulness is heavily discounted by the opening pages, which are given to indiscriminating attack upon the threefold nature of the early settlers of Illinois and Indiana. The author imputes to them the lowest motives; he puts the worst possible construction on their every act. Lincoln himself does not escape rough handling; and as for his family, they are pursued with fire and sword — no city of refuge avails them.

That the pioneers built log huts before building palaces is a shameful thing; the forest was their personal misdemeanor; the privations of the foregoer are his reproach. Decency, cleanliness, morality, truthfulness, honor, common honesty, the author denies to them, directly or by implication. Indeed, of all possible virtues he grants them only two: "an ignoble physical courage" and "a sort of bastard contempt for hardship." These are his prudent words. For myself, I think that sort of bastard contempt for hardship would do nearly as well in a pinch as

a legitimate contempt for hardship, with a church register rampant tattooed on its torso. Honestly, don't you think he went out of his way to be offensive?

What sticks in his gizzard most, however, was that these men were migratory. He doesn't approve of that. He rings all the changes on this theme: "restless;" "shiftless vagrants;" "the natural idler;" "nomads;" "rovers;" "waifs and strays from civilized communities;" "adventurers," forever "moving on." He intimates pretty strongly that they "moved on" to avoid paying their debts. He does not explain how they could have settled the West if they had stayed at home. He evidently thinks they might have been better employed. It is a pity. He blames them severely. "Wretched;" "brutal;" "squalid;" "frontier ruffians of the familiar type;" "uncouth;" "coarse;" "vulgarity;" "utter lack of barriers establishing strata of society"—these are but a few expressions culled from a dozen pages.

I want to do a little inferring now. I feel that I have a right to infer a little. My inference is that this author has lived too long among the noble oaks and the solid citizens, many of whom have never left their native parish, that he has acquired a wrong notion of this matter. I do not know his birthplace. I do not here hazard a guess. But I think I could find him if I had to.

There! I have done the man an injustice. He *does* credit these people with another virtue—a notable one. He says: "Finding life hard,

they helped each other with a general kindness which is impracticable among the complexities of elaborate social organizations."

We have noticed that. Our sort of objects seldom receive help or kindness from really cultured people — or politeness, either. They invite us to say Shibboleth, generally. Then they slay us.

The question naturally arises: Is a stratified society that finds kindness and helpfulness impracticable, really superior to a society in which kindness and helpfulness are spontaneous and inevitable? (Cries of "Good!" "Good!")

"Troughs served for washtubs when washtubs were used." Exactly. It is difficult to imagine troughs serving for washtubs when washtubs were not used. That would have been a useless extravagance — as he would realize if he had ever hollowed out a log with an adze. But perhaps he meant that they did not wash their clothes. On examination, it is likely that such was indeed his meaning. People living so far away commonly do not wash their clothes. That is well known.

"If a woman wanted a looking-glass she scoured a tin pan, but the temptation to inspect one's self must have been feeble."

I think it is your turn to infer a little while, Thos. If, speaking of these thousands of brave dead women, he could not keep his puny malice from this bitterest sneer, how much mercy do you think he showed the men? He had never seen these women, remember. And they are dead

now. To be so ugly that the temptation to inspect one's self was feeble — and one a woman, mind you! — that is abnormal. It crushes one. Desecration can no further go.

They were our grandmothers, Thos; we hold that they were brave and pure and fair; their sons saved this nation. Let no one dream that we are gratified at this wanton insult. We will not say his grandam was but withered. It would not be the speech of a gentleman. And we do not know. Let us confine ourselves to the facts and to the living. We will say of him that he is the sort of person who would say that sort of thing. That squares it up, I fancy.

For myself, I deem and say that this stock was as good as any that ever came over in the Mayflower, loaded mast-high with Chippendale and Sheraton — well, furniture, anyhow. Maybe it was Cloisonné and Valenciennes. I don't really know about furniture. Chippendale and Sheraton are lovely words, so I used them.

The trouble with this sort of people is that they are that sort of people. They are puffed up with vainglory and presumption. A little astonished at themselves, too. They ignore the fact that language is a tool, made by those who use it — made by that use — and that it changes. They make no allowance for the growth of idiom, or for the modifications of a living tongue. Language is changed by modifying — never otherwise. Like other man-made instruments, language was at first more complicated than was needful. We have outgrown most of the cum-

brous and clumsy inflections now; we are simplifying the spelling in our slow, easy-going way, and have been simplifying it for centuries: I think we shall simplify our pronunciation in time. The Greeks, when two letters came together in a word to make an ugly sound, systematically changed or dropped one of them to make a smooth and flowing sound. They had a beautiful and sonorous word for this euphonic process, too. I wish I could remember it. It is a bully word. Never mind — we are going to do the same thing. We are doing it. The dictionaries haven't caught up with us yet — that's all.

Cultured people give the words oil, noise and boy, as ô-îl, nô-îse and bô-î, with a fur-lined mouth and the accent on the first sound — not exactly in two syllables, but, say, a syllable and a half; ice, mine and by are rendered ä-ěéce, mä-ěéne, bä-ěé, with a pinched nose; the more carefully sheltered of them pronounce out, bound and now as thus: ä-ōōt, bä-ōōnd, nä-ōō, with the lips closed — accent as above.

I think these elaborate pronunciations will die out after a while — not because they are not proper but because it is not convenient to frame to utter them. The last has now but few devoted adherents.

The next to go, as I judge, will be the Norman “u” — except as an initial sound and in some of the easier combinations. We can all pronounce “amusing” rightly enough. Lute, except as “loot,” is too hard for us. This is a

relic of the attempt to foist Norman-French upon England. The old aristocratic flavor still clings to it. Duke, lute, new, as *dī-ōōk*, *lī-ōōt*, *nī-ōōw*, serve as social insignia, verbal strawberry leaves. But the most enthusiastic practitioners of this admirable sound find it a difficult accomplishment. It will have to go, I think. We, the Ephraimites, the masses, the bourgeoisie, *hoi polloi*, the plebeians — the workers, in fact — desire it. We cannot frame to utter these distinguished words.— Good word that, bourgeoisie — eh? A bit difficult to frame it, however. A bourgeois, I gather, is one who supports himself by his own exertions and doesn't put on airs.

When a person approaches you with one of these linguistic feats, observe him closely. If he is pale, breathless, astonished, shun him. It is fair to say that many excellent people use any or all of these sounds — naturally, unconsciously and without consternation. This warning — and these comments — are not for them.

Fictionists will lose a valuable asset when the Norman "u" sound is abandoned. It is an old standby. You seldom read a story by a young writer without hitting upon "literachoor" or "literatoor." The thing interests him and he has but lately learned how one in his station in life should pronounce the word. "Brootal," too. Brootal seldom fails to win a smile. "Noo York" is another mirthmaker. And there is unfailling merriment in "calling" the midday meal "dinner."

Some novelists and story-tellers are offensive in their dialect writing. Others use precisely the same phonetics without hurting any one. It depends upon the spirit in which the spelling is done. If the context is marked by haughty superiority, pride, disdain, arrogance and contempt, it is probable that no kindness is meant by the dialect. James Whitcomb Riley has grieved no Indiana heart by his loving mockery.

(Just a word of digression, boys and girls of literatoor: When your illiterate writes a letter, and you print it in your text, please do not permit him to keep up that dialect in that letter with a proper apostrophe in each fitting place. It isn't consistent; it isn't sensible; it isn't artistic. It is a blemish. We've all seen this done — too often. Manage to have him misspell without his own knowledge of it — surreptitiously, as it were).

We'll skip three or four French and German sounds, produced by holding the vocal organs rigidly in position for the sound of one letter and then trying to give the sound of some other letter — not any other letter, you understand; some particular letter. The resultant disaster will be the required sound — perhaps. Let us hurry on.

There are place-Shibboleths over which there is much ink shed. Such a word is "gallery." Why is "gallery" taboo? It is of good and direct lineage, French and Spanish; brought here by French and Spanish settlers in Louisi-

ana. Why are porch, portico, piazza and the Dutch "stoop" admitted, while "gallery" is so rigorously barred? Answer: It is the "favor of makers." It is because New Orleans has produced few lexicographers.

One more, and we are done. "Creek" is, I believe, pronounced "creak" in lexicographer-land. I am entirely willing to pronounce it that way. Most of our millions, however, pronounce it "crik." That does not prove that this is a better way to pronounce it; it only proves that it is pronounced that way. Also, that it will probably continue to be pronounced that way. "Been" was once pronounced "bean". It is not, now, Why? Because the dictionaries changed? I rede you, Nay. The dictionaries changed, for that a perverse and stiff-necked generation provincially pronounced it "bin" — because they wanted to, maybe; or perhaps because it is a little easier to say. That is a way dictionaries have. A dictionary does not create; it records. It is not a master; it is a tool. When we seriously decide that we want to have a tool changed, we change that tool.

So let us not be unduly hurt or angered by these continual little slurs and slings at our manners and our hopes and our people, Thos. Tonight, as we furtively gobble our plates of corned-beef hash, let us laugh over it. We have had our little say; we are just a trifle sheepish over our own blatant vindictiveness — a little ashamed of the childish perversity with which we cling to our sins.

We can afford to smile. The future is ours — yes, and the present, too. “The real language of a people is the spoken word, not the written.” We can forgive even the Gileadite, if he will only show a little respect for helpless age and for the dead. For us — the living — let him scold. Poor fellow, he is beaten. He is conscious, too, that his class has never done that part of the world’s work for which it has been fitted by its splendid opportunities. His class has been too much engrossed hitherto. But I think it will do its part, and do it nobly, sometime. I think that time is drawing near. Heaven speed the day!

Have I any “constructive program?” I have; a simple one — not, I think, unreasonable; but it is not new. When pointing out to us our verbal faults, our teachers are under no bond to make and publish morose inferences as to our complexion, age, clothes, weight, height, disposition or ultimate destination. In noteworthy books dealing with the subject—and they are needed, for our errors are *not* right and our deficiencies are *not* accomplishments — you may find such phrases as these: This term is better than that one; This word is incorrect; That is not the preferred usage; Avoid this error. And for more emphasis: This blunder is only too common, but it cannot be justified; This usage is indefensible—care should be taken to avoid it. The authors of such books make no mention of our vices, our sins, our crimes, our bad manners or our clothes — judging, possibly,

that we are sufficiently informed on those subjects. They confine themselves to the use or misuse of words and leave us to adjust those other matters with our God and our tailor.

KING CHARLES'S HEAD

. . . . Beyond was a wide valley of cleared and irrigated farm lands. This was Garfield settlement.

You remember Mr. Dick, and how he could not keep King Charles's head out of his Memorial? A like unhappiness is mine. When I remember that pleasant settlement as it really was, cheerful and busy and merry, I am forced to think how gleefully the super-sophisticated Sons of Light would fall afoul of these friendly folk — how they would pounce upon them with jeering laughter, scoff at their simple joys and fears; set down, with heavy and hateful satisfaction, every lack and longing; flout at each brave makeshift, such as Little Miss Brag crowded over, jubilant, when she pointed with pride:

*For little Miss Brag, she lays much stress
On the privileges of a gingham dress —
A-ha-a! O-ho-o!*

A lump comes to my throat, remembering; now my way is plain; if I would not be incomparably base, I must speak up for my own people. Now, like Mr. Dick, I must fly my kite, with these scraps and tags of Memorial. The string is long, and if the kite flies high it

may take the facts a long way; the winds must bear them as they will.

Consider now the spreading gospel of despair, and marvel at the power of words — noises in the air, marks upon paper. Let us wonder to see how little wit is needed to twist and distort truth that it may set forth a lie. A tumblebug zest, a nose pinched to sneering, a slurring tongue — with no more equipment you and I could draw a picture of Garfield as it is done in the fashion of to-day.

Be blind and deaf to help and hope, gay courage, hardship nobly borne; appeal to envy, greed, covetousness; belaud extravagance and luxury; magnify every drawback; exclaim at rude homes, simple dress, plain food, manners not copied from imitators of Europe's idlesse; use ever the mean and mocking word — how easy to belittle! Behold Garfield — barbarous, uncouth, dreary, desolate, savage and forlorn; there misery kennels, huddled between jungle and moaning waste; there, lout and boor couch in their wretched hovels! We have left out little; only the peace of mighty mountains far and splendid, a gallant sun and the illimitable sky, tingling and eager life, and the invincible spirit of man.

Such picture as this of Garfield *comme il faut* is, I humbly conceive, what a great man, who trod earth bravely, had in mind when he wondered at "the spectral unreality of realistic books." It is what he forswore in his up-summing: "And

the true realism is . . . to find out where joy resides and give it a voice beyond singing."

This trouble about Charles the First and our head . . . it started in 1645, I think—needs looking into.

There are circles where "adventurer" is a term of reproach, where "romance" is made synonym for a lie, and a silly lie at that. Curious! The very kernel and meaning of romance is the overcoming of difficulties or a manly constancy of striving; a strong play pushed home or defeat well borne. And it would be hard to find a man but found his own life a breathless adventure, brief and hard, with ups and downs enough, striving through all defeats.

Interesting, if true. But can we prove this? Certainly; by trying. Mr. Dick sets us all right. Put any man to talk of what he knows best—corn, coal or lumber—and hear matters throbbing with the entrancing interest born only of first-hand knowledge. Our pessimists "suspect nothing but what they do not understand, and they suspect everything"—as was said of the commission set to judge the regicides who cut off the head of Charles the Martyr—whom I may have mentioned, perhaps.

Let the dullest man tell of the thing he knows at first hand, and his speech shall tingle with battle and luck and loss, purr for small comforts of cakes and ale or sound the bell note of clean mirth; his voice shall exult with pride of work, tingle and tense to speak of hard-won steeps, the

burden and heat of the day and "the bright face of danger;" it shall be soft as quiet water to tell of shadows where winds loiter, of moon magic and far-off suns, friendship and fire and song. There will be more, too, which he may not say, having no words. We prate of little things, each to each; but we fall silent before love and death.

It was once commonly understood that it is not good for a man to whine. Only of late has it been discovered that a thinker is superficial and shallow unless he whines; that no man is wise unless he views with alarm. Eager propaganda has disseminated the glad news that everything is going to the demnition bowwows. Willing hands pass on the words. The method is simple. They write long books in which they set down the evil on the one side — and nothing on the other. That is "realism." Whatsoever things are false, whatsoever things are dishonest, whatsoever things are unjust, whatsoever things are of ill report; if there be any vice, and if there be any shame — they think on these things. They gloat upon these things; they wallow in these things.

The next time you hanker for a gripping, stinging, roaring romance, try the story of Ed-dystone Lighthouse. There wasn't a realist on the job — they couldn't stand the gaff. For any tough lay like this of Winstanley's dream you want a gang of idealists — the impractical kind. It is not a dismal story; it is a long record of trouble, delay, setbacks, exposure, hardship,

death and danger, failure, humiliation, jeers, disaster and ruin. Crippled idealists were common in Plymouth harbor. The sea and the wind mocked their labor; they were crushed, frozen and drowned; but they built Eddystone Light! And men in other harbors took heart again to build great lights against night and storm; the world over, realists fare safelier on the sea for Winstanley's dream.

There is the great distinction between realism and reality: It is the business of a realist to preach how man is mastered by circumstances; it is the business of a man to prove that he will be damned first.

You may note this curious fact of dismal books — that you remember no passage to quote to your friends. Not one. And you perceive, with lively astonishment, that despairing books are written by the fortunate. The homespun are not so easily discouraged. When crows pull up their corn they do not quarrel with Creation. They comment on the crows, and plant more corn.

This trouble in King Charles' head may be explained, in part, on a closer looking. As for those who announce the bankruptcy of an insolvent and wildcat universe, with no extradition, and who proclaim God the Great Absconder — they are mostly of the emerged tenth. Their lips do curl with scorn; and what they scorn most is work — and doers. For what they deign to praise — observe sir, for yourself, what they uphold, directly or by implication. See if it

be not a thing compact of graces possible only to idleness. See if it be not their great and fatal mistake that they regard culture as an end in itself, and not as a means for service. Aristocracy? Patricians? In a world which has known the tinker of Bedford, the druggist's clerk of Edmonton, the Stratford poacher, backwoods Lincoln, a thousand others, and ten thousand — a carpenter's son among them?

Returning to the Provisional Government: Regard its members closely, these gods *ad interim*. The ground of their depression is that everybody is not Just like Them. They have a grievance also in the matter of death; which might have been arranged better. It saddens them to know that so much excellence as theirs should perish from the earth. The skeptic is slacker, too; excusing himself from the hardships of right living by pleading the futility of effort.

Unfair? Of course I am unfair; all this is assumption without knowledge, a malicious imputation of the worst possible motives, judgment from a part. It is their own method.

A wise word was said of late: "There are poor colonels, but no poor regiments." It would be truer to change a word; to say that there are poor soldiers, but no poor regiments. The gloomster picks the poorest soldier he can find, and holds him up to our eyes as a sample. "This is life!" says the pessimist, proud at last. "Now you see the stuff your regiments are made of!"

If one of these pallbearers should write a treatise on pomology he would dwell lovingly on apple-tree borers, blight and pest and scale. He would say no word of spray or pruning; he would scoff at the glory of apple blossoms as the rosy illusion of romance; and he would resolutely suppress all mention of — apples. But he would feature hard cider, for all that; and he would revel in cankerworms.

These blighters and borers — figuratively speaking — when the curse of the bottle is upon them — the ink bottle — they weave ugly words to ugly phrases for ugly books about ugly things; with ugly thoughts of ugly deeds they chronicle life and men as dreary, sordid, base, squalid, paltry, tawdry, mean, dismal, dull and dull again, interminably dull — vile, flat, stale, unprofitable and insipid. No splendid folly or valiant sin — much less impracticable idealisms, such as kindness, generosity, faith, forgiveness, courage, honor, friendship, love; no charm or joy or beauty, no ardors that flame and glow. They show forth a world of beastliness and bankruptcy; they picture life as a purposeless hell.

I beg of you, sir, do not permit yourself to be alarmed. What you hear is but the backdoor gossip of the world. And these people do not get enough exercise. Their livers are torpid. Some of them, poor fellows, are quite sincere — and some are merely in the fashion. It isn't true, you know; not of all of us, all the time. Nothing is changed; there is no shadow but proves the light; in the furthest world of any

universe, in the latest eternity you choose to mention, it will still be playing the game to run out your hits; and there, as here, only the shirker will lie down on the job.

In the meantime, now and here, there are two things, and two only, that a man may do with his ideals: He may hold and shape them, or tread them under foot; ripen or rot.

What, sir, the hills are steep, the sand heavy, the mire is Despond-deep; for that reason will you choose a balky horse? Or will you follow a leader who plans surrender?

The bookshelviki have thrown away the sword before the fight. They shriek a shameful message: "All is lost! Save yourselves who can!"

The battle is sore upon us; true. But there is another war cry than this. It was born of a bitter hour; it was nobly boasted, and brave men made it good. Now, and for all time to come, as the lost and furious fight reels by, men will turn and turn again for the watchword of Verdun: "They shall not pass! They shall not pass!"

Pardon the pontifical character of these remarks. They come tardy off. For years I have kept a safe and shameful silence when I should have been shouting, "Janet! Donkeys!" and throwing things. I will be highbrow-beaten no longer. I hereby resign from the choir inaudible. Modesty may go hang and prudence be jiggered; I wear Little Miss Brag's colors for favor; I have cut me an ellow gad, and I mean to use it on the seat of the scorner.

THE GENTLE PLAGIARIST

A POSTHUMOUS PAPER

Most writer-folk are nervous. They are not writers because they are nervous: they are nervous because they are writers. And to be painfully aware, on February twenty-ninth, that one must, by writing, procure \$289.32 on or before March thirty-first, makes it possible and probable that he will not even raise the thirty-two cents.

It is because of this paralyzing effect of fixed payments upon the human mind, or certainly upon my mind, that I have now hit upon the happy idea of writing a series of papers, and laying them by to eke out my life-insurance after my death.

There are many advantages in this scheme, besides the obvious one that if I had sold these papers while — or whilst — I yet lived, I should doubtless have spent the money long ago. First, the missus will probably get more of that good money for the MSS than I could possibly have got. For that particular brand of MSS she will have the market cornered, and if there is any demand at all she may make quite advantageous terms. I can find it in my heart to hope that she will be very austere. Second, I may cheerfully say “I” when “I” is what I mean without clumsy subterfuge or foolish circumlo-

cution. It is one of the many advantages of being dead — perhaps the greatest advantage — that you do not have to be modest. In some ways it was very tiresome to be alive.

Third, I may use the humble parenthesis when I see fit; I will be at liberty to fearlessly split infinitives or tensed verbs: last and best, I shall not have to read the proofs.

I think I shall write a little about writing, for two reasons — neither of which reasons is that I have anything particularly new or valuable to say. But I have reason to believe that most readers are writing, or are going to write, or think they are going to write.

There is everything in a name, no matter what Verulam says.

Take the Republican Party of today. So long as one faction submits to be branded as Insurgents or even as Progressives, while the other wing is triumphantly known as Republicans, "Standpatters," or the "Old Guard," we may expect no great changes. But when the radicals shall be known as Republicans and the conservatives are called the "Non-Progressives," then we shall hear tidings.

When the United States can plagiarize the Filipinos and get the transaction whitewashed as assimilation, while the writer who really assimilates another man's thought, makes it a part of himself, recoins it and utters it again, will be called a plagiarist — (unless indeed, he is a genius) — I trust we can see that the name of a thing is a question of the very first importance.

Observe that I am not writing of men of genius. No one will accuse the genius of plagiarism. No one — not even Thomas Fleming Day — will accuse Mr. Rudyard Kipling of plagiarism. I suppose the man does not live who would not think it an honor to have Mr. Kipling plagiarize from him.

Plagiarism is an ugly word. I mean now the word as a word, not the thing. The sound of it is intrinsically ugly, only less hateful than the hideous no-word "pants." And no one can possibly spell plagiarism without a dictionary.

What curious things men do! We used to write with pens, and then we spelled the word "received," in full, by means of making "e" and "i" exactly alike and putting the dot half way between the two letters. But with the advent of the typewriter this evasion will no longer serve. Now we spell it "rec'd."

Here's another funny thing. Mr. Jones, a tired business man — every business man is a Tired Business Man nowadays, and it is for his Weariness that musical and other comedies must be silly — dictates his letters. As the stenographer does not usually know the full name and address of the correspondent, Mr. Jones gives that as a preliminary both to save time and as a precaution against forgetting to give it at all. Hence the formal superscription :

Mr. James Estwick Smith
Kennebec,
Me.
Dear Sir:

This is sensible enough, so far. But, from habit, Mr. Jones uses the same form of superscription when he does the writing himself — (with, perhaps, “*My dear Mr. Smith,*” or “*Dear Jim,*” instead of “*Dear Sir,*”) — although the form is then meaningless, since he knows the address without such note. And Thompson, who has no stenographer, and has never dictated a letter, uses the same formal, commercial superscription — because Jones does!

We are all the slaves of habit. We do things every day, merely from the force of habits whose origin we have never known.

You have noted that unless the larger horse of a team were driven on the off side you are annoyed or even distressed? This is, of course, because your heart is on your left side. You may say that it is because you are used to that particular arrangement of horses: but did you ever ask yourself why the larger horse is harnessed upon the right side? Let us follow it up: it is interesting.

It is because, not so very long since, we had a postilion to drive for us, who rode one of the horses. It was his habit to hitch the smaller horse on the left hand side, because it is easier to get on a small horse than on a larger one — and because it was the habit to mount a horse from the left side.

The habit of getting on a horse from the left side was formed because men had the habit of wearing the sword upon the left side: therefore to get upon a horse from the right side while

wearing a sword, was not practical; one's sword would get tangled between one's legs. The habit of wearing the sword on the left side rather than on the right was formed because most men were habitually right-handed; and so could draw easier and quicker from a scabbard on the left. The habit of being right-handed was formed so that the heart might not be easily reached by the opposing sword: and the sword habit was partly because man is a fighting animal, and partly because he was clever enough to invent something better than teeth and claws to fight with.

We might easily go further and inquire how man acquired the clever habit of thinking — but that would be to set reason to explain itself, a horrible habit, fortunately confined to philosophers.

That chain of thought seems fairly clear; but we are not always so fortunate. Every one knows why Friday is an unlucky day and thirteen an unlucky number, especially the legally hanged; but who has found the mystical bond between the white horse and the red-headed girl? Yet there must have been some reason for this fortunate fact. Come to think of it, the colors go well together.

Reason assures us that waiters wear evening dress because, yesterday or day before, the master was attended by his own man, and the man wore the master's cast-off clothing; but reason throws no light on why the master ever wore evening dress in the first place. Doubtless there is some arbitrary historical cause; but it is

not likely that reason ever had anything to do with evening dress. Perhaps it is of Puritan origin, a species of penance for the sins of the flesh: perhaps it was originally a symbol of devilworship.

Returning to our black sheep.—When I was alive, it so often distressingly happened that when I had finished writing a little passage and saw that it was good, I must needs cry out, “There’s that beast Kipling again!”—having discovered that I was once more the victim of a too tenacious memory. To be sure, I could change the phrase from “a contemporary of Nineveh and Tyre” for instance, to “a contemporary of Damascus and Arpad;” but the phrase was none the less stolen for being spoiled, and I was naturally resentful. Therefore, it is easy to see why Mr. Kipling is associated with plagiarism in my mind, because he has so frequently been the plagiarzee — if I may coin a needed word.

There is a great deal more of this unconscious stealing going on than you wot, and I think that no one would be more surprised than some of the guilty parties, who were innocently unaware of it.

I have had the opposite experience too, more than once, and have gravely cut out a good phrase under the impression that it was loot, to find out, too late for publication, that it was of my own authentic make; to say nothing of the numberless cases when I was in doubt, but tacked on quotation marks to be on the safe side. Curi-

ously enough, I once had plagiarism thrust upon me. I used a quotation, with perfectly good quotation marks in the MSS. These were cut out in galley sheets. Twice, I nobly restored them in the proofs; yet the quotation marks were rigorously suppressed, and the booty was finally printed without them, to my great joy.

To plagiarize a man is the surest way as well as the commonest way to disseminate his principles. If you but plagiarize him often enough, you make him immortal, and then you cannot plagiarize him at all. He has become part of the common stock. Do your utmost and you only succeed in making a happy allusion. You cannot plagiarize the Decalogue, or Shakespeare, or the Gettysburg Address. Thus, if you have only written something worth while in the first place, the plagiarist is your best friend.

For, you may cheat, swindle, defraud and steal in merely material ways and walk unsuspected,—honored, anyway. Cases have been known where a box-car has been stolen, or even a whole railroad, and no one the wiser. But the one theft that you cannot commit with impunity is the literary theft. It is not only always detected; it is always detected immediately. True, it is seldom exposed, unless by officious third persons. The wise writer is delighted with this proof of merit; the unwise writer is, commonly, at least prudent enough to let sleeping dogs lie, to ware the deadly parallel column.

One cowardly and popular device is to convey a striking sentiment or a striking phrase by

making one of your characters, A or Y, use it in his speech. Thus, if the transfer passes unnoted you get credit for originality: whereas if it is noticed, you still get credit for cleverness in making your man A, or your man Y, so well read and so humanly consistent. This is obviously the safest form of literary theft. But it is a base and unworthy evasion, showing the same meanness of spirit involved in making hedge-bets. I seldom resort to it myself. My talent lies more along the lines of plain piracy.

One thing more about quotations. If you are trying to convince, in a subtle argument where closest attention is desired, quotation marks are prone to distract attention from the vital matter of what is said to the irrelevant matter of who said it first. It is often advisable to give the weighty passage enforcing (or causing) your views, without the quotation marks; and then, after you have made your point, you may cite the authority who supplied you with your masterstroke. With a little practice you also can acquire the habit of forgetting to name your authority.

If strictly original work were printed in the normal way, and borrowed or worked-over material punished and proclaimed by red ink, literature would be one vast red Pacific, sparsely dotted by barren islets of black.

To remold a thought, inspired by enthusiasm and admiration — that beneficent process cannot be stopped without stopping all thought. It is needful, however, to cast into the crucible

one new ingredient — yourself. Be you never so light of weight, if you add yourself to the alloy, you are making a legitimate scientific experiment, even though it may be a futile one. But if you do not put yourself into the remolding, you are merely melting down your loot, silver curiously carven, into unrecognizable bullion, for the sake of an ignominious safety. When you do this you are not merely a thief. You are also a wastrel.

Lest I forget when I write my forth-coming paper, Notebooks and the Artistic Temperament, let me now urge my little friend Legion to exercise great caution in taking down the bright sayings of his friends for future use. It is not safe. They have such an abominable habit of cribbing their bright sayings from books.

Now for the application. It is commonly said to my little friend Legion: Read the great writers for style. But I say to him: Read the great dead masters for ideas. Devour them, Fletcherize them, digest, assimilate, make them part of your blood; let the enriched blood visit your brain. The resultant activities will be fairly your own, and the little kinks and convolutions of your brain, which are entirely different from the kiuks of any other brain, will furnish you all the style you will ever get.

There are no really fresh ideas; just as there is not any fresh air. Air and ideas are refreshed and refreshing, vitalized and vitalizing; but the thoughts have been thought before and the air has been breathed before.

Note, however, that I advise to read the great *dead* writers for this purpose. This is for two reasons. The great dead writers will not protest, and there are not many great ones living. For what few there are, they are not apt to protest: but they would make note of it privately and think coldly of you.

I find that I have not been quite honest about my reasons for writing this paper. I am keen about the life insurance feature, right enough. But neither will I be sorry to be remembered — kindly, I hope — for a fleeting second. Then surely, like Gaffer and Granny Tyl in *The Bluebird*, we live again, we dead, when we are remembered; we move dimly in the spinning mist and smile our love at you.

It is curious to think how highly you would value the slightest word from me from where I am now. Yet, could you really question me, it is like you would ask me about some utterly trivial thing, just as I, could I get word from you, would probably ask you about baseball championships or presidential elections or some equally unimportant matter. For the fact that I still existed would of itself answer the one Important Question; just as the great thing with you is not whether you are a Shakespeare or a coalheaver, which is a slight and superficial matter. The great thing is, that you exist at all. That is the one incredible miracle.

As a matter of fact, what I feel just now is not regret so much as curiosity as to how it happened. *Cyrano* wished to die upon a hero's

sword. We have few conveniences for such exit now. We are reduced, broadly speaking, to dying of sickness, mental error, adulterated food, doctors of an experimental turn, or motor-cars. Personally, I hope that it was not a motor-car, or at least that it was not an intoxicated motor-car. The idea of being killed by an intoxicated motor-car has always been distasteful to me.

Postscript

Owing to the disgusting and heartless importunities of my creditors, especially of the insurance company, I have been compelled, most reluctantly, to modify my original plan and to dispose of these papers now. This leaves me in a false position, which I feel keenly, and I trust you will share my regret.

This book should be returned to the Library on or before the last date stamped below.

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~~DUE MAY 9 1947~~



