

## CHAPTER V

### THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

It was Grose who dominated the whole character and trend of slang during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. The Lexicon Balatronicum, 1811, so far from being, as it purported, a recast of Grose, was Grose's third edition reprinted with the addition of a few entries. Even Pierce Egan's edition, 1823, was only The Vulgar Tongue altered a little here and there and augmented with a certain number of racing and boxing slangy terms designed less, we suspect, to "improve" Grose than to advertise Egan's Life in London (1821) and his Boxiana, which was "in progress" as the booksellers and librarians phrase it.

Rather outside the stream of progress and owing nothing, so far as can be detected from internal evidence, to Grose was a curious little book that still occupies in antiquarian booksellers' catalogues a place of honour to which it has slight claim. In or about 1820 appeared Gradus ad Parnassum,<sup>1</sup> which consists of some thirty words (e.g., Athens, Bacchus, Christ; to die, kiss, quarrel; nightingale, rose, sword) with their synonyms, the adjectives most usually found with them, and those phrases which, like *the Swan of Avon*, are virtually synonymous: mostly of a dignified and poetical nature. But it contains a few slang phrases, such as *kick the bucket*, *pull a crow*, which rather startle one.

Much more important than Gradus ad Parnassum are the works of Pierce Egan and William Moncrieff (actually William Thomas). Egan brought out Boxiana in four volumes from 1811 to 1824, and as a specimen of his pugilistic slang we may quote from his account<sup>2</sup> of Bill Stevens "the Nailer", who, a short time champion of England, found it profitable to lose his fight. "He entered the lists with George Meggs, a Bristol collier, for 200 guineas at the Tennis Court, James Street [London]. Stevens scarcely knew how to make a fight of it—and let Meggs drive him about as he pleased; and after seventeen minutes in humbugging the spectators—Stevens gave in. The sporting men were properly swindled upon this occasion; and the Nailer had the impudence to acknowledge soon after, that he was tipped handsomely to lose the battle."

<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, but almost certainly by James Jermyn of Reydon: see the British Museum volume, No. 11603, g. 24, at the blank leaf prefacing Opus Epithetorum, the first of three pamphlets pretty evidently by the one author. I cite this à titre de curiosité.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. i.

From: Eric Portridge, Slang To-Day and Yesterday  
(London: Routledge, 1933)  
[Bm 2272.g.20]

More general, however, is the slang of his *Life in London*; or, *The Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, Esq., and his Elegant Friend Corinthian Tom, accompanied by Bob Logic, the Oxonian*, in their Rambles and Sprees through the Metropolis. Appearing in 1821, it is illustrated by I. R. and George Cruikshank. The composition is slack and careless to a most cavalier degree, but the book is lively and amusing, whether in the loose-jointed, straggling prose or in the facile verse that deserves no more than to be called doggerel, "snappy" and fleet though it be. The following description of London (as by Corinthian Tom) fairly represents the nature of the work and viewpoint of the author:—

London Town's a dashing place  
 For ev'ry thing that's going,  
 There's *fun* and *gig*<sup>1</sup> in ev'ry face,  
 So natty and so *knowing*.  
 Where Novelty is all the rage,  
 From high to low degree,  
 Such pretty *lounges* to engage,  
 Only come and see!  
 What charming sights  
 On gala nights;  
 Masquerades,  
 Grand parades,  
 Fam'd gas-lights,  
 Knowing fights.  
 Randall and Cribb  
 Know how to *fib*<sup>2</sup>!  
 Tothill-fields  
 Pleasure yields;  
 The Norwich bull  
 With antics full.  
 Plenty of news,  
 All to amuse;  
 The monkey "Jacco",  
 All the crack<sup>3</sup> O!  
 Ambroghetti's squall  
 Match girls bawl!

\* \* \* \* \*

To Vauxhall haste to see the blaze,  
 Such variegated lights;  
 The ladies' charms are all the gaze—  
 No *artificial* sights.  
 Lovely faces  
 Full of graces,  
 Heav'nly charms  
 Create alarms!  
 Such glances  
 And dances. . . .  
 Cyprians<sup>4</sup> fine,  
*Kids*<sup>5</sup> full of wine. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Mischief.

<sup>2</sup> Hit, strike, punch.

<sup>3</sup> Fashion.

<sup>4</sup> Courtesans.

<sup>5</sup> Youngsters, youths.

Plenty of *hoaxing*,  
 Strong *coaxing* ;  
 Beautiful shapes,  
 Beaux and apes,  
 Prone to quiz  
 Every phiz !  
 Dashing glasses  
 Queering lasses ;  
 Flashy cits,<sup>1</sup>  
 Numerous wits. . . .  
 Duke and groom  
 In one room ;  
 Here all dash on  
 In the fashion !

Moncrieff, a brilliant opportunist, threw Egan's rambling medley-tale into the form of an operatic extravaganza in three acts : Tom and Jerry was produced on 21st November, 1811, played throughout two seasons, as fashionable in country as in Town, and responsible for introducing slang not merely among "The bright young things" (no more bright to-day than ever they were) but among society in general—women as well as men, the drawing-room as well as the club or the fashionable lounge. Its author could justly claim that it was The Beggar Opera of the century. The songs and the dialogue was tremendously in character. In Act I, scene 7, we have such racing slang as that in—

*Tom.* Ha ! ha ! ha ! was there ever such a flat, as that Mr. Great We can buy no prod today, Jerry ; we must go where some gentleman stud is selling ; and while the dealers are running down the cattle, we can get a prime good one for a song. But now for Almack's—the highest life in London, and see what game Cupid has sprung up for us in that quarter...

*Logic.* Aye ; call a rattler.

*Jerry.* A rattler ; I'm at fault again.

*Logic.* A rattler is a rumbler, otherwise a jarvy ! Better known perhaps by the name of a hack.

And the Honourable Dick Trifle's affected talk to "Kate, S—— and Jane", and the society note present also in the song :—

Run, Jerry, run, all London are quadrilling it,  
*Jerry,* Tom and Logic must not be behind ;  
 Come, Jerry, come, now for toeing it, and hurling it,  
 "La Poule" et "La Finale",—soon we'll partners find.  
 King Almack, with his Star and Garter coterie,  
 Tonight does invite, come, we each must be a votary.  
 No time to waste, then haste, Willis strict is, we must nick it ;  
 Not even a Field Marshal can get in without a ticket.

The whole mad piece abounds in slang of almost every kind, nor does it owe all the slang to Egan : Moncrieff seems to have been an "expert".

<sup>1</sup> Citizens ; *nouveaux riches*.

Egan and Moncrieff, although they did not dispel that eighteenth and early nineteenth century contempt for slang which, lasting till about 1850, arose, to a large extent, from the confusion of slang with cant, i.e., from the lumping-together of ordinary, more or less respectable slang and thieves' slang, yet they did more than anyone until their heyday (1818-1828) to cause slang to become fashionable and general. It is mainly of these two authors that Hotten is thinking when he observes that "street phrases, nicknames and vulgar words were continually being added to the great stock of popular slang up to the commencement of the [nineteenth] 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 in the latter part of the reign of George III and in the early days of the Regency [and indeed until 1850 or so]. Slang in those days was generally termed 'flash' language . . . So popular was 'flash' with the 'bloods' of high life, that it constituted the best paying literary capital for certain authors and dramatists." Egan, Moncrieff, and Tom Moore owed much of the popularity of their more racy work to the fact that they ignored that general opinion and sentiment which holds cant to be something of "a language within a language" and therefore incomprehensible to the people as a whole and which considers slang to be a "collection of colloquialisms from all sources": a view that, being essentially sound, obtains to this day.

Contemporary with Egan and Moncrieff was the poet Moore. Tom Crib's Memorial to Congress, actually antedating Boxiana by three years, contains a vigorous "Account of the Grand Set-to between Long Sandy and Georgy the Porpus", when "long before daylight, gigs, rattlers, and prads [*riding-horses*] were in motion for Moulsey, brimful of the lads" and when the fight began thus:—

*First Round.* Very cautious—the kiddies both sparr'd  
As if shy of the scratch—while the Porpus kept guard  
O'er his beautiful mug, as if fearing to hazard  
One damaging touch in so dandy a mazzard [*face*].  
Which t'other observing put his one-two [*quick blows*]  
Between Georgy's left ribs, with a knuckle so true,  
That had his heart lain in the right place, no doubt  
But the Bear's double-knock would have rummag'd it out—  
As it was, Master Georgy came souse [*fell plump*] with the whack,  
And there sprawl'd, like a turtle turn'd queer on its back."

The last four rounds were livelier:—

*Seventh Round.* Though hot-press'd, and as flat as a crumplet,  
Long Sandy show'd game again, scorning to rump it [*give in*];  
And, fixing his eye on the Porpus's snout,  
Which he knew that Adonis felt peery [*suspicious, anxious*] about,

By a feint, truly elegant, tipp'd [gave] him a punch in  
The critical place, where he cupboards his luncheon,  
Which knock'd all the rich Caraçao into cruds [curds],  
And doubled him up like a bag of old duds !

*Eighth Round.* Sandy work'd like a first-rate demolisher :  
Bear as he is, yet his lick<sup>1</sup> is no polisher ;  
This round was but short—after humouring awhile,  
He proceeded to serve an ejectment, in style,  
Upon Georgy's front grinders, which damag'd his smile  
So completely that bets ran a hundred to ten  
That Adonis would ne'er flash his ivory [smile broadly] again.

*Ninth Round.* One of Georgy's bright ogles [eyes] was put  
On the bankruptcy list, with its shop-windows shut ;  
While the other soon made quite as tag-rag a show,  
All rimm'd round with black, like the Courier<sup>2</sup> in woe.  
From this to the finish, 'twas all fiddle faddle [mere trifling]—  
Poor Georgy, at last, could scarce hold up his daddle [hand]—  
With grinders dislodg'd and with peepers [eyes] both poach'd,  
'Twas not till the Tenth Round his claret was broach'd :  
But a pelt in the smellers [a punch on the nose], too pretty [to shun],

If the lad even could, set it going like fun.

It was such language as this which caused J. P. Thomas, My Thought Book, 1825, to exclaim : " It is painful to see that the low verbiage which was but lately engrossed by the vagabonds, is now adopted by those who would be highly affronted if you were to express a doubt whether they gentlemen."

From "outsiders" like Pierce Egan and Moncrieff, by way of a "bright lad" like Tom Moore, and due in part to the success of Egan's re-issue of Grose's Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, to the reinforcing influence of Bee's dictionary of the turf, the ring, low slang and indeed cant became "the thing" with group of novelists.

But before we consider Scott, Bulwer Lytton, Disraeli, Ainsworth (who represented a veritable apotheosis of the gutter), let us glance at Jon Bee, actually John Badcock's Dictionary of the Turf, the Ring, the Chase, the Pit, the Bon-Ton, and Varieties of Life, which appeared in 1823. The compiler evidently possessed an intimate knowledge of the sporting slang of the time, but as an editor he is inferior to even Pierce Egan, whom he wished to emulate, for the latter did at least supply valuable biographical details concerning Grose. Bee takes Grose in the Lexicon Balatronicum version, as his basis. Much what, with a pretentious flourish of trumpets, he adds is not slang nor cant but the terms peculiar to the sport in question, when he defines *allowances* thus : "(Turf) mares and geldings running against horses are allowed weight (usually 3 lbs. each).

<sup>1</sup> A pun on a bear's lick and lick = blow, punch.

<sup>2</sup> The Courier : an old newspaper. The reference is to an obituary notice.

... if coming of untried parents, 3 lbs. each and either. Fillies  
 always carry less than colts, 2, 3, or 4, and sometimes 5 lbs., but  
 it is not called by any name. *Allowance*—Bub and Grub  
*[meat and food]*, with a . . .<sup>1</sup> clean shirt, and a guinea, twice  
 a week, is good *allowance*." The frivolity of the whole per-  
 formance may be guessed from the following: " *Bon-ton*—high-  
 way Cyprians [*courtesans*], and those who run after them, from  
 good, easy—and *ton* or *tone*, the degree of tact and tension  
 to be employed by modish people; frequently called the '*ton*',  
 . . . Persons taking the good portions of their hours in sleep  
 and pleasure, are of the *Bon-ton*, as stage-actors and frequenters  
 play-houses, visitors at watering-places, officers, etc., etc. . . .  
 The appellation is much oftener applied than assumed. High  
 life, especially of whoredom: he who does not keep a girl, or  
 a girl of one, cannot be of the *Bon-ton*; when he ceases, let him  
 . . . Terms which denote the *ton*: 'The go, the mode, or  
 link of the mode; bang-up, the prime of life, or all prime;  
 thing, the dash, and a dasher; quite the Varment—a four-  
 band, a whip, a very jarvy, a swell, a diamond of the first  
 water' . . ."

The glorification of the underworld, or rather the vogue of  
 language in literature, not merely in chapbooks, pamphlets,  
 and badly written novels or now-forgotten dictionaries dredging  
 up, began in 1818 with Scott's Heart of Midlothian, for which  
 greatest of all historical novelists ransacked the Classical  
 Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue. Some years later, but not  
 influenced by the vast success enjoyed by Pierce Egan and  
 William Moncrieff (both owing much to Grose), Ainsworth,  
 Bulwer Lytton<sup>2</sup> and Disraeli<sup>3</sup> introduced, each of them, cant  
 words or songs into several of their novels. As Disraeli<sup>4</sup> is the  
 most important, he can be dismissed, but the other two have their  
 significance: that of literary men like Henley later, deliberately  
 writing cant, or rather including cant in their work. Bulwer  
 Lytton has a few terms in Pelham, 1828, and many in Paul  
 Clifford, 1840. In the latter, also, he included several canting  
 songs, which, like Ainsworth's, are inferior to Maginn's and  
 Henley's. William Ainsworth, a disciple of Scott, introduced  
 cant into Jack Sheppard, 1839, and especially, in 1834, into his  
 best novel, Rookwood, of which Dick Turpin, the highwayman,  
 is the hero. Rookwood contains several canting songs that became

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps free "oats".

<sup>2</sup> On the canting activities of Lytton and Disraeli and the text of their  
 songs in cant, see especially Baumann's Londonismen, 1887, and W. L. Hanchant's  
 Morna to Garland, 1932.

<sup>3</sup> The same thing, though a little later, happened in France, where Hugo,  
 Alphonse, and Sue "cribbed right and left" from Vidocq's Mémoires, 1828, and  
 Volcure, 1837.

<sup>4</sup> See Venetia.

famous and were sung as late as 1880: the best are "The Game of High Toby" and "Nix my Doll Palls, Fake Away". But for "respectable" slang Ainsworth is in no way notable. Bulwer Lytton and Disraeli are. Both these very fashionable novelists adorned their work with much high-society slang, almost every novel of theirs testifies. Not one of these three, however, had one quarter of the knowledge of low life and the underworld possessed by B.E. or Grose or Pierce Egan or James Greenwood, the very un-Victorian novelist best known in his life as "One of the Crowd".

Not modish nor meretricious as Bulwer Lytton, Disraeli, and even Ainsworth too often were, Dickens freshened and sweetened the English novel, as Scott had done before him in his Scottish tales, by dealing with ordinary folk. He, too, uses slang freely, but it is mainly that of the middle and lower class Cockney, not that of the bloods on the one hand nor that of the underworld on the other. Sketches by Boz, with which he made his name in 1835-6, bears the sub-title, Every-Day Life and Every-Day People. In "Some Account of an Omnibus Cad", we hear of Mr. Barker's shrewd perception of "how much might be done in the way of enticing the youthful and unwary, and showing the old and helpless into the wrong 'bus,<sup>1</sup> and carrying them off until, reduced to despair, they ransomed themselves by the payment of sixpence a head, or, to adopt his own figurative expression in all its native beauty, 'till they was rig'larly doose over [exhausted], and forked out the stumpy [*the cash*]'".<sup>2</sup> He heard of a new 'bus: "... a crack affair altogether. An enterprising young cabman, of established reputation as a dashing whip—for he had compromised with the parents of scrunch'd [maimed] children, and just 'worked out' his fine for knocking down an old lady—was the driver." Mr. Barker got the job of cad.<sup>3</sup> In "Greenwich Fair" we hear an early version of the thimble trick so popular on race-courses, the "worker" addressing the crowd thus: "Here's the sort o' game to make you laugh seven years arter you're dead, and turn every air on your edgery with delight. Three thimbles and vun little pea—with a vun two, three, and a two, three, vun; catch him who can, look on, keep your eyes open, and niver say die! Niver mind the change, and damn the expense: all fair and above board: them as don't play can't vin, and luck attend the ryal sportsman. Bet any gen'l'm'n any sum of money, from arf-a-crown up to a soverin, as he doesn't name the thimble as kivers the pea." The greenhorn loses; the man with the thimble consoles him with

<sup>1</sup> Slang at this date.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the later *stump up the cash*.

<sup>3</sup> An omnibus conductor. Tom Hood, three years earlier, was the first to use the term.

"all the fortin of Var! this time I vin, next time you vin; never mind the loss of two bob and a bender [*sixpence*]! Do it up in a small parcel, and break out in a fresh place! Here's the tort o' game . . ." With the alteration of a word or two, thus might any twentieth century Cockney talk, except that the substitution *v* for *w*, so general in Dickens's day, is now employed only to represent a Jew's or a Frenchman's difficulty with *w*. In 1836-7 Dickens firmly established his position ("consolidated" as post-War, War-influenced slang has it) by bringing out the Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club, much more generally known as the Pickwick Papers. On the very first day's journey Mr. Pickwick meets with a lively stranger whose "lengthened string of broken sentences, delivered with extraordinary volubility" is full of slang, as two successive volleys will show: "'Never mind,' said the stranger, cutting [Mr. Pickwick's] address [of thanks] very short, 'said enough, no more; smart chap that cabman—handled his fives [*fists*] very well; but if I'd been your friend in the green jemmy [*a greatcoat*]—damn me—punch his head—'cod I would,—pig's whisper<sup>1</sup>—pieman too,—no gammon,'"; and: "'My coach,—place booked,—one outside—leave you to pay for the brandy and water,—want change for a five,—bad silver—Brummagem buttons—won't do—no go—eh?' and he shook his head most knowingly."

Mr. Weller's manner of speaking is so famous that it were an impertinence to quote his humorous conversation. Throughout his career, Dickens was to use much slang in his novels and stories, and his influence on the slang of 1840 to 1880 would be very difficult to assess: but one may declare that it was certainly farther-reaching than that of any other author, or of any dictionary; and it would probably be no exaggeration to add that the same remark would apply to the whole century. That his fiction is "instructive in slang", as he might himself have phrased it, cannot be doubted (despite his aversion for American slang). Sometimes the instruction is disarmingly intentional, as in that passage<sup>2</sup> in which Mr. Gradgrind finds himself in odd company, "of the Circus, circusy."

"Kidderminster, stow that!" said Mr. Childers. (Master Kidderminster . . . was Cupid's mortal name.)

"What does he come here cheating us for, then?" cried Master Kidderminster . . . "If you want to cheek us, pay your ochre<sup>3</sup> at the doors and take it out." "Kidderminster," said Mr. Childers, raising his voice, "stow that." "Sir," to Mr. Gradgrind, "I was addressing myself to you. You may not be aware (for perhaps you have not been much in the audience), that Jupe<sup>4</sup> has missed the tip very often, lately."

<sup>1</sup> i.e., in a pig's whisper, slang for "in a trice". Gammon puns "bacon" and "nonsense".

<sup>2</sup> Hard Times, 1854.

<sup>3</sup> Money, from the colour of a sovereign.

<sup>4</sup> Whom Gradgrind has called to see.

"Has—what has he missed?" asked Mr. Gradgrind, glancing at the potent Bounderby for assistance.

"Missed his tip."

"Offered at the Garters four times last night, and never done it once," said Master Kidderminster. "Missed his tip at the banners too, and was loose in his ponging."

"Didn't do what he ought to do. Was short in his leaps and bad in his tumbling."

"Oh!" said Mr. Gradgrind, "that is tip, is it?"

"In a general way that's missing his tip," Mr. E. W. B. Childe answered.

Usually less obtrusively and therefore more effectually, Dickens—the most read<sup>1</sup> British author of the century—garnered a very large proportion of the slang current during the forty years ending in 1870, endowed much of it with a far longer life than it would otherwise have had, so popularized certain slang terms that they gained admittance to standard speech, and so imposed on the public certain slangy innovations of his own that they became general slang and then, in a few instances, were passed into the common stock. Professor W. E. Collinson, in a book that we shall later notice in some detail, has, after a piece of *ad hoc* research and with justice remarked: "I cannot think of any modern writer who has exercised so far-reaching an influence on our everyday speech; neither Scott nor Thackeray, let alone Jane Austen, Geo. Eliot, Meredith or Hardy, have made so deep an impression," a judgment applying with equal force to slang in especial and to colloquial speech in general. Yet Dickens saw the danger that slang might vitiate the language, for which he did care and which he could handle, and handle well or better than well, on a variety of planes and in a gamut of manners that are quite beyond the powers of his detractors. In 1853 he wrote<sup>2</sup>: "So universal has the use of slang terms become, that, in all societies, they are frequently substituted for, and have almost usurped the place of wit. An audience will sit in a theatre and listen to a string of brilliant witticisms, with perfect immobility; but let some fellow rush forward and roar out 'It's all serene', or 'Catch 'em all alive, oh!' (this last is sure to take), pit, boxes, and gallery roar with laughter. . . . If the evil of slang has grown too gigantic to be surpassed, let us at least give it decency by legalizing it; else, assuredly, this age will be branded by posterity with the shame of jabbering a broken dialect . . . and our wits will be sneered at . . . as mere word-twisters, who supplied the lack of humour by a vulgar facility of low language."

When Dickens was busy, in 1835-7, in opening up that new avenue of everyday people described in a far from everyday

<sup>1</sup> Among English-speaking people and peoples.

<sup>2</sup> On 24th September: in *Household Words*. It was the leading article and entitled "Slang".

manner, William Maginn was at the height of his fame as a journalist, his best "periodical" work being done for Blackwood's Magazine, for that short-lived paper, The Representative, and for Fraser's Magazine, more famous for its publication of Carlyle's Sartor Resartus. The brilliant Maginn is remembered chiefly for half a dozen quite first-class short stories and, among scholars, as a master of low slang and of cant: it is almost certain that he was the translator of Vidocq's Memoirs. Like his fellow countryman and "Fraserite", Francis Mahony (better known as Father Prout), Maginn was very learned and might, as Prout described himself, be described as "an Irish Potato seasoned with Attic salt". As a specimen of his manner in verse, though he was a better prose-writer than a poet, we may quote the beginning of his flowing translation of Vidocq's *En Rouland de Vergne en Vergne*:—

As from ken to ken, I was going, [shop, house]  
 Doing a bit on the prigging lay, [thieving]  
 Who should I meet but a jolly blowen, [girl; harlot]  
 Tol lol, lol lol, tol dirol lay?  
 Who should I meet but a jolly blowen,  
 Who was fly to the time of day. . . . [wide-awake]  
 I pattered in flash like a covey knowing, [talked in cant]  
 "I, bub or grubby, I say?" [drink, food]  
 "Lots of gatter," says she, "is flowing, [beer]  
 Tol lol, lol lol, tol dirol lay.  
 Lend me a lift in the family way." [help me as among friends]

Perhaps influenced by Dickens and Maginn, R. H. Barham in 1840-7 issued in book-form his comic, spirited, highly-colloquial medley of verse and prose, *The Ingoldsby Legends*, which were further enlivened by Leech's illustrations. Their gay facility and unconventional language may be observed in any poem whatsoever, but we will choose "*The Dead Drummer*", in which two men are caught in a storm on Salisbury Plain. The lightning flashed, the rain "kept pouring"—

While they, helter-skelter,  
 In vain sought for shelter  
 From, what I have heard term'd, "a regular pelter";  
 But the deuce of a screen  
 Could be anywhere seen,  
 Or an object except that on one of the rises,  
 An old way-post show'd  
 Where the Lavington road  
 Branch'd off to the left from the one to Devizes;  
 And thither the footsteps of Waters seem'd tending,  
 Though a doubt might exist of the course he was bending,  
 To a landsman at least, who, wherever he goes,  
 Is content, for the most part, to follow his nose;—  
 While Harry kept "backing  
 And filling"—and "tacking",—

Two nautical terms which, I'll wager a guinea, are  
Meant to imply  
What you, Reader, and I  
Would call going zig-zag, and not rectilinear.

Barham († 1845) was an exceedingly versatile and dexterous master of slang, and his contribution to its literary practice may be guessed from a glance through that dictionary which familiarly call Farmer and Henley, but since his prose as well as poetry now seem very old-fashioned<sup>1</sup> and at times a little tedious, further quotation is perhaps inadvisable, such meagre representation not being deceptive if it is borne in mind that if he were accorded space commensurate with his importance he would fill three or four pages.

Douglas William Jerrold, who knew Dickens, probably read Barham, and almost certainly knew Maginn, did his best work in the 'forties: Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures, first in Punch and then in book form, in 1846, have, in their own kind, never been surpassed; and The Barber's Chair, appearing in his own journal, Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper, in 1847, but not reprinted till 1874. To quote from the former is supererogatory, from the latter desirable, for The Barber's Chair deserves to be much better known. Mr. Nutts, who has named "them two cats" *Whig* and *Tory*, explains their ways and habits:—

" You see Whig there, a-wiping his whiskers. Well, if he in the night kills the smallest mouse that ever squeaked, what a clatter he does kick up! He keeps my wife and me awake for hours; and sometimes—now this is so like Whig—to catch a mouse not worth a fardin', he'll bring down a row of plates or a tea-pot or a punch bowl worth half-a-guinea. And in the morning when he shows us the measly little mouse, doesn't he put it back up and purr as loud as a bagpipe. . . . Doesn't he make the most of a mouse that's hardly worth lifting with a pair of tongs and throwing in the gutter? Well, that's Whig all over. Now there's Tory lying along the hearth, and looking as innocent as though you might skin him up in a dairy with nothing but his word and honour. Well, when he kills a mouse, he makes hardly any noise about it. But this I will say, he's a *little* greedier than Whig; he'll eat the varmint up, tail and all. No conscience for the matter. Bless you, I've known him make away with rats that he must have lived in the same house with for years."

At the end of the half-century, the Bulwer Lytton, Ainsworth school of canters was moribund: wounded to the death by the novels of Dickens and by the writings of such anti-phraseurs as Douglas Jerrold. Then, too, it was Dickens who engendered the novel of social pity (you get it even in Disraeli): moreover, he prepared the public to pay at least some attention to Henry Mayhew, who stands rather outside Hotten's *aperçu* on the approximate period 1850–1870; "[Slang] has now taken a somewhat different turn, dropping many of the cant and old vulgar

<sup>1</sup> In literary jargon, it has "dated", a term that will, however, be accepted in Standard English, for it is much shorter than *become out of date*.

words, and assuming a certain quaint and fashionable phraseology —familiar, utilitarian, and jovial." This aspect was due to a change in general familiar speech, which had become a little more refined, especially in the broad trend of the colloquial (the free-and-easy, undress kind of) language of the day. The more civilized a country and the more refined its speech, the richer will be the stock of slang ; that is why in Elizabethan times there was much cant (a " secret " vocabulary) but little slang (the general vocabulary, syntax, and accidente of unfettered speech), the conversation of that period being so picturesque that slang was hardly needed to render it more picturesque.

But before we deal with Henry Mayhew, John Mills must be considered. Mills's D'Horsay appeared in 1844, Life of a Race-horse in 1854, and Stable Secrets in 1863. An authority on horses, he is also thoroughly conversant with general and with society slang : and as an all-round slangster he shows at his best in D'Horsay ; or, The Follies of the Day, which, by "A Man of Fashion" (as Mills certainly was), takes<sup>1</sup> the Count D'Orsay the exquisite dandy's career as a basis and brings in Sir Henry Bulwer Lytton as Pelham, the Countess of Blessington as Countess of Rivington, the Marquis of Hertford as Marquis of Hereford, Disraeli as "that swarthy, circumcised driver of the cabriolet", and numerous other aristocratic (and several *demi-monde*) fashionables of the day. Mills is really "small beer" as compared with Mayhew, but he can do this sort of thing well enough : His lordship—the Marquis of Riverford (i.e., of Waterford)—about to throw a handful of heated coins to a group of humble folk, "addressed the admiring throng with the following neat and witty speech. 'Now you set of beggars'—the implication was more apt than intended—'now, you set of beggars,' repeated he, 'keep your daylights open and your potato-traps shut. There's a few here who have burnt their fingers in getting money by more ways than one, and although some of ye may blister 'em in picking up this, yet the choice is entirely with yourselves whether the risk is worth running or not.' 'Arrah, honey !' exclaimed a feminine voice. 'Toss the kine [coins] to us, and we'll show ye the vally we set on our fingers. Bad luck to 'em, but they'll stand a scorch.'"

The scramble was highly successful and pleasing to organizer, patron, and patronized. An old trick, of course ! But the Marquis of Riverford played fair : in the eighteenth century, the money was usually tossed to a crowd unwarmed of the state of the coins.

But this sort of horse-play is antiquated and this sort of slang is rarely so interesting as that of the middle and the lower classes. Though he is necessarily much grimmer, Henry Mayhew does

<sup>1</sup> See esp. Joseph Grego's adequately documented edition, 1902.

nevertheless come as a refreshing breath after Mills. Mayhew's greatest work appeared in an incomplete form in 1851 ; some years later this was incorporated in the four volumes of 1861-2, London Labour and the London Poor, whose title continues thus, A Cyclopædia of the Condition and Earnings of Those that *will* Work Those that *cannot* Work, and Those who *will not* Work. The value of this book is enhanced by the numerous illustrations from photographs. And the value of the colloquialisms and the slang therein may be reckoned from the following facts presented in the author's preface.<sup>1</sup>

" It surely may be considered curious as being the first attempt<sup>2</sup> to publish the history of a people, from the lips of the people themselves . . . and to pourtray the conditions of their homes and their families by personal observation of the places, and direct communion with the individuals. . . . Curious also as being the first commission of enquiry into the state of the people, undertaken by a private individual. . . . Curious, moreover, as supplying information concerning a large body of persons, of whom the public had less knowledge than of the most distant tribes of the earth."

Mayhew gives specimens of the speech of almost every trade and occupation current among the lower and the poorer classes in London : sometimes short, sometimes longish lists of words with their equivalents in standard English ; and accurate transcriptions of actual conversations and authentic recitals of information sought by the author. One of the most interesting is the account of " the recent experience of a running patterer ", the seller of a paper giving details of " murders, seductions, crim.-cons. [*adulteries*], explosions, alarming accidents, 'assassinations,' deaths of public characters, duels and love-letters ". The patterers are called *running* and not *standing* if they " describe, or profess to describe, the contents of their papers as they go rapidly along, and they seldom or never stand still ". This man, who had been twenty years at his job, relates the past year's success.

" Well, Sir, I think, take them all together, things hasn't been so good this last year as the year before. But the Pope, God bless him ! he's been the best friend I've had since Rush, but Rush licked his Holiness. You see, the Pope and Cardinal Wiseman is a one-sided affair ; of course the Catholics won't buy anything against the Pope, but *all* religions could go for Rush. Our mob [*the speaker and the two or three others that worked with him*] once thought of starting a cardinal's dress, and I thought of wearing a red hat myself. I did wear a shovel hat when the Bishop of London was our racket<sup>3</sup> ; but I thought the hat began to feel too hot,

<sup>1</sup> The 1861-2 edition, used as the basis of the ensuing quotations and remarks.

<sup>2</sup> The second came at the beginning of the present century ; the third, now in rapid progress, is being published by Messrs P. S. King & Son.

<sup>3</sup> The English original of yet another Americanism.

"I shovelled it off . . . There was one—Cardinal Wiseman's Lament"—and it was giving his own words like, and a red hat would have capped it. It used to make the people roar when it came to snivelling and grumbling at Little Jack Russell [probably Lord John Russell]—by Wiseman, of course; and when it comes to this part—which alludes to that 'ere thundering letter to the Bishop of Durham—the people was stunned:—

He called me a buffalo, bull, and a monkey,  
And then with a soldier called Old Arthur Conkey<sup>1</sup>  
Declared they would buy me a ninepenny donkey  
And send me to Rome to the Pope.

"They shod<sup>2</sup> me, Sir. Who's they? Why, the Pope and Cardinal Wiseman. I call my clothes after them I earn money by to buy them with. My shoes I call Pope Pius; my trousers and braces, Calcraft; my waistcoat and shirt, Jael Jenny; and my coat, Love Letters. . . . There was very little doing for some time after I gave you an account before; hardly a slum worth a crust and a pipe of tobacco to us. A them's a paper fake,—make a foot-note of that, Sir. I think Adelaide was the first thing I worked after I told you of my tomfooleries. Yes it was—her helegy. She weren't of no account whatsoever . . . But there was poor Sir Robert Peel,—he was some good; indeed, I think he was as good as 5s. a day to me for the four or five days when he was freshest. Browns [copper coins] were thrown out of the windows to us . . . I worked Sir Robert in the West End, and in the quiet streets and squares. Certainly we had a most beautiful helegy. Well, poor gentleman, what we earned on him was some set-off to us for his starting his new regiment of the Blues<sup>3</sup>—the Cooks' Own. Not that they've troubled me much. I was once before Alderman Kelly . . . , charged with obstructing, or some humbug of that sort. 'What are you, my man?' says he quietly, and like a gentleman. 'In the same line as yourself, my lord,' says I. 'How's that?' says he. "I'm a paper-worker for my living, my lord," says I. I was soon discharged; and there was such fun and laughing, that if I'd had a few slums in my pocket, I believe I could have sold them all in the justice-room.

"Heynau was a stunner . . . just in the critical time for us, as things was growing very taper.<sup>4</sup> But I did best with him in chaunting [*the singing of ballads in street and public-house*] . . . We're forced to change our patter—first running, then chaunting, and then standing—oftener than we used to.

"Then Calcraft was<sup>5</sup> pretty tidy browns. He was up for starving his mother,—and what better can you expect of a hangman? Me and my mate worked him down at Hatfield in Essex, where his mother lives. It's his native [sc. place], I believe. We sold her one. She's a limping old body . . . 'How much?' says she. 'A penny, marm,' says I. 'Sarve him right,' says she. We worked it, too, in the street in Hoxton where he lives, and he sent out for two, which shows he's a sensible sort of character in some points after all. . . .

"Sirrell was no good either. Not salt to a herring. Though we worked in his own neighbourhood, and pattered about gold and silver all in a row. 'Ah!' says some old woman, 'he was a 'spectable man.' 'Werry, marm,' says I."

<sup>1</sup> The Duke of Wellington, because of his large nose, was known as Conky, and as late as 1870 big-nosed children were called Duke.

<sup>2</sup> i.e., provided me with the money to buy boots.

<sup>3</sup> The police: long, and still occasionally, called *Peelers*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the modern *thin*.

<sup>5</sup> Tacitely elliptical for "was worth to us".

In several later and less ambitious works, Mayhew reveals his incomparable knowledge of familiar, lowly London speech. Indeed, if Hotten was the first to compile a good dictionary of slang as such and if Farmer put slang on to an historical basis, if moreover Dickens had the greatest influence of any one writer on slang, then it is equally true to say that nowhere—even up till to-day and even including Pett Ridge—does there exist such a corpus of London slang as in Henry Mayhew's works: not merely as the material of a dictionary but as a record of the actual language; the long conversations and monologues, reported verbatim or, at the worst, from tenacious memory, are of the utmost value. Sympathy, knowledge, memory, aided by great intelligence and an infinite patience, have made his books, especially *London Labour and the London Poor*, a "gold-mine" for the historian of the English language.

Beside Mayhew, the pseudonymous Ducange Anglicus who in 1857 published, and in 1859, with revisions and additions, re-issued *The Vulgar Tongue: A Glossary of Slang, Cant, and Flash<sup>1</sup>* Words and Phrases Used in London from 1839 to 1859, hardly merits more than a few lines. Yet, though the glossary runs to not more than approximately five hundred words, it certainly is, in the main, accurate. Perhaps the chief claim of this book to our attention is that it is the first to list any considerable number of rhyming slang words, such as *apples and pears*, *stairs*; *Jack Dandy*, *brandy*; *lord of the manor*, "tanner" (sixpence); *round me houses*, *trouse(r)s*; *Rory o'More*, a floor. Ducange Anglicus (identity apparently unknown) gives an interesting list of "flash terms for money", some examples of narrative cast into cant, and two poems containing a sprinkling of cant terms; the latter of the two poems, by the way, is from *Pickwick Abroad*, which had appeared twenty years earlier, from the pen of that extraordinarily popular serial writer, G. W. M. Reynolds. In his extracts from the critics, Ducange Anglicus includes a quotation from Charles Astor Bristed, who is the first scholar to define slang as we know it to-day. In his long essay, "The English Language in America," contributed to the *Cambridge Essays*, 1855, Bristed says: "By *slang* we understand, first, technical expressions<sup>2</sup> peculiar to a body of men, forming a part of their customs and a bond of union and fellowship, such as the cant [= *slangy*] terms of students, political nicknames, and the special phraseologies of particular trades and professions. Secondly, and more generally,—expressions consecrated, as it were, to Momus from their birth, devoted to comic or would-be comic literature and conversation, always<sup>3</sup> used with a certain

<sup>1</sup> By *flash* is meant *cant* = thieves' slang.

<sup>2</sup> What we now call jargon. These "technical" terms become slang only when they are popularized outside of the group that uses them clannishly.

<sup>3</sup> Read rather: generally.

amount of ludicrous intent, and which no person,<sup>1</sup> except from slip of the tongue or pen, or unfortunate habit, would employ in serious writing or discourse."

In the year that was not greatly excited by the revised edition of Ducange Anglicus's little book, the first edition of John Camden Hotten's best known compilation, *The Slang Dictionary*, was issued anonymously by the editor's own publishing firm, which later became Messrs. Chatto & Windus. Hotten was what we would in post-War, rather highbrow slang describe as a near-scholar ; he was also a competent if somewhat journalistic writer, an enthusiastic assembler of facts, a bohemian who, like Grose, went out into the highways and by-ways (especially the by-ways) to observe and note, and the first man to compile a bibliography<sup>2</sup> of slang and cant. In 1874, fifteen years after the first edition and a year after his death, came the third edition, which contained all his *corrigenda* and *addenda*. Since then the book has sold steadily.

His introductory matter,—despite the fact that, for fashionable, theatrical, and artistic terms, he owes more than he admits to Charles Dickens's important article, on slang, in *Household Words*,—contains much original thinking and very considerable research, the latter being made even more evident in the bibliography of slang and cant. His accounts of the history of both cant and slang—for he treats them separately—are discursive but very readable, often suggestive, and nearly always reliable ; his sections on class-slangs and occupation-slangs are sketchy,—as might perhaps be expected in such definitely pioneering work ; the general remarks on the origin, tendencies, and characteristics of slang, though philosophically nebulous, are concretely valuable—in other words, his examples and his synonyms are genuinely illustrative and informative of his theme ; the appendices on back, rhyming, and centre slang constitute the first authoritative memoranda on these subjects, long remained easily the best, and are still of prime importance. The *Slang Dictionary* proper contains a fair number of cant words and phrases, but for the most part it deals with ordinary everyday slang current in the middle of Queen Victoria's reign. The most astonishing thing about this glossary is that so many of its guests are still guests, some of them honoured, of the nation and so few in their graves though a good number have one syllable there. It is certain that slang has, since 1859, changed less rapidly than it did before that date : perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the slang of 1859–1874 survived almost intact until the Great War, that a surprising amount of that old slang still survives, and that

<sup>1</sup> Rather : few educated persons.

<sup>2</sup> It remained the best for nearly forty years.

much of the slang current in the 1860's has actually become incorporated in English colloquial and familiar speech by being promoted from the stage of slang. This fixing and dignifying of so much of that mid-Victorian slang is due mainly to the steady, continuous popularity of Hotten's glossary, partly to the reinforcing influence of that great lexicographical enterprise, Farmer's seven-volume Slang and its Analogues. John Camden Hotten is too leisurely for present critical taste, but he knew how to mix ancient saw and modern instance, obsolete yet interesting term with the latest catchword from the street, the latest adjective from Belgravia, snobbery from Bohemia, and realism from Hobohemia. Here are four successive entries from a page chosen at random :—

"*Burke*. To kill, to murder secretly and without noise by means of strangulation. From Burke, the notorious Edinburgh murderer, who, with an accomplice named Hare, used to decoy people into the den he inhabited, kill them, and sell their bodies for dissection. The wretches having been apprehended and tried, Burke was executed, while Hare, turning King's evidence, was released. Bishop and Williams were their London imitators. The term *Burke* is now usually applied to any project that is quietly stopped or stifled—as 'the question has been *burked*'. A book suppressed before publication is said to be *burked*." [On this last point Hotten spoke feelingly.]

"*Burra*, great as *burra sa[h]ib*, a great man; *burra khanah*, a great dinner.—Anglo-Indian.

"*Bury a Moll*, to run away from a mistress.

"*Bus*, or *Buss*, an abbreviation of 'omnibus', a public carriage. Also, a kiss, abbreviation of Fr. *baiser*.<sup>1</sup> A Mr. Shillibeer started the first bus in London. A shillibeer is now a hearse and mourning coach all in one, used by the very poorest mourners and shabbiest undertakers.

"Why is Temple Bar like a lady's veil? Because it wants to be removed to make way for the busses."

A man, in some respects, after Hotten's own heart was James Greenwood, whose published work—mostly novels—covered the period 1860–1905. Like Hotten, he was an expert practitioner of slang: like Henry Mayhew, he knew the real London underworld and the poorest of London's poor a good deal better than did even the publisher-author.

Greenwood's first novel, *Under a Cloud*, 1860, was written in collaboration with his brother Frederick, who († 1909) became a very famous journalist indeed—and the editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette* in its palmiest period; James also was a journalist but

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps not: the etymology is doubtful.

prominently—though he never had his dues—a novelist.  
the Cloud we derive a ray of sunshine:—

"Dick! you villain!" cried Joel, quite gleeful over his sagacity, "listen  
to something in your line. Tom licks—Dick kicks!  
"Well, why not? Tom doesn't lick to the end of his days, but only  
he has licked together a nice little sum of money; then he sits down  
and other Thomas's come and lick the ground all round about.  
"Aye, there's such a thing as strainin' at a gnat and swallerin' of  
as the Scripture tells us. Now, Dick strains at a very little  
when he refuses to take advantages that Tom snaps up like a hawk:  
he swallows an awful big camel when he and his children go on to  
work. Accordingly, I'm for Tom's plan; whereby I've licked  
a hundred and thirty-seven pounds ten, all snug in my box  
now. But that ain't all I've got there. In that box there's a precious  
thing now, that I'm a nidjot if I don't hatch into a golden hen—a hen  
that make her nest of bank notes, and lay no end of gold and silver.  
gold and silver, Nick!" repeated Hatcher, warming at the prospect;  
gold and silver, you old rogue! And you shall have a silver collar,  
now as you're a tom cat!—if I can get one cheap."

Two years later, James Greenwood published *The Seven Years of London*: neglected children, thieves, beggars, prostitutes, drunkards, gamblers, careless philanthropists. These ~~things~~ do not concern us, poignantly and frankly as he writes ~~them~~, but in the chapter on adult criminals he quotes an actual <sup>letter</sup><sup>1</sup> penned in July, 1868, from Dundee Prison, from garrotter to his brother:—

"Dear Brother, the only thing I am afraid of is that moll [woman]; if you can manage to square her I fear nothing; but she ~~swears~~ she saw me have him by the throat it will not go well with me, for they are most damned down on garotting. Again, if she says she saw him with that amount of money, God! they might put me in for the robbery too; and there is ~~two~~ years dead certain. You don't know what a b—r like that ~~is~~ my. It can surely to God be squared between so many of ~~us~~, and only the moll to come against me. If the bloke [*a man whom a woman might pick up in the street*] is in town he could be easily squared, I think; you could get him sweet [*in a good mood*], put the gloves on him [*flatter him*], and things like that, and get ~~me~~ to say he cannot swear to me in court; that would be all ~~that was~~ wanted; or it is very easy giving that moll a dose ~~of poison~~. Put Ginger [*one of the female witnesses*] up to it; who the hell would take notice of a whore kicking the bucket? I would do it for you. If any of them is squared, tell Ginger to sign M.H. at the bottom of her letter, so as I may know. Think it would be a good idea for my mother to get the bloke

<sup>1</sup> Joel Hatcher addresses a cat, his sole companion during this comfortable imprisonment.

<sup>2</sup> Greenwood quotes with spelling correct (improbable that the man could spell correctly) and well punctuated.

privately, and make an appeal to him ; he would have a little feeling for her, I think ; if you was getting him into the Garrick, the wifey could talk to him so fine. If you only had one of them squared that's all that is wanted ; for I am certain there is no more against me than them two. Set your brains to work, and stick at nothing ; tell them not to be afraid of perjury in this case ; they can't be brought in for it nohow ; swear black is white, I must get off if they do the right thing ; swear to anything, swear the bloody wigs off their heads ; there is no danger for being brought in for perjury in this case, not a damned bit.—Bill." A postscript ran : "Poison the moll if she will not do what's right ; by Christ ! I would think damned little of doing it to save my brother ! Ginger will fix her if you tell her to."

The value of such "human documents" as that letter can hardly be exaggerated. The importance of men like Grose and Mayhew, Greenwood and Sims, in any record of spoken English is paramount, whether for ordinary colloquial speech, for slang or for cant, for they placed their talent, their education, their energy, and their probity at the service of investigation and transcription, instead of nonchalantly collecting a few unconnected and unco-ordinated terms either to illustrate a preconceived theory or to adorn a barren text : give point to general uncertainty, insert a pretty marble into a vacuum.

As an example of Greenwood's leisurely, familiarly conducted novels, *Almost Lost* (1883) will suffice for the general reader, while the opening chapter, which deals with "Epsom Downs on Derby Day", will interest the literary sportsman. But except to remark that the book contains a wealth of lowly English, we must "leave it at that".

Passing also by the books with titles so journalistically worded (but with contents most satisfactorily documented and modestly sincere) as *Mysteries of Modern London*,<sup>1</sup> *Toilers of London*, and *Undercurrents of London Life*, we arrive at an almost Dickensian volume : *Behind a 'Bus. Curious Tales of "Insides" and "Outs"*, 1895. Sketches and stories, slight enough some of them, but crammed with humanity all of them. "The Rag-Fair Express" is perhaps the richest in slang. A Cockney youth visits an uncle : "I told him all about my having the kick-out from home and about my donkey and barrer being up the spout [*in pawn*] for two pounds ten (which it wasn't, it was for only thirty bob, but I thought I would pitch it strong enough) . . . Well, he came down 'an'som . . . He gave me the two-pun-ten . . . I was a pound to the good. I had no other togs but them as I was wearing, and they were so wore out I was ashamed to be seen in 'em.

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps prompted by the astoundingly prolific Eugene Sue's *Mystères de Paris* : Paris, 1842-3, in 10 vols.

"So I goes to the Fair on Sunday morning . . . I moulted to my very shirt and socks." But he was so showily dressed that he couldn't redeem his donkey, the stables woman calling a policeman. "And then it struck me," he continues, "I daren't go with him to my uncle all slap-up dressed as I was because it would be bowling myself out in the lie I had told him . . . So I had to go to the police-station, and there I was detained while they sent over . . . to ask the man who had the things in pawn to come and 'dentify me. But he had gone out for the day, and I was locked up all night, and the man came in the morning, and then I was let go, but not before I had parted with three and a tanner, which was every blessed farden I had, for green-yard expenses. That was a caution to me against 'moultting the mouldies', and I haven't done it ever since."

When Greenwood had been writing a few years, Laurence Oliphant startled London with Piccadilly, a brilliantly satirical novel dealing with the venality, insincerity, and superficiality of certain types in metropolitan society. Appearing at first in Blackwood's Magazine in 1865, and issued in book form, with some very clever illustrations by "Dicky" Doyle, in 1870, it "caused great excitement in fashionable circles. The picture of London playing at life was too vivid to be false, too true to be pleasant. The assault on the 'worldly-holies' and the author's rather bitter preference for the 'wholly-worldlies' found a mark in uneasy breasts, and left many prominent social persons with an embarrassed sense of sudden public nakedness".<sup>1</sup> People expected great things of him, but his gay, dazzling, and adventurous career was physically blotted and spiritually ruined by Thomas Lake Harris, an American "backwoods Messiah". Apart from several talented pre-Piccadilly travel books and Piccadilly itself, he wrote only one work of note, Altiora Peto, a novel that, in 1883, expressed the adastral aim implicit in its title.

The slang in Piccadilly is that of society. Listen to the mercenary Lady Broadhem—who admires poise and decorum but is complacently prepared to make of her daughter's hand a profitably monetary *quid pro quo*—discoursing to Lord Frank Vanecourt (Oliphant himself) about her shares! "Lord Stagger-ton . . . was kind enough to put me into two Turkish baths, a monster hotel, and a music hall . . . Spiffy says I ought never to stay so long in anything as I do; in and out again, if it is only half a per cent., is his system. . . . With this system of rigging the market, so many people go in like me only to get out again, that it is becoming more and more difficult every day to start anything new. Oh dear . . . How exhausted it always

<sup>1</sup> Michael Sadleir in the preface to his reprint of Piccadilly in 1928.

makes me to talk 'City'! I only want to show you that I understand what I am about, and that if you only help to tide me over this crisis, something will surely turn up a prize." Vanecourt interposes: "I know you disapprove of cards, but perhaps you will allow me to suggest the word 'trump' as being more expressive than 'prize'."

Though he had little in common with Greenwood, just as John Mills had with Mayhew, and though he was more likely to satirize than to understand Laurence Oliphant, W. S. Gilbert impinged powerfully on English slang almost as long as did Charles Dickens, John Mills, and James Greenwood. From 1863,<sup>1</sup> with clever journalism, with The "Bab" Ballads in 1869, with his brilliant musical comedies from that date until 1896, when he and Sullivan finally separated, he was, thanks mainly to that amazingly successful cat-and-dog collaboration with Arthur Sullivan, constantly before the public. It was Hotten who, from his publishing office in Piccadilly, issued in January, 1869, with the addition of others, the various "Bab" ballads that had appeared in periodicals. Much Sound and Little Sense was the clever sub-title, and the illustrations, in line, by the author were as delightful, in their very different way, as Karel Čapek's to his books of travel. "Disillusion" is one of the best, for in it Gilbert, after describing various types (poet, novelist, actor, and soldier) as he had romantically imagined them, limns them as he found them. The poet:—

I found him in a beerhouse tap  
Awaking from a gin-born nap,  
With pipe and sloven address;  
Amusing chums, who fooled his bent,  
With muddy, maudlin sentiment,  
And tipsy foolishness.

And as for that figure beloved of the Press, the novelist, Gilbert discovers him—

in clumsy snuffy suit,  
In seedy glove, and blucher boot.

And, not to put too fine a gloss on it:—

Particularly<sup>2</sup> commonplace,  
With vulgar, coarse, stock-broking face  
And spectacles and wig.

Not much slang there? No; but such easy diction, when it becomes popular, makes it very easy for slang to be accepted, welcomed.

Some ten years later, Gilbert and Sullivan scored a success with H.M.S. Pinafore; or, The Lass that Loved a Sailor, which

<sup>1</sup> He had written for Punch, Fun, and other papers during the six years prior to that date.

<sup>2</sup> Every syllable, *more Gilbertino*, is to be given its full phonetic value.

as the title-page obligingly informs us, "an entirely original musical comical opera." The tone of this well-known piece is set by the initial aria sung by Little Buttercup, "a Portsmouth hawboat woman":—

I've snuff and tobacco and excellent jacky, [gin]  
 I've scissors, and watches, and knives;  
 I've ribbons and laces to set off the faces  
     Of pretty young sweethearts and wives.  
 I've treacle and coffee and excellent toffee,  
     Soft tommy<sup>1</sup> and succulent chops;  
 I've chickens and conies and pretty polonies,  
     And excellent peppermint drops;

and by that chorus of sailors which varies their opening chorus:—

We sailed the ocean blue,  
     And our saucy ship's a beauty,  
 We're sober men and true,  
     And attentive to our duty.  
 We're smart and sober men,  
     And quite devoid of fe-ar,  
 In all the Royal N.  
     None are so smart as we are.

As an example of Gilbert sans Sullivan we may take The Mountebanks, 1892; this was composed by Alfred Collier. This is a lively play, but how much better it would have been for Sullivan's logically sympathetic interpretation! The following dialogue is between Risotto and his newly-wed in front of the members of a band that is really a secret society:—

Ris. Allow me to present to you—my wife.  
 Minestra. I think you'd better keep her to yourself.  
 Ris. She's the treasure and the pleasure of my life.  
 Min. I daresay—until she's laid upon the shelf!  
 Ris. She's a poem, she's a song—  
 Min. (relenting). You don't mean it—go along!  
 Ris. I shall love her when she's grey!  
 Min. Will you really?—I daresay—;  
     With your snapping and your snarling!  
 Ris. You're a dear, and you're a darling!  
 Min. Do you mean it?  
 Ris. Yes, I mean it!  
 Both. O, my darling! O, my dear!

Belonging to a social stratum other than that of Gilbert, than whom he was scarcely less witty and certainly more catholic in his tastes and life and friends, George Robert Sims (1847–1922) was an extremely popular journalist for the thirty-odd years beginning about 1877 and as an active writer until 1917. As a versifier—for he was a poet in only a couple of pieces—he is

<sup>1</sup> Soft tommy is bread, hard tommy, sometimes called white tommy, is ship's biscuits; cf. soft tack and hard tack.

best remembered for The Dagonet Ballads and Ballads of Babylon (1880) : as a prose-writer he is famous as the liveliest, most consistently and wonderfully able journalist The Referee newspaper, which he put "in the sun", has ever had on its excellent staff, as the author of some highly readable novels, and as an entertaining, kindly memoirist of his varied, often adventurous past. How much Sims did to cure social sores, to stimulate the indifferent, to enlighten those who would help in social work, if only they knew how to go about it, has not yet been properly appraised : it was a very great deal ; for he could make masterly—never maudlin—use of his gift for touching the chord of pity and he could wield the scourge with the vigour of an ancient prophet. "Fallen By the Way" in Ballads of Babylon commences thus :—

"Don't be a fool and blub, Jim, it's a darned good thing for you—  
You'll find a mate as can carry and I'll play the music too ;  
I'm done this time for a dollar—I can hardly get my breath ;  
There's something as tells me, somehow, 'Bill Joy, you be took to death.'

It's a vessel gone bust, and a big 'un ; I can hardly speak for blood ;  
It's the last day's tramp as 'as done it—the hills and the miles o' mud.  
There ain't not the sign of a light, Jim, in this God-forsaken spot—  
Hunt for some warter, pardner, for my lips is burnin' hot.

How much ha' we took today, Jim ? Why not a single brown,  
And our show was one of the best once, and we rode from town to town ;  
Now it's dirty and old and battered, and the puppets is wus for wear,  
And their arms and legs is shaky, and their backs is reg'lar bare.  
I ain't done my share o' the work, mate, since I went that queer in  
the chest,

But I done what I could, old fellow, and you know as I did my best ;  
And now—well, I'm done, I reckon ; it's life as is flowing fast—  
Stick to me, Jim—don't leave me ; it's the end as is come at last."

As a composer of verse he became widely known as "Dagonet", as a journalist it was his "mustard and cress" in The Referee which made him famous ; yet he also gained an honourable name as a short-story writer and a novelist. A fair notion of his stories may be had from The Coachman's Club ; or, Tales Told out of School, 1897. The style is easy, conversational, familiar, with slang occurring naturally and unpretentiously. As when "a young gentleman named Vivian" is called "tra-la-la-la" because he constantly used this expression which he had heard at the Gaiety in the mouth of "a celebrated low comedian". Vivian's valet "in the days when he was cutting a dash" told some friends that "it 'knocked him', as the vulgar saying is, the first time he heard his young governor spoken to in that way". The saying "tickled Mr. Vivian so much that he got it into his head, and always after that would bring it into his own conversation. For instance, if he went racing and laid seven hundred to four hundred on the favourite and it went

own he would shrug his shoulders and say, ' Well, what does it matter ?—Tra-la-la-la ! ' or if some decent fellows who saw him going to the dogs and his good nature being imposed upon right and left said to him, ' Look here, Jack, old fellow—you're making a fool of yourself. If you go on like this you'll be stony broke in a couple of years,' he would smile a sad sort of smile and say, ' Well, what does it matter ?—Tra-la-la-la-la ! ' "

In dialogue one naturally expects slang. But Sims uses it ~~skillfully~~ in actual narrative : this he is enabled to do because he adopts the device of a raconteur telling the stories. In this way : " A smart, well-set up chap he was . . . he had been in the army, and he drove like most soldier coachmen generally do, as if he were charging the enemy. You can always tell a soldier in the box, first by the way he sits, which is as if he'd swallowed a poker, as the saying is, and second by the way he drives, which is as if he was going between gates and posts at the trot and the gallop at the Military Tournament at the Agricultural Hall." This Con Doolan, after a job with a rich young fellow that was a regular " plunger ", found himself " out of a berth " and " was in a great state about it ". Soon, however, " he got a place with a swell bookmaker who lived in a big house at Kew and . . . did the thing in a good style." Con Doolan decided that if he liked the place he would stay, " for the bookmaker will last out half a dozen backers," his new master being one of those who " bet with the swells and stand up against the rails in Tattersall's ring, most of his business being on the nod, as it is called, that is, no money passing but everything settled by cheque on Monday at the Victoria Club."

As an instance of Sim's fiction, Anna of the Underworld is particularly interesting, as it comes so late in his career (1916) and as it affords lively specimens of society, middle-class, and lowly slang. This last shows how difficult it is to draw the line between ordinary familiar speech and slang, for if slangy words and phrases are the only ones used for certain things, then those slang expressions tend to become ordinary familiar speech : for instance, in the following description by Mrs. Gaskin, " char," of her son's theatrical work as " an attendant imp . . . in the Drury Lane pantomime " :—" E 'ad only to come on, my dear, in the 'arlekynade sellin' a evenin' paper, and shoutin' ' All the winners ', but he did it that natural you could see the sportin' gents in the aujence puttin' their 'ands in their pockets feelin' for a copper to buy a paper with ! Then my Jim had the part of a bootblack offered him in the autumn drama and was the 'it of th' play through gettin' the villain to 'ave 'is boots blacked, and then seizin' 'old of 'is leg, and hangin' on to it, and makin' 'im 'op all the way to the police-station, where he was recognized as the real murderer by the 'ero who was in custody, 'avin' been

falsely accused, which, of course, is only what 'e 'ad to expect, because 'eroes always are. And then my boy took on for the pictures, and done well, the work bein' reg'lar and your evenin' off." When asked, later, how her son is doing on the films, Mrs. Gaskin replies : " Beautiful, Miss. 'E's doin' things as 'ud take your breath away." This young sprig is named " James Howard Vincent Gaskin—after the Assistant Commissioner that 'is father was in the [Metropolitan Police] Force with. But we dropped them two middle names because they was above our stations in life ". James Howard Vincent is amusingly precise about the role he plays, his fellow-actors, the setting, and the plot as a whole. His speech is slangy-familiar ; much more so than his mother's. But we must deny ourselves *his* eloquence.

From English Sims we turn to German Baumann, who likewise had a sense of humour. That humour sweetened his learned works, *Londonismen* and *Parisismen*. In 1887, Heinrich Baumann, " master of arts of London University, head master of the Anglo-German School, president of the German Teachers' Association," published at Berlin and in German, his *Londonismen—Slang und Cant*. He concentrates on London, to which, however, he does not confine his researches. In some ninety pages he contrives to give an astonishing amount of sound information on the differences between slang and cant; a bibliography, with excerpts of the texts and dictionaries comprising the subject of, and the commentary on, cant and slang; extremely useful notes on the nature and the " literature " of military and naval slang, school slang, cockney slang, Romany, Lingua Franca, Americanisms, society slang; some genuinely enlightening extracts illustrating certain kinds of slang; the jargon of sports and games; notes on pronunciation. The glossary is both historical and current, its entries terse and efficient, the definitions exemplarily accurate, and the indications of *milieu* as reliable as they are useful. It is true that he includes a few words (mainly from sport) that are neither slang nor cant; but no English reader, and very few foreign readers would be misled by these.

A year after Baumann's invaluable book appeared, Charles Mackay<sup>1</sup> wrote thus, soundly except that he forgot how popular slang was in the eighteenth century : " Slang . . . has . . . within the last half-century invaded the educated and semi-educated classes in England, America, and France, though it has not yet, to anything like the same extent, permeated the literature and conversation of the European nations, other than the two named, where Liberty has more or less degenerated into Licence. Democracy . . . is the real parent of vulgar<sup>2</sup> slang. . . . The

<sup>1</sup> Blackwood's Magazine, in May, 1888.

<sup>2</sup> He might have added " and of much picturesque ".

Jargon of recent years, fashionable and unfashionable . . . , is mostly . . . derived from the common speech of illiterate people. . . [Words that, originating in the lower classes] have obtained favour and currency among the imperfectly educated vulgar of the middle and upper classes, and have lately been raised to the distinction of print and publicity of newspapers and inferior novels<sup>1</sup> . . . are numerous and threaten to become still more fashionably and extensively employed."

It is advisable to turn now to several lexicographers of slang. In 1889-1890, Albert Barrère, a notable authority on English and French slang and cant, and Charles Leland, an authority on Romany and the author of the once famous Breitmann Ballads, brought out A Dictionary of Slang, Jargon and Cant. The former wrote the preface, which begins : " To a very great number of respectable and by no means uneducated persons, slang is simply a collective name for vulgar expressions, the most refined individual being he who uses it least . . . Others regard it as the jargon of thieves . . . Others, again, believe that it is identical with the gypsy tongue." All this may hold of those ignorant of slang, but no one who had read Hotten could possibly be so childish. Leland wrote the introduction, a brief history of English slang, and he and Barrère acted as general editors to a notable team of contributors. Despite the revised edition of 1897, this work cannot be compared with Slang and its Analogues ; for instance, the quotations are undated.

Then comes Farmer and Henley's Slang and its Analogues Past and Present, which superseding Leland and Barrère, was "a dictionary, historical and comparative, of the heterodox speech of all classes of society for more than three hundred years. With synonyms in English, French, German, Italian, etc.". The seven volumes appeared in 1890-1904, W. E. Henley the poet's name appearing on the title-page of the second and succeeding volumes. It was, however, John S. Farmer, author of Americanisms Old and New and editor of Musa Pedestris, that collection of canting songs and other verses which is still the fullest, who did most of the work. " Printed for subscribers only," the edition consisted of 750 copies ; a set, even in these hard times, will fetch ten or twelve guineas—and is more than worth it, for it constitutes the most comprehensive, and the best, dictionary of slang in any language. Farmer could truly say that very often he found himself a pioneer, an explorer in " what was practically a *terra incognita* ". Modestly he quotes from the "Advertisement" (i.e., Author's Note) to the 4th edition, 1773, of Dr. Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language : " He that undertakes to compile a dictionary, undertakes that which, if it comprehends the full extent of his design, he knows himself

<sup>1</sup> Probably a " knock " at Greenwood and Sims.

unable to perform. Yet his labours, though deficient, may be useful, and with the hope of this inferior praise, he must incite his activities, and solace his weariness."

The conscientiousness of the lexicographer and the scope of his work may be surmised from the fact that there are upwards of 100,000 illustrative quotations. Farmer, for by far the greater part of the time, worked single-handed, yet he gratefully acknowledges his three chief debts: to Notes and Queries, "that invaluable storehouse"; to the Oxford English Dictionary, which had finished only *B* when the first volume of Slang and its Analogues appeared, which had finished only *L* when Slang and its Analogues was completed, and was not terminated until twenty-four years after that; and to G. L. Apperson, the editor of English Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings.

It is true that the dates of the illustrative quotations are often wrong and that the quotations are occasionally copied inaccurately. What would one expect in so huge a piece of work? I can point to mistakes—let us be charitable and speak of misprints and slips of the pen—in works produced by groups of experts with sub-editors and a host of assistants at their command, but I don't think I'm smart or clever because I happen to have noticed these lapses, nor do I impute demerit in those more famous lexicographers. Farmer's errors of date were doubtless due to the very natural tedium consequent upon the labours of proof-correcting and they are easily detectable and remediable; the imperfect transcriptions of the illustrative quotations are almost never serious and, so long as the keyword is correct, such imperfections are very very rarely misleading: Farmer was practically never misleading. It is so easy to indicate errors, let us rather praise the excellence of the arrangement and the always courageous, often brilliant execution of the plan of Slang and its Analogues, which is one of the three or four most remarkable one-handed achievements in the whole record of dictionary-making. His definitions are sound, his distinguishing of shades of meaning is careful and delicate, his comments are shrewd and scholarly, his essayettes on important or interesting or puzzling words are entertaining, and his understanding of the nature and tendencies of slang is remarkable. His psychology is as penetrating as his research is astounding.

But a couple of examples will show how very good Farmer is at all points.

"*ABBESS* or *LADY ABBESS*, *subs[tantive]* (old).—The keeper of a house of ill-fame; also a procuress. It has been suggested that the origin of this term for the mistress of a brothel, as also that of *ABBOT* (q.v.), the name given to the male associate of the mistress, may be traced to the alleged illicit amours of Abelard and Héloïse. In this connection it is significant that,

According to Francisque Michel's *Études Comparées sur l'Argot*, a common woman was in the old French cant, said to come from *abbaye des s'offre à tous*. The keeper of such an establishment was called *l'abbesse*, and her associate *le sacristain*. The analogy was carried still further, by the inmates being called 'nuns' and 'isters of charity'. This depravation in the meaning of words usually applied only to the holders of sacred office may possibly, without undue licence, be regarded as resulting from the mockery of the degradation, in the popular mind, of the priestly office; it may naturally flow from the loose way in which the title of 'abbot' was often applied to the holders of non-monastic offices. In fact, the first step towards degeneration may have occurred in applying the term to the principal of a body of clergy, as an episcopal rector; or, as among the Genoese, to a chief magistrate. The second stage was reached when, in the middle ages, 'abbot' was applied ironically to the heads of various guilds and associations, and to the leaders in popular assemblages and disorderly assemblies, e.g., the Abbot of Bell-ringers, the Abbot of Misrule, the Abbot of Unreason. Henceforward deterioration was both rapid and easy to the point when 'abbot' and its co-relative 'abbess' signified a steward and stewardess of the STEWS (q.v.). The terms are now obsolete on both sides of the Channel. In England the modern equivalent for *ABBESS* is *MOTHER* (q.v.); and in France *la maca*, *mère maca*, *la maquée*, or *institutrice* do similar duty.

"1782. Wolcot (Pindar) . . .

So, an old *Abbess*, for the rattling rakes,  
A tempting dish of human nature makes,  
And dresses up a luscious maid.

"1840. W. Kidd, *London and All its Dangers*. 'The infernal wretches who traffic in the souls and bodies of their helpless victims are called *Lady Abbesses*.'"

"*ABBOTT'S PRIORY*, *subs.*, *phr.* (popular):—The King's Bench Prison was formerly so called; perhaps from Chief Justice Abbott."

Farmer's Dictionary influenced the opinion of scholars more academic than himself. We can feel sure that Slang and its Analogues was in the mind of J. Brander Matthews when,<sup>1</sup> in 1893, he wrote: "Until recently few men of letters ever mentioned slang except in disparagement and with a wish for its prompt extirpation. Even professed students of speech, like Trench<sup>2</sup> and Alford<sup>3</sup> . . . , are abundant in declarations of

<sup>1</sup> See "The Function of Slang" in Harper's Magazine; revised and reprinted in his *Parts of Speech*, 1901.

<sup>2</sup> Notably, English Past and Present.

<sup>3</sup> Especially, The Queen's English, 1863.

abhorrent hostility. De Quincey<sup>1</sup> was almost alone in saying "good word for slang."

Quite independently of critics and lexicographers, men like Arthur Morrison, Arthur Binstead, and William Pett Ridge pursue their self-appointed and much enjoyed task of presenting people, especially humble folk and the very poor, just as they are; and in that pursuit, though with no deliberate intention, they heed and note the everyday speech of those people, to whom slang is usually the only poetry, often the only safety-valve, and sometimes the only adventure. As always, slang is a prominent feature and by no means the whole of familiar speech: for, except incidentally, slang affects neither grammar nor composition.

In 1894, Arthur Morrison published *Tales of Mean Streets*, a collection of stories that, for the most part, had already appeared in prominent periodicals. They all concern the East End of London. They are grim and realistic and astonishingly frank for the period. In "The Red Cow Group", for instance, a number of anarchist workmen decide that one of their fellows, whom they suspect of playing informer to the police, must be dispatched in an explosion planned by them. One man runs through the hapless victim's pockets. "' You won't 'ave no use for money where you're goin', ' he observed callously; ' besides, it 'ud be blowed to bits and no use to nobody. Look at the bloke at Greenwich, 'ow 'is things was blowed away. 'Ullo ! 'ere's two 'arf-crowns an' some tanners. Seven an' thrippence altogether, with the browns. This is the bloke wot 'adn't got no funda. This'll be divided on free an' equal principles to 'elp pay for that beer you've wasted. 'Old up, ol' man ! Think o' the glory. P'r'aps you're all right, but it's best to be on the safe side, an' dead blokes can't split to the coppers . . .'"

<sup>1</sup> His, however, is not an important contribution to the subject; but Brander Matthews was right to stress the importance of the fact that De Quincey († 1859) did speak well of slang.