

**A GLOSSARY OF THE
COTSWOLD
(GLOUCESTERSHIRE)
DIALECT**

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A Glossary of the Cotswold (Gloucestershire) Dialect by Richard Webster Huntley

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RICHARD WEBSTER HUNTLEY

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OF THE

Cotswold (Gloucestershire) Dialect,

ILLUSTRATED BY EXAMPLES FROM ANCIENT AUTHORS,

BY THE LATE

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THIS being a posthumous Work of the Author's, great difficulty has been found in editing it correctly; and the reader will kindly make allowance for any remaining imperfections.



REMARKS
ON THE
COTSWOLD DIALECT.



DIALECT is one of the best evidences of the origin and descent of the people who use it; and, whenever we can trace it to its roots, we seem to fix also the country which supplied the first inhabitants of the region where it is spoken. Bringing their language with them from the cradle whence they emigrated, every people brings also its customs, laws, and superstitions; so that a knowledge of dialect points also towards a knowledge of feelings, seated (in many cases) very deeply, and of prejudices which sway the mind with much power; and thus we gain an insight into the genius and probable conduct of any particular races among mankind.

Another reason, which at this present time renders dialects more worthy of remembrance, is the universal presence of the village schoolmaster. This personage usually considers that he places himself on the right point of elevation above his pupils, in proportion as he distin-

guishes his speech by classical or semi-classical expressions; while the pastor of the parish, trained in the schools still more deeply, is very commonly unable to speak in a language fully "understood of the people," and is a stranger to the vernacular tongue of those over whom he is set; so that he is daily giving an example which may bring in a latinized slip-slop. In addition to this, our commercial pursuits are continually introducing American solecisms and vulgarisms. Each of these sources of change threaten deterioration. Many homely but powerful and manly words in our mother tongue appear to totter on the verge of oblivion. As long, however, as we can keep sacred our inestimable translation of the Word of God, to which let us add also our Prayer-book, together with that most wonderful production of the mind of man, the works of Shakespeare, we may hope that we possess sheet-anchors, which will keep us from drifting very far into insignificance or vulgarity, and may trust that the strength of the British tongue may not be lost among the nations.

It has, moreover, been well observed that a knowledge of dialects is very necessary to the formation of an exact dictionary of our language. Many words are in common use only among our labouring classes, and accounted therefore vulgar, which are in fact nothing less than ancient terms, usually possessing much roundness, pathos, or power; and, what is more, found in frequent use with our best writers of the Elizabethan period. The works of Shakespeare abound in examples of the Cotswold dialect, which indeed is to be expected, as his connexions and early life are to be found in the districts where it is entirely spoken; and if, as has been thought,

he spent some part of his younger days in concealment in the neighbourhood of Dursley, he could not have been better placed to mature, in all its richness, any early knowledge which he might have gained of our words and expressions.* This, however, is certain, that the terms and phrases in common use in the Cotswold dialect are very constantly found in his dialogue; they add much strength and feeling to it; and his obscurities, in many cases, have been only satisfactorily elucidated by the commentators who have been best acquainted with the dialect in question.

The Cotswold dialect is remarkable for a change of letters in many words; for the addition or omission of letters; for frequent and usually harsh contractions and unusual idioms, with a copious use of pure Saxon words now obsolete, or nearly so. If these words were merely vulgar introductions, like the pert and ever-changing slang of the London population, we should look upon them as undeserving of notice; but as they are, still almost all to be drawn from undoubted and legitimate roots, as they are found in use in the works of ancient and eminent authors, and as they are in themselves so numerous as to render the dialect hard to be understood by those not acquainted with them, they become worthy of explanation; and then they bring proof of the strength and manliness of the ancient English tongue, and they will generally compel us to acknowledge, that while our modern speech may possibly have gained in elegance and exactness from the Latin or Greek, it has lost, on the other hand, impressiveness and power.

We believe that the roots chiefly discoverable in this

* See Note at end.

dialect will be the Dutch, Saxon, and Scandinavian; bearing evidence of the Belgic, Saxon, and Danish invasions, which have visited the Cotswold region. Occasionally, a Welsh or Gaelic root shows itself, and is probably a lingering word of the old aboriginal British inhabitants, who were subsequently displaced by German or Northern irruptions. One or two words seem to be derived from the Sanscrit, which may have been obtained from our German relations; one word from the Hebrew may have been left among us when the Celtic tribes were driven into Wales.

To these old words, now nearly lost in modern conversation, is to be added a corrupted use of the Saxon grammar; whence modes of expression are produced which at first sight are obscure, as having never obtained admission in the colloquy of the better informed, and as being in themselves ungrammatical.

We presume that the most ancient work now extant written in the Cotswold dialect is the "Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester," who lived, according to his own statement, at the time of the battle of Evesham, *i. e.*, August 4, 1265. This historian and versifier may be said to use altogether the Cotswold tongue, and his language is that which is still faithfully spoken by all the unlettered ploughboys in the more retired villages of the Gloucestershire hill-country. This dialect extends along the Cotswold, or oolitic, range, till we have passed through Northamptonshire; and it spreads over Wilt, Dorsetshire, northern Somersetshire, and probably the western parts of Hampshire. In Oxfordshire the University has considerably weakened the language by an infusion of Latinisms; and in Berkshire it has suffered still more by London slang and Cockneyisms.

In noticing the change of letters observable in the vernacular tongue on the Cotswolds, we will begin at the beginning.

A. This vowel, in the first place, frequently receives reduplication; we may instance "A-äter," for "After." The next change which this letter admits is into the diphthong *Æ*, as in "Æle" for "Ale;" in these cases it is common to have the letter "Y" placed before the diphthong, as "Yæle;" sometimes so rapidly pronounced as to sound like the word "Yell," an outcry. "Lærk" stands for "Lark," the bird; with similar instances of alteration, which generally are preservations of the Saxon pronunciation. Next, we find the letter changed into "ai," as in "Make—Maïke," "Care—Caire;" and where the "ai" is the legitimate mode of spelling, there it obtains a great elongation of sound, as "Fair" becomes "Fai-er," "Lair" (of a beast) "Lai-cr"; for this use we have found no authority. Next, the letter "a" frequently becomes "o," as in "Haund—Hond," "Land—Lond," "Stand—Stond," "Man—Mon;" the whole of which are pure Saxon, and are found in constant use by Robert of Gloucester. Finally, the diphthong "au" frequently becomes "āā," as in "Daughter—Dāäter," which is unadulterated Danish; "Draught—Drāāt," with many other instances. This is also the case where the letter "a" has properly the sound of this diphthong, as in "Call—Cāāl," "Fall—Vāāl," "Wall—Wāāl," and suchlike words; to these we will add "Law," which is pronounced "Lāā," agreeing with the Saxon "Lah."

B is, as we might expect, sometimes interchanged with P, as in the name of the plant "Privet," often called "Brivet;" it is also sometimes, though not frequently, used for W, as "Beth-wind," for "With-wind," "Edbin" for "Edwin;" "Bill" for "Will," is common everywhere.