

**A DICTIONARY OF THE
KENTISH DIALECT AND
PROVINCIALISMS IN USE
IN THE COUNTY OF KENT**

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A dictionary of the Kentish dialect and provincialisms in use in the County of Kent by W. D. Parish & W. F. Shaw

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INTRODUCTION.

THE KENTISH DIALECT finds its expression in peculiarities of phrase and pronunciation rather than in any great number of distinctly dialectical words. In many respects it closely resembles the dialect of Sussex, though it retains a distinctive character, and includes a considerable number of words which are unknown in the neighbouring County.

The Kentish pronunciation is so much more coarse and broad than that of Sussex, that many words which are common to both dialects can scarcely be recognised a few miles away from the border; and many words of ordinary use become strangely altered. As an instance, the word *elbow* may be taken, which first has the termination altered by the substitution of *ber* [ber] for *bow* [boa], and becomes *elber* [el·ber]. The *e* is next altered to *a*, and in Sussex the word would be generally pronounced *alber* [al·ber], in which form it is still recognisable; but the Kentish man alters the *al* into *ar* [aa], and knocking out the medial consonant altogether, pronounces the word *arber* [aa·ber], and thus actually retains only one letter

out of the original five. The chief peculiarities of pronunciation are these,—

Such words as *barrow* and *carry* become *bar* and *car* [baa, kaa].

a [a] before double *d* is pronounced *aa*; as *laader* [laa'der] for *ladder*.

a [a] before double *l* becomes *o*; as *foller* [fol'er] for *fallow*.

a [ai] before *t* is lengthened into *ea*; as *pleät* [plee'h't] for *plate*.

Double *e*, or the equivalent of it, becomes *i*; as "*ship in the fil*" [ship in dhu' fil] for "*sheep in the field*."

Then, by way of compensation, *i* is occasionally pronounced like double *e*; as "The meece got into the heeve" [Dhu' mee's got in'tu' dhu' hee'v] for "*the mice got into the hive*."

i appears as *e* in such words as *pet* [pet] for *pit*.

o before *n* is broadened into two syllables by the addition of an obscure vowel; as "Doänt ye see the old poäny be all skin and boäns" [doa'h'nt ye see dhu' oald poa'h'ny bee aul skin un boa'h'ns].

ou is lengthened by prefixing *a* [a]; the resulting sound being [æw]. "The haöunds were raöund our haöuse yesterday." [Dhu' haewnds wer raewnd our haews yest'erday.]

The voiced *th* [dh] is invariably pronounced *d*; so *that*, *this*, *then*, *though* become *dat*, *dis*, *den*, *dough* [dat, dis, den, doa].

In words such as *fodder* (A.S. *fóðor*), where the old *d* comes between two vowels, the dialect has *th* [dh], as [fodh'er].

The final letters are transposed in *wasp*, *hasp*, and many words of similar termination. Hence these become [wops, haps].

w and *v* change places invariably when they are initial; as "*very vell*" for *very well*.

Peculiarities of construction appear in the case of a large class of words, whereof "upgrown," "outstand," "no-ought," "over-run" and others may be taken as types.

Almost every East Kent man has one or two special words of his own, which he has himself invented, and these become very puzzling to those who do not know the secret of their origin; and as he dislikes the intrusion of any words beyond the range of his own vocabulary, he is apt to show his resentment by taking so little trouble to pronounce them

correctly, that they generally become distorted beyond all recognition. *Broad litus*, for instance, would not easily be understood to mean bronchitis.

The East Kent man is, moreover, not fond of strangers, he calls any new-comers into the village "furriners," and pronounces their names as he pleases. These peculiarities of speech and temper all tend to add to the difficulty of understanding the language in which the Kentish people express themselves.

The true dialect of Kent is now found only in the Eastern portion of the County, and especially in the Weald. It has been affected by many influences, most of all, of course, by its geographical position, though it seems strange that so few French words have found their way across the narrow streak of sea which separates it from France.

The purity of the dialect diminishes in proportion to the proximity to London of the district in which it is spoken. It may be said that the dialectal sewage of the Metropolis finds its way down the river and is deposited on the southern bank of the Thames, as far as the limits of Gravesend-Reach, whence it seems to overflow and saturate the neighbouring district. The language in which Samuel Weller, Senior and Junior, express themselves in the pages of the *Pickwick Papers*, affords an excellent specimen of what the Kentish dialect is, when it is brought under the full influence of this saturation.

Our collection of Kentish words and provincialisms has been gathered from various sources. Much has already been done to rescue from oblivion the peculiarities of the dialect. As long ago as 1736 Lewis published a glossary of local words in the second edition of his *History of the*

Isle of Tenet; this was reprinted by Prof. Skeat for the English Dialect Society as 'Glossary B 11,' in 1874. Dr. Pegge's attention was drawn to the subject at the same time, and he compiled a glossary entitled 'Kenticisms,' which remained in manuscript till it was communicated, in 1876, by Prof. Skeat, to the English Dialect Society and to the IX. Vol. of the *Archæologia Cantiana*. The MS. was purchased by him at Sir F. Madden's sale, and will be presented to the English Dialect Society.

A large number of Kentish words were found in the pages of Holloway's *General Dictionary of Provincialisms* (1839), and also in Halliwell's *Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial words* (1872); and when Professor Skeat suggested to us a more complete glossary of the dialect, we found that these publications had aroused such a considerable interest in the collection of Kentish words, that several collectors were at work in different parts of the County, all of whom most kindly placed their lists of words at our disposal. (One peculiarly interesting collection was given to the Society many years ago by Mr. G. Bedo.) The learned Professor has never for a moment abated his interest in our work, and has been always ready with a helping hand. Meanwhile the great local professor of the Kentish language, Mr. H. Knatchbull-Hugessen, M.P., has given us the full benefit of his thorough knowledge of the subject.

In order to exhibit the modern dialect more clearly, references to the specimens of Kentish in the Early and Middle English Periods have been avoided. It may, however, be well to observe here that the peculiarities of the phonology of the old dialect are well shown in some of these. The most important are the following :

1. The inscription in the Codex Aureus, printed in Sweet's *Oldest English Texts*, p. 174, and reprinted (very accessibly) in Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, Part II., p. 98. This inscription is of the Ninth Century.

2. Some Glosses in a copy of Bede (MS. Cotton, Tib. c. 2), apparently in Kentish. Printed in Sweet's *Oldest English Texts*, p. 179. Of the end of the Ninth Century.

3. Some of the Charters printed in Sweet's *Oldest English Texts*, pp. 425—460. See, in particular, a Charter of Hlothere, No. 4; of Wihtred, No. 5; of Æthelberht, Nos. 6 and 7; of Eardwulf, No. 8; and the Charters numbered 33—44, inclusive. Of these, Nos. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 34—42, inclusive, are reprinted in Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, Part II., pp. 174—194.

4. Kentish Glosses of the Ninth Century, first printed by Prof. Zupitza in Haupt's *Zeitschrift*, and reprinted in Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, Part II., pp. 152—175.

5. Five Sermons in the Kentish dialect of the Thirteenth Century, printed in Morris's *Old English Miscellany*, pp. 26—36. Two of these are reprinted in Morris's *Specimens of English*, Part I., pp. 141—145. The grammatical forms found in these Sermons are discussed in the Preface to the *Old English Miscellany*, pp. xiii.—xvi.

6. The Poems of William, of Shoreham (not far from Sevenoaks), written in the former half of the Fourteenth Century, edited for the Percy Society by T. Wright, London, 1849. An extract is given in *Specimens of English*, ed. Morris and Skeat, Part II., pp. 63—68.

7. The Ayenbite of Inwyt, or Remorse of Conscience, finished A.D. 1340, by Dan Michel, of Northgate, edited by Morris for the Early English Text Society in 1866. An

extract is given in *Specimens of English*, ed. Morris and Skeat, Part II., pp. 98—106.

It may be added that the Psalter, known as the Vaspasian Psalter, printed in Sweet's *Oldest English Texts*, is now ascertained to be Mercian. It was first printed by Stevenson for the Surtees Society in 1843-4, under the impression that it was "Northumbrian" a statement which will not bear even a hasty test. Mr. Sweet at first claimed it as "Kentish" (*Trans. of the Phil. Soc.* 1877, Part III., p. 555), but a closer investigation proves it to be Mercian, as Mr. Sweet has himself shown.

It may be mentioned that the collection of words presented in this Dictionary has been in process of formation for no less than fourteen years, and in the course of that time we found many instances of folk lore and proverbial expressions, which have been retained in expectation that they may form the nucleus of a separate work to be published hereafter.

At the end of this book a few blank pages will be found perforated so as to be detached without injuring the rest, and upon these we hope that many notes on Folk Lore and Local Proverbs, and quaint words and anecdotes, illustrative of Kentish dialect and character, may be jotted down from time to time and forwarded to Rev. W. F. Shaw, Eastry Vicarage, Sandwich, in whose hands they will help to the completion of a work which promises to be one of considerable interest.

