

PAPERS.

I.—ON THE HISTORY OF NAVAL TERMS.

By the Rev. J. S. Howson, M.A., Principal of the Collegiate Institution.

I need not begin this paper by an argument in praise of the study of words. That words, considered merely as words, are full of instructive phenomena; that language contains in its very texture a manifold record of the past; that endless stores of suggestive associations are laid up in our commonest phraseology,—all this is so readily recognised by all who have ever thought on the subject, that it would be a needless delay to attempt to prove it. This truth has been expressed in a manner so lively and so well adapted to our present topic, by a writer in an American periodical, that I will adopt the passage as my introduction to this paper.

“To the scholar, words seem instinct with meaning and life, even when they stand alone. Each one of them has, in the first place, a parentage from which it springs according to laws almost as settled as those of physical generation. They reflect, too, the image of their parent, and carry the marks of relationship upon their faces. Differ they may greatly in moral characteristics, in importance and frequency of use, from their venerated progenitors; but they can never escape from the resemblance in sound and sense which their birth has *enstamped upon them*. Sometimes they are settlers on a foreign soil, and trace back to an ancestry in some older land, perhaps to an ancestry now dead, at least to a dead language. But the philologist comes, and by a few strokes of his pen clears up the family genealogy, shows, perhaps, when they changed their domicile, and how by degrees they acquired the rights of citizens. Sometimes a single straggler or two comes from the antipodes, led away from his fireside in the course of trade, as a solitary merchant will settle at some trading post among the Indians. Perhaps they find it necessary to suit foreign ears by a considerable alteration of external appearance, so that a relative at home would scarcely recognise them in their transformation. But the master of languages is a spy upon them, from whom they can seldom escape. Those few who are sons of nobody, and whose parentage cannot be traced, are more badly off than their brethren in this—that philologists, instead of letting them alone, torment them with a thousand exploring questions, offer impertinent conjectures as to who their fathers were, and often give them an unpleasant prominence by inventing for them a very improbable or absurd genealogy.”

These are the remarks of a writer in the "New Englander." Now, looking at language from this point of view, we at once see the value of the study of provincialisms. Such local peculiarities of speech are not to be despised as mere vulgarisms; and a fondness for research of this kind is not to be laughed at as idle antiquarianism. The patois of a language is not always its deterioration: it is often "a prior state which circumstances have induced and enabled some favoured orders to desert;" it exhibits "not the scoria of the furnace, but some of the first, though perhaps grotesque shapes, of the fused ore."* Thus it will often be found to manifest old types and analogies which have disappeared in the more refined tongue of common life, and hence to aid us in our enquiries respecting the affinities of languages, besides illustrating the progress of manners and customs and the history of social life.

What is true of a provincialism, or the dialect of a district, is at least equally true of the dialect of a class. It is very curious to observe how a peculiar language is formed among any class of men who are separated from their fellows, and united among themselves by a peculiar interest or occupation. Hence the origin of *slang*, which it is perhaps difficult to define in any other way, and of *cant*, which may be briefly described as religious slang. But the point which it is of importance to us to notice on this occasion is, that these class peculiarities may contain materials drawn from very various and very ancient sources, and preserve them unaltered, when they have been elsewhere either lost or entirely transformed. I believe that the conversation of the London cabmen, or even the rude terminology of the navvies who made our railroads, may contain forms of pronunciation and expression of extreme interest to the philologist; just as I should expect remote provincialisms in Ireland or in America to contain illustrations which might be useful to the critical student of Chaucer or Shakspeare.

Of all classes, there is none whose language is so well worth considering in this point of view as that of our seafaring countrymen. In the first place it is a very ancient language. An English sailor's phraseology is not of yesterday; but it is connected with the greatest passages of our history from Raleigh to Nelson. In the course of its formation, also, it has drawn its

* See an Essay on the Yorkshire Dialect, in the *Nugæ Literariæ* of Rev. R. W. Hamilton, of Leeds.

materials from various parts of our coast, each characterised by its own local dialects and customs. But in appreciating the philological importance of our nautical phraseology, we must travel more remotely into antiquity, and far beyond our own coasts. How many of our technical seafaring terms came from the Mediterranean, and how many from the opening of the Baltic? How many have we in common with France, and how many with Holland? It is evident that we cannot reflect long on this subject without our thoughts being brought to the first Saxon invasions and to the Danish pirates, to Alfred and Canute and William the Conqueror, to the Crusades and the acquaintance thus effected between our own ancestors and the traders of Venice and Genoa, and to the time when our navigators in the Atlantic were brought into rivalry with those who sailed from the Spanish Peninsula. These topics, in their practical bearing on our general subject, may perhaps be alluded to in some future paper.

In further illustration of the interest and value of our nautical dialect I would mention its strongly marked and emphatic character. The language of the British tar, however he may have found it convenient to borrow from all nations of the world, is peculiarly his own; whatever it expresses, it expresses decidedly; its features are clear and positive, and can be easily examined and scrutinized. Another reason why it is worthy of our examination is that it is widely spread, and ever spreading more widely with every new effort of British enterprise; so that it is tending to become the universal language of the seas. And, lastly, this wide extension is attended with hardly any liability to change. With the exception of such slight alterations as may be expected to result from modifications in the practice of shipbuilding and navigation, so long as wind and water, timber and canvas, remain the same, the language of the English sailor will remain the same for centuries to come, in all the creeks of the Asiatic seas, and among all the islands of the Pacific.

Yet, with all these interests associating themselves with that seafaring life of which we are nationally proud, I cannot find that any one has subjected our maritime patois to a careful philological examination. No one, so far as I know, has made it the occasion of a separate work. Among our grammarians we have a full recognition of the importance of dialectical forms; we have books published on the dialects of nearly every county; but the dialect of the sea has escaped the attention which was due to it. In Mr. Halliwell's Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words, which brings

together scattered contributions from every district, I find nothing in the introduction except the following remark, which appears to be made in a MS. communication:—"The language of our seamen in general is well worth a close investigation, as it certainly contains not a few archaisms; but the subject requires time and patience, for in the mouths of those who call the Bellerophon and the Ville de Milan the *Billy Ruffian* and *Wheel-em-along* there is nothing

"But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something new and strange."

To which Mr. Halliwell replies with justice, that the remark "must be received with some limitation, and perhaps applies almost entirely to difficult modern terms not easily intelligible to the uneducated. Many of the principal English nautical terms have remained unchanged for centuries."* Yet, in the body of the dictionary, very little light is thrown upon our subject; the number of nautical terms quoted is small, and there is no attempt to elucidate them on any general principles. We cannot expect to find philological inquiries in any of the dictionaries which are intended to explain the usage of nautical terms; though in Falconer's well-known work † many judicious remarks in this direction are made incidentally. As regards the general dictionaries of the English language, we are equally at fault; nor can we be surprised. We know that Johnson was weak in etymology; and we should hardly expect that the hero of St. John's-gate and the Mitre Tavern, who is said to have studied not the *genus homo*, but the *species* Londoner, would have extended any peculiar sympathy to the *species* sailor. As regards Richardson's dictionary, which is of the highest etymological merit, it will be generally allowed to be very defective in what relates to technical terms of all kinds. And similar remarks might be extended, I believe, to all our published vocabularies.

We seem, then, to be treading on new and unbroken ground when we proceed to inquire into the history of nautical terms. To do this at all thoroughly would require a remarkable union of great qualifications. It would demand, in the first place, a thorough knowledge of the terms themselves, and the mode of using them, which cannot possibly be obtained except in the experience of a seafaring life. With this ought to be united a full acquaintance with the dialectic peculiarities on the different parts of

* Halliwell, pp. xv, xvi.

† *Universal Dictionary of the Marine*, to which is added, a Translation of the French Sea-terms, &c., 1766.

our coasts. But far more than this would be required. The subject could not be thoroughly mastered by any one without an adequate knowledge of various European languages, both in their earlier and later forms, and especially with Anglo-Saxon, whence the parentage of many naval expressions must be sought. Nor, lastly, could he proceed with safe steps in his inquiry, unless he were well trained in the linguistic principles which have been established by the great philological writers of Germany and other countries.

Now, I am very conscious that I possess not merely not all these qualifications, but not even one of them. Though I have been much on the water, I am always too sea-sick to hold a tiller or handle a rope; and though I am fond of the study of language, I have been almost forced to be content with looking on the outside of the great works of Grimm and Bopp. Yet it may be possible to indicate a line of inquiry which is interesting, or at least, amusing, and which may be afterwards followed up more systematically by others. In a town like this it may be expected that some may take more than usual interest in the subject, and may perceive some prospect of connecting useful results with the study of this branch of nautical antiquities. Burke observes, in his *Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful*, that "the English language is peculiarly framed for purposes of business." And if it is true, as the compiler of one of the comparative marine dictionaries which I have used says, in his preface—"that many an English ship is in the most imminent danger of being lost, from the commander or master not understanding the foreign pilot who is to conduct her into port; and that our navy officers and shipmasters are frequently at a loss to express their wants in foreign ports, and to examine accounts of repairs, &c., drawn up in foreign idioms; and that our merchants, ship-owners, and underwriters are often necessitated, in regard to the true sense of the most important ship papers, implicitly to rely on the imperfect, unguided knowledge of translators;"* it seems by no means impossible that something useful might result from any study which induces us to place in juxtaposition, for the purpose of comparison, the naval terms of different countries.

Before proceeding to mark out the lines of division, by help of which I conceive the whole subject might most conveniently be examined, I will take

* H. Newman, *Marine Pocket Dictionary of the Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and German Languages*. London, 1800.

a single example to illustrate the nature of the inquiry, and to show how much historical and philological interest may be connected with a nautical term. When a subject is new, a single example often clears away more obscurity than could be dissipated by a long explanation.

I take the word *binnacle*—the common name of the box or covered place which contains the compass, within sight of the steersman, and which is carefully illuminated by night. I make no apology for defining what is known to almost every one; for, in an essay on technical terms, it is always better to assume that elementary explanations may be useful to some one present. There is no one who has gone on a dark night by steam-boat from Liverpool to Glasgow who is not familiar with the appearance of the *binnacle*; but few, perhaps, have ever thought of inquiring into the derivation of the word. From its form we might be disposed to guess, at first sight, that it is a true old-fashioned English word, or, at least, that it is of northern origin. This, however, is not the case. The corresponding terms in German are *Kompass-haus* or *Nacht-haus* (night-house), which explain themselves at once; and the latter of these terms is also the customary expression in Danish, Swedish, and Dutch. But if we look to the languages of southern Europe, we find at once the derivation of our English word. For its synonym in French is *habitaclé*, in Spanish *bitacora*, in Portuguese *bitacola*, which are merely the two Peninsular varieties of the same word. The origin of the term is, in fact, the Latin *habitaculum*, and since the first syllable is already dropped in Spain and Portugal, I should imagine that it has come to us from thence rather than from France, where the word is used more nearly in its original form—an opinion which seems the more reasonable when we consider that the compass itself was unknown to our Anglo-Norman ancestors, but was familiarly known to those who patronised Columbus, and those who were the countrymen of Vasco de Gama. But again, this word invites us to a little further research: what was this Latin *habitaculum*, or “small house,” which became the title of that enclosed box which protects the compass from storm and darkness? I cannot help conjecturing that it was, in its original sense and in heathen times, a small chapel, or shrine, in which an image of the ship’s patron deity was placed; and that it received its new application when the compass was found more worthy to occupy the place of a dumb idol, which could rescue the mariner from no danger, and guide him in no difficulty; and I am confirmed in this conjecture by observing

that the modern Italian term for the binnacle is *chiesola*—"little church." But a difficulty might still be started in reference to our proposed derivation. It might be said that the change of *t* into *n* is an objection to the theory. No one, however, will feel any difficulty here who has ever closely watched the phenomena of a cold in the head—and here I may make the incidental remark, that in all such inquiries as that in which we are engaged, it is of the utmost importance that we should attend closely to the organs with which different consonants are pronounced, if we wish to be accurate in tracing their interchanges between one language and another. I make this remark in reference to the subject generally, for, as regards the word binnacle, we find it stated by Falconer that the old English mode of pronouncing it was *bittacle*, and so, indeed, it is spelt in Captain Marryat's novels.

This one word, then, is a very full illustration of the manifold associations, historical and philological, which may be grouped round a nautical term. It may also conveniently illustrate the method according to which I would propose to examine the subject generally. This method is, in fact, based on the comparison of our own nautical terms with those of other nations. I would take four northern languages, Dutch, German, Swedish, and Danish (or Norwegian), as means of tracing the Teutonic or Scandinavian elements of our maritime phraseology;—and four of southern Europe, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and French, as representing the influence of the Romance languages,—and trace the synonyms of our various seafaring terms in all of them.

The whole subject might be conveniently thrown into two divisions, *philological* and *historical*. If we were prosecuting a comprehensive and minute inquiry, some further subdivisions would be necessary, in order to avoid confusion; but at present I can only describe the general features of the subject: and in the rest of this paper, which at best is only introductory and suggestive, I will limit myself to a few philological illustrations, reserving what is properly historical for another occasion.

Under the head of what is merely *philological*, I consider nautical terms simply as words—as components of language; and the questions before us relate to the passing of words from one language to another, and the modifications, as to consonants and vowels, which they undergo in the process. We are brought here among considerations of the highest interest. Our inquiries are within the domain of "Grimm's Law," and the whole field of

comparative etymology is opened before us. But, happily, no ambitious attempt can be made in a paper like this. In what remains, I can do little more than suggest such questions as these:—by what links our nautical vocabulary is connected with those of other nations,—and how far it contains archaic forms which elsewhere are almost obliterated—how far we can distil from this salt water any pure drops of Saxon undefiled.

We should expect, in the first place, to find in the English sailor's language that facility of adaptation, combined with sturdy independence, which is characteristic of the English language generally. The Englishman borrows from every side, and yet he always remains an Englishman. So with his language; and so, not less, with his nautical dialect.

The very first word that crosses the mind supplies us with an illustration. The word "*ship*" is Teutonic. We use it in common with all the four northern languages which I have selected for comparison (*schip*, D.; *schiff*, G.; *skift*, D.; *skepp*, S.), and yet our adjectives are "*naval*" and "*nautical*," words derived from the Greek and Latin, and exhibiting our relation to the other four languages which represent the south (*navire*, F.; *nave*, I.; *navio*, S.; *nao*, P.) How completely are we seen, even at this stage of the inquiry, to stand at the meeting point of north and south, where we can appropriate what we like and yet retain our independence.

As a further illustration of this position, let us select a few parts of the gear of a ship, and examine the words by which we call them. The symmetry of a ship's arrangements may enable us to do this without confusion. Let us take three ropes which belong to the yard of a sail—*braces*, *lifts*, and *halyards*. The first word denotes the rope by which the yard is turned in a direction parallel to the horizon; the second the rope which supports the yard, and causes it to hang in proper equilibrium; the third the rope by which the yard is hoisted or lowered vertically on the mast. Now, if we compare our vocabulary with that of other nations, we find the first of these terms appearing in every one of them. It is, in fact, the Latin word *brachium*, "an arm," and no term could be more appropriate. In the case of the other two terms, the English sailor has disdained to use a word common to any other language, though for *halyards* all the four northern languages agree in using one common word, and the four southern languages agree in using another; and the same remark may be extended, with a slight modification, to the third word, *lifts*.

I had collected many examples of this kind, for the purpose of showing the curiously wilful way in which our marine vocabulary sometimes harmonises with the north, sometimes with the south, and sometimes with neither; and also for the purpose of showing how this dialect often contains links of connection with other countries which are lost in our general language. But I must hasten to show, by a few illustrations, how it contains relics of our own older tongue, which are otherwise extinct, or at least very partially retained. We ought here properly to make a division between archaic forms and archaic significations; but I am content to give my examples without any precise attention to order.

Swab, the mop made of old rope, with which decks are cleaned, is an old form of *sweep*. *Swain*, which we seldom use now, except in pastoral poetry, appears in its old meaning of a servant, in *boatswain* and *coxswain*. *Tide* is the Anglo-Saxon for *time* (German, *Zeit*), and explains its own derivation from the periodicity of the daily phenomena on our coasts. The proverb, "time and tide wait for no man," must be comparatively modern in its present form, and is a curious exemplification of the composite nature of the English language, *time* and *tide* being really the Latin and Teutonic words for the same thing, coming respectively through the Anglo-Norman and the Anglo-Saxon. *Taut* is only an older form of *tight*, and I cannot but regret that one naval writer whom I have consulted (Lieutenant For-dyce) spells it *tort*, thus entirely concealing its etymology. The *hull* is the part of the ship which is covered with the waves, unless, indeed, it is more properly synonymous with *hold*, the planking which covers and conceals the cargo. At all events, it is derived from a well-known Anglo-Saxon verb which means "to cover," and it is still in familiar use in our northern provincial dialects, in the sense of "a covering;" pea-pods, nutshells, and potato-skins are all called "*hulls*" in Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Westmorland. *Tow* and *tug* (more properly pronounced *toog*, as we do pronounce it in the north) are the same word, and I find another form of it in my native dialect of Craven, where the exertion of any laborious and fatiguing effort is expressed by the word *tew*. This dropping of the *g* is quite according to rule. Thus the *bow* of a ship appears as *boeg* in Dutch; and the pronunciation of some of our northern sailors, who speak of the *boos* of their vessel, preserves the link of connexion. *Adrift* is an old adverb, of which we have but few examples, connected with *drive*. The word *bitts*, denoting the perpendicular pieces of timber on deck, to which

the cables are fastened, is connected with *bite* (A.-S. *bitan*), and may be compared with the *bit* we place in a horse's mouth, and with the *bait* upon a fish-hook. *Roadstead*, a place of anchorage, is instanced by Horne Tooke, in the "Divisions of Purley," as one of the few instances where the old word *stead*, "a place," is retained in the language. *Tiller*, the handle by which the rudder is moved, denotes, in some of the southern dialects, the stalk of a cross-bow; and in Suffolk it is used for the handle of any instrument.

Instances of this kind might be multiplied to a very great extent; but I will limit myself to three others, which seem to deserve a more special notice.

The word *luff*, which often puzzles those who have never been at sea, and which denotes the bringing of the vessel's head towards the quarter from which the wind comes, is, in fact, the same old word as the German *Luft*, "the air." It appears copiously in the naval vocabulary of other nations; thus, the French *lowoyer* means "to beat up against the wind," and the Dutch *loeven* means "to go to the weather side." We retain the word in the term *loft*, which we apply to an upper room. The sailors' word *aloft* is familiar to us all; and I think the same root is to be traced in another expression used at sea, namely, when a ship is sailing near the wind and a fluttering motion is caused by the air in the edge or leech of the sail, which is then said to *lift*.

The next word is *shrouds*, by which is meant the aggregate of ropes which come down from the mast-head to the ship's side. We have serious and solemn associations with another use of the word *shroud*; but at first sight there appears no connection between the two. There is, however, real connection. *Scrudan*, in Anglo-Saxon means "to clothe;" and *shroud* (*scrud*) is the dress of the ship. In "Guy of Warwick" we find the following line:—

"In a kirtle of silk he 'gan him schrede."

In the case before us the difference is, that the kirtle is of hemp and not of silk.

The last word is *frap*—a term not in very common use, but not without considerable interest; for it denotes that operation of undergirding a ship which is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, xxvii, 17. In the other Euro-

pean languages the synonymous term is expressive of the operation; * and we might well be perplexed to explain the origin of the English phrase. We find, however, good reason to believe that it is an old Saxon word, when we discover that in the Devonshire dialect *fraped* means "drawn or fixed tight." Thus it would seem that the Torquay fishermen have preserved to us this curious relic of the language of the West Saxons.

I am compelled to conclude this paper abruptly, without entering on the *historical* branch of the enquiry. But the Society will probably allow me to resume the subject, and perhaps it will be prosecuted by others.

II.—LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE MEN IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

By the Rev. A. Hume, D.C.L., LL.D., F.S.A.

[The meeting at which these papers were read was held during the day, for the convenience of country members. The members of the Literary and Philosophical Society were invited to attend; together with those of the Polytechnic Society, the Architectural and Archæological Society, and the Chemists' Association. The visitors in attendance also included ladies. The Paper of which the following is an abstract, was a popular account of the subject, written specially for a meeting of that kind.—ED.]

The ancient and beautiful church of Sefton, in this neighbourhood, contains several monumental brasses, and among them those of Sir William Molyneux and his two wives. He was an ancestor of the present Earl of Sefton, and died in 1548, or in the beginning of the reign of Edward VI. When the brasses were in a perfect state, the arms of the knight were above his head, and those of each wife over hers; while an elaborate achievement, containing twelve quarterings, shewed as many families of distinction whose blood and representation he had inherited.

At the bottom is an inscription, from which we learn that William Molineux, soldier (*miles* not *eques*), Lord of Sefton, was three times engaged in battle during the reign of Henry VIII.; on each occasion he bore himself bravely, but especially at Flodden, where, with his own hand, he captured and bore away two standards from the Scots, though he was valiantly opposed.

* See these synonyms in "The Life and Epistles of St. Paul," by the Rev. W. J. Conybeare, M.A., and the Rev. J. S. Howson, M.A., vol. ii, p. 311, n. 5.