English as we speak it in Ireland

Joyce P W
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IN IRELAND.
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BY

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THE LIFE OF A PEOPLE IS PICTURED IN THEIR SPEECH.

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PREFACE.

This book deals with the Dialect of the English Language that is spoken in Ireland.

As the Life of a people—according to our motto—is pictured in their speech, our picture ought to be a good one, for two languages were concerned in it—Irish and English. The part played by each will be found specially set forth in Chapters IV and VII; and in farther detail throughout the whole book.

The articles and pamphlets that have already appeared on this interesting subject—which are described below—are all short. Some are full of keen observation; but very many are mere lists of dialectical words with their meanings. Here for the first time—in this little volume of mine—our Anglo-Irish Dialect is subjected to detailed analysis and systematic classification.

I have been collecting materials for this book for more than twenty years; not indeed by way of constant work, but off and on as detailed below. The sources from which these materials were directly derived are mainly the following.

First.—My own memory is a storehouse both of idiom and vocabulary; for the good reason that from childhood to early manhood I spoke—like those among whom I lived—the rich dialect
of Limerick and Cork—and indeed to some extent speak it still in the colloquial language of everyday life.

I have also drawn pretty largely on our Anglo-Irish Folk Songs of which I have a great collection, partly in my memory and partly on printed sheets; for they often faithfully reflect our Dialect.

Second.—Eighteen years ago (1892) I wrote a short letter which was inserted in nearly all the Irish newspapers and in very many of those published outside Ireland, announcing my intention to write a book on Anglo-Irish Dialect, and asking for collections of dialectical words and phrases. In response to this I received a very large number of communications from all parts of Ireland, as well as from outside Ireland, even from America, Australia, and New Zealand—all more or less to the point, showing the great and widespread interest taken in the subject. Their importance of course greatly varied; but many were very valuable. I give at the end of the book an alphabetical list of those contributors: and I acknowledge the most important of them throughout the book.

Third.—The works of Irish writers of novels, stories, and essays depicting Irish peasant life in which the people are made to speak in dialect. Some of these are mentioned in Chapter I., and others are quoted throughout the book as occasion requires.
Fourth.—Printed articles and pamphlets on the special subject of Anglo-Irish Dialect. Of these the principal that I have come across are the following:—

‘The Provincialisms of Belfast and Surrounding District pointed out and corrected,’ by David Patterson. (1860.)


‘Don’t, Pat,’ by ‘Colonel O’Critical’: a very good and useful little pamphlet, marred by a silly title which turns up perpetually through the whole pamphlet till the reader gets sick of it. (1885.)

‘A List of Peculiar Words and Phrases at one time in use in Armagh and South Donegal’: by D. A. Simmons. (1890.) This List was annotated by me, at the request of Mr. Simmons, who was, at or about that time, President of the Irish National Teachers’ Association.

A Series of Six Articles on The English in Ireland by myself, printed in ‘The Educational Gazette’; Dublin. (1890.)

‘The Anglo-Irish Dialect,’ by the Rev. William Burke (an Irish priest residing in Liverpool); published in ‘The Irish Ecclesiastical Record’ for 1896. A judicious and scholarly essay, which I have very often used.
‘The Irish Dialect of English; its Origins and Vocabulary.’ By Mary Hayden, M.A., and Prof. Marcus Hartog (jointly): published in ‘The Fortnightly Review’ (1909: April and May). A thoughtful and valuable essay. Miss Hayden knows Irish well, and has made full use of her knowledge to illustrate her subject. Of this article I have made much use.

Besides these there were a number of short articles by various writers published in Irish newspapers within the last twenty years or so, nearly all of them lists of dialectical words used in the North of Ireland.

In the Introduction to the ‘Biglow Papers,’ Second Series, James Russell Lowell has some valuable observations on modern English dialectical words and phrases derived from Old English forms, to which I am indebted for much information, and which will be found acknowledged through this book: for it touches my subject in many places. In this Introduction Mr. Lowell remarks truly:—‘It is always worth while to note down the erratic words or phrases one meets with in any dialect. They may throw light on the meaning of other words, on the relationship of languages, or even history itself.’

Of all the above I have made use so far as served my purpose—always with acknowledgment.

Fifth. For twenty years or more I have kept a large note-book lying just at my hand; and
whenever any peculiar Irish-English expression, or anything bearing on the subject, came before me—from memory, or from reading, or from hearing it in conversation—down it went in the manuscript. In this way an immense mass of materials was accumulated almost imperceptibly.

The vast collection derived from all the above sources lay by till early last year, when I went seriously to work at the book. But all the materials were mixed up—three-na-haila—'through-other'—and before a line of the book was written they had to be perused, selected, classified, and alphabetised, which was a very heavy piece of work.

A number of the Irish items in the great ‘Dialect Dictionary’ edited for the English Dialect Society by Dr. Joseph Wright were contributed by me and are generally printed with my initials. I have neither copied nor avoided these—in fact I did not refer to them at all while working at my book—and naturally many—perhaps most—of them reappear here, probably in different words. But this is quite proper; for the Dialect Dictionary is a book of reference—six large volumes, very expensive—and not within reach of the general public.

Many of the words given in this book as dialectical are also used by the people in the ordinary sense they bear in standard English; such as break:—’Poor Tom was broke yesterday’ (dialect: dismissed from employment): ‘the bowl
fell on the flags and was broken in pieces’ (correct English): and dark: ‘a poor dark man’ (dialect: blind): ‘a dark night’ (correct English).

This is essentially a subject for popular treatment; and accordingly I have avoided technical and scientific details and technical terms: they are not needed.

When a place is named in connexion with a dialectical expression, it is not meant that the expression is confined to that place, but merely that it is, or was, in use there.

P. W. J.

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