

Is Pennsylvania-German a Dialect?

BY CHARLES CALVIN ZIEGLER.



AS a Pennsylvania-German I cannot sit still when Prof. Albert Bushnell Hart calls my mother-tongue a "so-called language," "a barbarous compound of German and English words in German idiom, somewhat resembling that mixture of Hebrew and German called Yiddish," a "lingo" and a "jargon." It is evident that his knowledge of Pennsylvania German was acquired during an automobile ride around Lancaster county, eked out by odds and ends fished from Phebe Gibbons' *Essay on Pennsylvania Dutch* (1872) and a few other inconsequential sources. He repeats Phebe's "Buggy forray"—which one expression, so spelled, is enough to relegate both her and him to the realm of incompetency in treating of our dialect. Twenty years did Phebe dwell with and among our people and yet did not begin to understand our speech, and we cannot therefore expect, Albert, to do any better with only the experience

gathered during an automobile tour.

Professor Hart's article on The Pennsylvania Dutch in the Boston *Transcript*, reprinted in the November number of THE PENNSYLVANIA-GERMAN, is certainly very interesting, and is, I believe, historically and ethnologically about correct. But he is simply mistaken when he asserts that our speech is a mongrel mixture of German and English and not a German dialect. The halo of his Harvard professorship shall not invest this old error with the brightness of truth—not if I can help it.

Why did not the Professor, when he snatched "Buggy forray" from Phebe Gibbons' book, turn to the appendix, where he would have learned something of the structure of the dialect as given by Prof. Stahr? Does he not know that in 1872 S. S. Haldeman, then Professor of Comparative Philology in the University of Pennsylvania, wrote an essay on "Pennsylvania Dutch," in which he conclusively proved that our speech was a

true German dialect, different from all the rest, but very much resembling the Pfälzisch? Is he ignorant of the scientific treatise on the Pennsylvania-German dialect (1889) by Prof. Marion Dexter Learned, formerly of Johns Hopkins, now of the University of Pennsylvania? After exhaustive research, Prof. Learned shows beyond all cavil that ours is a true German dialect.

Now I do not for a moment deny that the Pennsylvania-Germans have appropriated a considerable number of English words into their speech. The proportion varies according to locality, the individual and the particular theme under consideration. The infusion of English at Mauch Chunk is immensely greater (judging from E. H. Rauch's "Hand-Book") than at Allentown, Lancaster and York. In his lexicon Rauch gives the number of words in our dialect at about 5,000, of which 1,000 are English. But Rauch was a lawyer and editor, and hence includes a multitude of English law and technical words which are not at all in general use by our people. Prof. A. R. Horne (Allentown) on the contrary, gives in "Em Horne sei Buch" 5,522 words, of which only 176 are English. These two dictionaries show 20 and 3 per cent. respectively of English infusion—an astonishing difference. In Lancaster and York counties the English admixture seems to be quite small. According to Prof. Learned's investigations it is less than one per cent!

But what I want to emphasize is the fact that the Pennsylvania-Germans brought their dialect with them when they came to Pennsylvania from their native homes in the Palatinate and other sections of South Germany. The infusion of English is accidental, and has not changed the essential characteristics of the dialect. It is Pennsylvania-German not because of the adventitious mixture of German and English, but because it always was Pennsylvania-German,—was so from the first,—from the period when it was brought to Pennsylvania by thousands of immigrants from South Germany. (See Rupp's "Thirty Thousand Names of German Immigrants in Pennsylvania, from 1727 to 1776").

It seems almost useless now to contend against the misnomer "Pennsylvania-Dutch," as it is so generally used. The fact remains, however, that there is really no more Dutch in Pennsylvania German than in English. Persons who speak with a faraway loftiness of the Pennsylvania "Dutch" do not seem to realize the fact that the great English language is a tree whose ramifying branches are grafted on the trunk of the Dutch dialect called Anglo-Saxon. It is an immense and wonderfully compounded pot-pie with Dutch for the undercrust. It doesn't take much erudition to prove this. From my dictionaries I gather within a few minutes this list of words which might be easily extended:

Eng.	Dutch.	Ger.	Pa.-Ger.
calf	kalf	kalb	kalb
that	dat	das	des
water	water	wasser	wasser
land	land	land	land
father	vader	vater	vatter, daadi
mother	moeder	mutter	mutter, mammi
sister	zuster	schwester	schweschter
brother	broeder	bruder	bruder
house	huis	haus	haus
what	wat	was	was
it	het	es	es
hood (hat)	hoed	hut	hut
cat	kat	katze	katz
foot	voet	fuss	fuss
great	groot	gross	gross
hand	hand	hand	hand
God	God	Gott	Gott
ox	os	ochs	ochs
sheep	schaap	schaf	schoof
hound (dog)	hond	hund	hund
ground	grond	grund	grund
wot (know)	weet	weiss	weess
good	goed	gut	gut
blood	bloed	blut	blut
plant	plant	pflanze	planz (p-b)
book	boek	buch	buch
sleep	slaap	schlaf	schloof
week	week	woche	woch
over	over	ueber	iwwer
tame	tam	zam	zaam
wild	wild	wild	wild
to prate,	praten.	sprechen	schpreche
talk	spreken	sprechen	schwetze
letter	letter	buchstaben	buchschaawe
(of alphabet)			
boor	boer	bauer	bauer

Don't you see the family resemblance in these words? All Teutonic. And you will notice that the relationship between English and Dutch is closer than between Dutch and Pennsylvania-German. Prof. Hart surely knows Grimm's law of consonantal changes, in accordance with which Pennsylvania-German is at once seen to belong to the *das* branch and English to the *dat* branch of the Teutonic languages. The former is German, the latter Dutch.

Talk about "barbarous compounds"! What was the English during the 400

years after the Norman Conquest, when Anglo-Saxon and Norman-French were being stirred in the pot and forced to combine? And consider all the elements that have been added to the mixture ever since; why, the combination isn't homogeneous yet.

"Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire, burn; and cauldron, bubble."

How poor the English would be had it not borrowed and incorporated thousands and thousands of words from every language under the sun! It is, to say the least, not fair to describe a dialect, as Prof. Hart has done, by presenting

its unusual, abnormal elements and thus making it appear ludicrous to the uninformed. Every language has its funny aspects, but these are not the language itself. A man may make a grimace occasionally, but that is not his natural expression.

I suppose people will continue to call us the Pennsylvania "Dutch" and perpetuate the old erroneous idea that our speech is only a curious compound of High German and English; but whenever I catch anyone doing it—be he professor or clodhopper—I shall take a shot at him.

