

TRACING SOME OF THE POPULAR PHRASES

Writing in the North American Review, Professor Brander Matthews attributed to Thomas B. Reed this remark: "When Dr. Johnson defined patriotism as the last refuge of a scoundrel he did not foresee the infinite possibilities of the word 'reform.'"

Professor Matthews is a member of a committee which has undertaken to "simplify" American spelling, and the New York World intimates that the professor is desirous of "simplifying American history, too," because he attributed to Thomas B. Reed a remark which the World says was made by Roscoe Conkling. According to the World:

"The remark was made by Conkling in a speech at the republican state convention in Rochester September 26, 1877. Platt, who was not yet a senator but already one of Conkling's handy errand boys, acted as temporary chairman of the convention, and in his speech attacked the Hayes administration, then only six months old. The resolutions drafted by Conkling contained no indorsement of the president or his policies. On the floor of the convention George William Curtis offered an amendment to the resolutions declaring that Hayes' title to his seat was as regular as Washington's and commending the administration. It was in answer to Curtis' speech that Conkling delivered the masterpiece of classical scurrility in which the remark occurred which Prof. Matthews undertakes to quote: 'When Dr. Johnson defined patriotism as the last refuge of a scoundrel he was unconscious of the then undeveloped capabilities and uses of the word "reform."'

Maybe Mr. Conkling got his idea from a statement made by Charles I. who said "public reformers had need first practice on their own hearts that which they propose to try on others."

It is not always an easy task to locate the origin of a popular phrase and many amusing and easily explained errors are made by well informed men in bestowing credit for some of these phrases.

Some time ago Harper's Weekly undertook to locate the origin of the phrase "a public office is a public trust." Harper identified it with the name of the late Daniel S. Lamont, but, taken to task by one of its readers, Harper said it did not claim that Colonel Lamont was the author of the phrase, but that he adapted it to fitting use in a Cleveland campaign. Harper then proceeded to give the credit to the late Governor Hugh S. Thompson of South Carolina who, according to Harper's, "first employed the expression in his inaugural address in 1832." Another reader of Harper's took issue with this statement and said that the credit belonged to Daniel Webster who, seventy years ago, in a speech delivered at Boston, declared: "It is time to declare that offices created for the people are public trusts, not private spoils."

The Commoner pointed out at the time that Harper's critical reader as well as Harper's itself was in error. Grover Cleveland or Daniel Lamont, as you please, used the phrase in 1834; Abram S. Hewitt used it in 1833 and Governor Thompson used it in 1832; but Dorman B. Eaton, a New York lawyer, said in 1831: "Public offices are public trusts;" and as early as May, 1872, Charles Sumner declared: "The phrase 'the public office is a public trust' has of late become common property." Daniel Webster, as this reader of Harper's Weekly reminded us, said: "It is time to declare that offices created for the people are public trusts, not private spoils." But Mr. Webster said that October 12, 1835, and eight months prior thereto, February 13, 1835, John C. Calhoun said: "The very essence of a free government consists in considering offices as public trusts, bestowed for the good of the country, and not for the benefit of the individual or a party." Years before that Edmund Burke, in his address on the French Revolution, referred to a public office as "a great trust," and in 1807 Thomas Jefferson said: "When a man assumes a public trust, he should consider himself as public property." But away back in seventeen hundred and something, Matthew Henry, a British divine, published a commentary on the old and new testaments. In the third chapter of the First Epistle to Timothy, referring to the qualifications of deacons as well as bishops, it is said: "And let these also first be proved." Commenting on this Matthew Henry said: "It is not fit the public trusts should be lodged in the hands of any till

they are first proved and found fit for the business they are to be entrusted with."

It is not difficult for one who studies the origin of some of these popular phrases, to conclude that there is "nothing new under the sun."

Beauveau Borie, one of the directors of the Lehigh Valley Railroad company, might have imagined he was getting off something original when, during the coal strike in December, 1902, being told by a newspaper reporter that the public might want to know something concerning the proceedings of the special board meeting, he retorted: "Well let them go to h—, it is nobody's business what was done." But the elder Vanderbilt put this doctrine much more succinctly long before, when he said: "The public be d—d."

Grover Cleveland is commonly credited with several phrases which did not originate with him. No one has yet claimed credit for his "innocuous desuetude" phrase, but when he said "it is a condition which confronts us—not a theory," it sounded very much like something Disraeli had said in 1843. When Mr. Cleveland referred to "the cohesive power of public plunder," he reminded one of something John C. Calhoun said in 1836, to wit: "A power has risen up in the government greater than the people themselves, consisting of many and various and powerful interests, combined into one mass, and held together by the cohesive power of the vast surplus in the banks."

To Lincoln is generally attributed the phrase, "government of the people, by the people, for the people." He used that phrase in his Gettysburg speech in 1863, but at Boston in 1850, Theodore Parker described "the American idea" as demanding "a democracy—that is a government of all the people, by all the people, for all the people." In 1830 Daniel Webster used this phrase: "The people's government, made for the people, made by the people, and answerable to the people."

In 1865, Lincoln said: "With malice toward none, with charity for all," but in 1838 John Quincy Adams said: "In charity to all mankind, bearing no malice or ill will to any human being." Of course Lincoln put it much better than John Quincy did.

Henry Ward Beecher is credited with saying: "A man in the right with God on his side is in the majority though he be alone." But Wendell Phillips put it much better when, long before Beecher spoke, he said: "One on God's side is a majority."

For years Abraham Lincoln has been credited with the saying: "You can fool all of the people some of the time, some of the people all of the time, but you can not fool all of the people all of the time." The Washington Post is authority for the statement that Representative Snooks, of Ohio, called upon the congressional librarian to say where this Lincoln quotation could be found, and that Assistant Librarian Spofford replied that the sentence does not occur in any of Mr. Lincoln's writings. Mr. Spofford said that Mr. Nicolay, Lincoln's secretary, told him (Spofford) that Mr. Lincoln did not use this phrase, but that P. T. Barnum, the great circus man, was the author. William Pitt Kellogg, however, declares that he remembers distinctly hearing Mr. Lincoln deliver this phrase at a meeting at Bloomington, Ill., in May, 1856. Mr. Kellogg says that Mr. Lincoln used this phrase frequently in his speeches, but that he remembers particularly that at Bloomington Mr. Lincoln said: "No one can long be deceived by such sophistries; you can fool all of the people some of the time, some of the people all of the time, but you can not fool all of the people all of the time."

In 1896, the republican leaders sought to poke fun at Mr. Bryan because he had used the expression, "the dollar before the man." But they forgot, or did not know, that in a letter written to certain Boston republicans in April, 1859, Abraham Lincoln complained of those who, he said, "held the liberty of one man to be absolutely nothing when in conflict with another's right of property," adding: "Republicans, on the contrary, are for both the man and the dollar, but in case of conflict the man before the dollar." It was, too, William McKinley who, arraigning the Cleveland administration, complained that Mr. Cleveland's purpose was to make men cheaper and money dearer, "money the master, everything else the servant."

Just where the very common phrase "the

greatest good to the greatest number," originated, would be difficult to say. Francis Hutcheson, a Scotch educator, wrote in 1720: "That action is best which procures the greatest happiness to the greatest numbers." Beccaria, an Italian political philosopher, in 1764, used the expression in the introduction to his "Treatise on Crimes and Punishments." Bentham, an English jurist, said that he had learned from Joseph Priestly, an English philosopher, that "the greatest happiness of the greatest number, is the foundation of morals and legislation."

"Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," is commonly attributed to various American orators. John Philpot Curran used it at Dublin in 1808.

When Andrew Hamilton, the insurance lobbyist, appeared before a New York committee, he sought to justify his manipulation of legislatures through the use of money, upon the theory that there is "a higher law that requires the protection of business interests." That was putting to very bad use a phrase that has some noble associations. In the house of commons, in 1830, Lord Brougham said he did not recognize any rights of property in a slave, adding: "In vain you tell me of laws that sanction such a claim! There is a law above all enactments of human codes—the same throughout the world, the same in all times—such as it was before the daring genius of Columbus pierced the night of ages, and opened to one world the sources of power, wealth and knowledge; to another all unutterable woes; such as it is at this day. It is the law written in the heart of man by the finger of his Maker; and by that law, unchangeable and eternal, while men despise fraud, and loathe rapine, and abhor blood, they will reject the wild and guilty phantasy that man can hold property in man! In vain you appeal to treaties, to covenants between nations; the covenants of the Almighty, whether of the old covenant or the new, denounce such unholy pretensions."

In a free soil meeting in Boston, in May, 1849, Wendell Phillips referring to "the higher law" said: "We confess that we intend to trample under foot the constitution of this country. Daniel Webster says: 'You are a law-abiding people;' that the glory of New England is 'that it is a law-abiding community.' Shame on it, if this be true; if ever the religion of New England sinks as low as its statute book. But I say we are not a law-abiding community. God be thanked for it!"

In a speech delivered in the United States senate in March, 1850, William H. Seward said: "We reverence the constitution, although we perceive this defect, just as we acknowledge the splendor and the power of the sun, although its surface is tarnished with here and there an opaque spot. The constitution regulates our stewardship; the constitution devotes the domain to union, to justice, to defense, to welfare, and to liberty. But there is a higher law than the constitution, which regulates our authority over the domain and devotes it to the same noble purposes."

This lobbyist, Hamilton, was not the first one to put to bad use a phrase that had served good purposes. In February, 1899, John B. Henderson, formerly a senator from Missouri, delivered an eloquent speech, protesting against imperialism, the keynote of which speech was: "Why not let well enough alone?" In that speech General Henderson said: "We are now entering upon an untried experiment in our system of government. Why not let well enough alone? Imperialism contains more armed soldiers than the fabled wooden horse of Troy. Imperialism reverses the entire theory of self-government. It discards the wisdom of our fathers, repudiates, without shame, the Monroe doctrine, and joins hands with the execrated holy alliance. It rejects the civil equality of men and accepts, without protest, the oppressions and despotism of the sixteenth century. This war in the Philippines brings us back into the shadows of the Dark Ages. It is a war for which no justification can be urged. As no reasons could be assigned for its existence, congress was ashamed to make up any record of its declaration. It has scarcely better excuse than the wars of subjugation waged by imperial Rome, whose object was to plunder, and enslave the weak, and whose result was, in the language of its own historian, to make a desert of other lands and call it peace."

And that's where Mark Hanna found his 1900 campaign slogan.

RICHARD L. METCALFE.