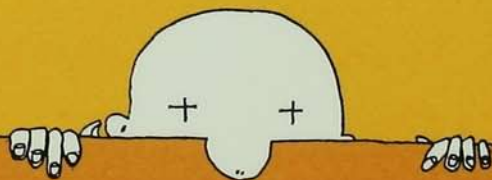


A DICTIONARY OF RHYMING SLANG

A PIG'S EAR,
TWO TORN THUMBS,
A PIMPLE AND BLOTCH,
VERA LYNN
(STRONG AND THIN),
AND A SMACK IN
THE EYE, PLEASE



JULIAN FRANKLYN

A DICTIONARY OF RHYMING SLANG

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A DICTIONARY OF
RHYMING
SLANG

by
JULIAN FRANKLYN
*Author of *The Cockney**

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To
ERIC PARTRIDGE
with respect for his learning, admiration of his
industriousness, and appreciation of his human
qualities

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PREFACE

A PREFACE is—or ought to be—an ambivalent item of literary output, inasmuch as being written last it is meant to be read first. That it runs a grave risk of not being read at all is unfortunate, but it stands a better chance of catching the eye than does a page headed 'Acknowledgements'.

Hence I find it reasonable to apply the suspense technique employed by writers of thrillers and here record my thanks to Eric Partridge, first for the abstract quantity of his having set an example, secondly for the moral favour of his support and encouragement and thirdly for the practical value of not only his two vast works, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, and *A Dictionary of the Underworld*, both of which contain a great deal of expertly defined and annotated rhyming slang, but also for the enlightenment gained from his numerous, and at once masterly, scholarly and entertaining essays and articles on the subject.

I have to thank him, too, for his having introduced me, some few years ago, to Sidney J. Baker, the acknowledged authority on rhyming slang in Australia, and on all other forms of Australian speech.

I distinctly remember how Mr Baker and I paced up and down the Colonnade of the British Museum, discussing the Cockney dialect, and slang, and speech habits of individuals. Among my own contributions to the last aspect of slovenly affectedness was the story of how I had once abandoned, because of it, the chance of securing a job (which I greatly needed).

I had been introduced to an executive of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Organization who had asked me to ring him up and make an appointment to call at his office and conclude the arrangements.

At the appointed time I made the call and a feminine voice, very ladylike, drawled or moaned 'ham jam'. I tried again. 'Ham jam' was again the reply at which I insisted that I wanted the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Organization. 'Hearts awry', moaned the voice, and at that moment the missing link fell into place. 'Ham jam' meant the initial letters MGM; 'hearts awry' meant 'that's right'. I rang off. When telling the yarn to Baker I did not dream a time would come, as it now has, when I would be publicly thanking him for permission to quote from his work.

He collaborated with Professor David W. Maurer of Louisville University in the production of an important article entitled 'Australian Rhyming Argot in the American Underworld', published in *American Speech, a Quarterly of Linguistic Usage*, from which both he and Professor Maurer have generously granted me permission to quote. The latter goes further, saying, 'If I can supply you with any additional information by letter, I shall be glad to do so. . . . I believe the situation has not changed much since 1944.' Indeed, it has not changed much in the United States, but there has been post-war growth in Australia.

Such developments as there may have been in U.S.A. are more likely to be in New York than in Chicago: Sydney, Australia has most assuredly evolved some new expressions.

Nearer home, and known to all, is Mr Lupino Lane, who lent both the Lord Chamberlain's Certified Copy of *Me and My Girl*, which happens to be the only copy in existence, and a private note-book, with permission to quote the relevant passages from both. The latter contained the fruits of many years of observation of rhyming slang used by actors and others connected with the world of the theatre.

The authors and the publishers whose names appear in conjunction with the examples used have all earned thanks and gratitude by their generous permission to re-print in this volume; and finally, the informants—so kind, tolerant and helpful—should be publicly acknowledged. That they remain anonymous is from no wish of the author to suppress the names of his helpers, but in deference to the wishes of the majority of them. As one of them put it, 'What! thay ain't no taste in nuffink, chinal yeh git sorted aht boi every berk what finks 'e knows berra an what you do, who'll pump yeh brains aht o' yeh fer the price of a pint.'

So much for suspense technique—the moment has now come when the task of forewording must be faced. In the introductory essay it will be observed that the theory of origin that has been universally accepted by scholars is here rejected and that in analysing the Victorian viewpoint of 'underworld', indication is given of one of the reasons for this rejection. After demolition and excavation comes the rebuilding and the architect of the new edifice (if no one else) is convinced of its superiority.

In the Glossary will be found a number of terms not hitherto placed upon record and which cannot therefore be dated within a decade; other terms which may have found their way into print have not been discovered, and again their dating is vague.

The present author is himself responsible for annotation and comment. To give a concrete example—Mr Lupino Lane should not be criticized for any notes or comments on terms gleaned from his private note-book, for it contained none.

Errors there may be: omissions there are. The author humbly invites

corrections and enlightenment, but begs for extensive definitions with (if possible) chronological information. For example, 'Hen and hog=bog' will be welcome in order to plug a gap in knowledge, but 'Hen and hog=bog (a muddy patch, with no reference to slang for W.C.) first heard in Maidstone, Kent, in 1910. A term used by cattle-drovers. Now obsolete,' will be far more useful, and, by the way, 'hen and hog' does not mean *bog*, is not (and never was) used by anyone; it is just an example of how to fill the back of a post-card.

Finally, although the predominant rhythm is either iambic or trochaic (see page 18) a term that is of another rhythm, or of none at all, must, in spite of its violation of the rules, be admitted. In the glossary will be found a number of single words devoid of rhythm and in some examples rhyming but weakly with their meanings, hence it should not be assumed that a term of this kind, known to the reader, but omitted from the glossary, is also known to the author who has rejected it.

PREFACE to the SECOND EDITION

FROM time to time a newspaper will print an article declaring that London's costers are no longer Cockney, that dialect is dying, that rhyming slang is dead.

These laments are superfluous, these obituaries premature; as attested by the call for a second edition of this dictionary and confirmed by there being—in round figures—five hundred additional entries.

This is not an indictment against the Press, neither does it reflect upon the veracity and conscientiousness of the contributors: on the contrary, both editors and writers are to be congratulated on being speech-conscious and giving expression to it.

They ought not to be held responsible for a misorientation attributable to the total mechanism of culture. They are men of affairs under an obligation to the reading public to supply up-to-the-minute news and views. To execute this duty they must keep their ears turned towards the seldom silent broadcasting apparatus: they are men of good taste who possess 'long-playing' records of the works of the master musicians and a machine for extracting the congealed sound therefrom: they are men of little leisure, hence, when 'dashing out for a quick coffee', are unable to be selective in their choice of a cafe and, in consequence are, while hastily imbibing, heavily bombarded by the jungle-howlings of the juke-box. Such conditioning of the auditory reflex renders them unable to listen to the human voice in the raw, and they assume that the slang they never hear is as dead as the donkey barrow.

People of less importance suffering from a similar sociological

deafness write letters along the same lines to editors who print them: this lofty misleading occurs because 'he who lives more lives than one more deaths than one must die' and rather than run the risk of double death these arm-chair commentators upon life out-of-doors remain isolated in their own world viewing the other man's through long-distance glasses, and filling up the gaps in observation with logical deduction.

It is not easy to cross social frontiers and feel at ease in an environment other than one's own even when one is conscious of the unexplored territory to be charted: it is, however, manifestly possible to believe, even in mid-twentieth century, that one falls off the edge when past the Pillars of Hercules.

If there are fresh worlds to conquer they must be sought. The Port aspect of London, vast and important though it is, remains unostentatiously in the background of Metropolitan life. Even the multitude that passes, night and morning, over London Bridge and sees the 'breakfast boats' discharging cargo does not mentally extend the scene to cover the considerable acreage of the docks.

The watermen and the dock-workers live largely in a close world of their own: do not, when in their pubs and cafes, lay themselves open to intrusion and they are inclined, when confronted with the insensitive, objective—even aggressive—questioner, to make their answers monosyllabic.

This attitude is not, as some romantic-minded writers on London life have inferred, because of 'the natural shyness' of men who earn their living by the waters of the world, either on ocean-going ships or on the small-craft of a great tideway, but because the man of the waterfront knows how easily he may be made a cat's-paw in a smuggling plot by some plausible and apparently genuine stranger.

The Thames waterman disapproves of smuggling (which is dishonest) because it is dishonest; but he jealously guards the Englishman's right to express his political opinions, and if he is a believer in Free Trade he can fearlessly, efficiently and in a practical manner exemplify his beliefs and his ideas without the aid of strangers.

His cautiousness in casual conversation makes it more than normally difficult to tap the living spring of rhyming slang that is demonstrating, almost daily, the vital process of its creation. Names, in general rhyming slang, are often totally fictitious, and even when those of living characters are used, they seldom have direct reference to their meanings, being employed only for their phonetic value. When, however, names are used along the waterfront they are almost always those of contemporary workers, or, more importantly, those of ships. These terms are allowed to fall into desuetude when the men retire, or the ships are broken-up—or 'sold foreign'—and the names of the new men and the new ships are adopted.

Unless one is of the waterfront world there is little likelihood of this nascent slang being revealed, but fortunately Mr F. C. Wright, who has spent a lifetime linked to London's river, was, in addition to a shrewd observer during the years of his service, an industrious note-taker, and he has been generous enough to send a list of such terms all of which, appearing in the addenda, are distinguished by the description 'waterfront ephemeral'.

The present writer's frenzied efforts to obtain further specimens has, so far, met with no success, but there is surely room for that tide to rise considerably. It should perhaps be emphasized that the vulgarity or the unprintability of a term ought not to bring blushes to the cheek of anyone who knows it, but whereas it was previously suggested¹ that a post-card would make a sufficient vehicle of information, it must now be said that unprintable terms require the modest concealment of an envelope. Postmen, it seems, are easily shocked even if mitred Bishops are not.

Another specialized and industrious helper was Mr A. K. Brice, whose list covered two generations and four aspects of life. Observing that addiction to the habit of employing rhyming slang runs in families (as musical ability does) he indicated among the terms used by his father which of them were in use before 1945 (a group that includes a number handed down by his grandfather), and which had been 'picked-up' by Mr Brice senior when working between 1946 and 1952, at Ealing Studios where he was a plasterer. In addition, his own stock of terms was separated into two groups: those used by him as a boy and young man between the wars, and those by which his vocabulary was extended while serving in the Royal Air Force. These four categories are suitably indicated by the method shown in the list of abbreviations preceding the additional Glossary.

Another unselfish helper, Mr Charles Bowness, who has spent many years in the Merchant Navy, revealed a nice crop harvested in the fore-castle as well as in the abode of the afterguard, and Mr Clive Graham forfeited a few gems mined upon the race-course. Non-specializing, but no less helpful, has been the material supplied by Eric Partridge *of course*—Mr A. J. Brooker, Mr Frank A. Allen, Mr Ralph A. Hadrill, and many others.

An optimist might, at this point, declare: 'there remains now no rhyming slang that is unrecorded', and lay down the pen, but clearly there must be, in addition to waterfront ephemerals, many modern Australian terms that have not yet been netted and, 'up to the time of going to press' no Irish Sportsman has tipped out the contents of his bag.

Finally, it is possible that here, on one's very door-step as it were, there lurks an unrecorded Cockney term or two, hiding behind the false front of truncation and familiarity.

¹ See page ix.

GLOSSARY

The following abbreviations have been used:

C. = century.

c. = *circa* (about).

cf. = compare.

q.v. = *quod vide* (which see).

- American Thesaurus* = *The American Thesaurus of Slang*: by Lester V. Berrey and Melvin Van Den Bark.
- Chicago May = *Chicago May—Her Story*: by May Churchill Sharpe.
- Ducange Anglicus = *The Vulgar Tongue . . .*: by Ducange Anglicus.
- Hotten = *The Slang Dictionary*: John Camden Hotten.
- Lupino Lane = a private note-book, kindly lent by Mr Lupino Lane.
- Maurer and Baker = *Australian Rhyming Argot in the American Underworld*: by D. W. Maurer (in collaboration with Sidney J. Baker) in *American Speech*, 1944.

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YOU CAN TAKE A
BOTTLE OF SAUCE TO
THE FISHERMAN'S
DAUGHTER, BUT YOU
CAN'T MAKE HER
TUMBLE DOWN
THE SINK



ESSAY

THE *Oxford English Dictionary* informs us that 'Rhyme . . . [is] agreement in the terminal sounds of two or more words or metrical lines, such that (in English prosody) the last stressed vowel and any sound following it are the same, while the sound or sounds preceding are different. . . . The consonance may extend over more than one word. . . . Imperfect rhymes are tolerated to a large extent in English', but imperfect rhymes are nearer to true rhymes than assonances are. 'Assonance', says the O.E.D., is 'resemblance or correspondence of sound between two words or syllables'. It is characteristic of Old French, rather than of Old English verse.

Some people, even some poets, endure the labours of Hercules in writing a short, rhymed, metrical verse; others, who make no claim to literary ability, find unpremeditated rhyme flowing rhythmically into normal conversation.

At the head of the list of unconscious rhymesters are the Cockneys, some of whom have the faculty developed to a pathological pitch inasmuch as they rhyme not merely unconsciously but against their wills at most inappropriate times.

This curious ability (or linguistic disease) has not been specifically commented upon in the past by those who have written on Cockney habits, customs and peculiarities, but it has given rise to the false impression that 'Cockneys converse in rhyming slang. This erroneous idea is excusable, because in the presence of a stranger who is obviously attentive, or one who is overtly enquiring, the conversational landscape will soon become transformed in a bewildering blizzard of this arresting speech-system whereby, in place of a word, a phrase consisting of two or three words that rhyme with it, is used.'¹

A nice discrimination must, however, be observed between rhyming slang and slang that rhymes. 'Argy-bargy', for *argument*, is one kind; another is the very general verbal euphemism, 'ruddy' for *bloody*, another is the rather weak literary expedient of writing in dialogue 'muck', 'mucker' and 'mucking'. Cockneys have, and have had for at least fifty

¹ *The Cockney*, Julian Franklyn.

years, their own little spelling joke: 'If you see Kate'. Another of the same type is: 'See you any Tuesday'.

The automatically standardized rhyming slang, evolved in the early nineteenth century, attracted educated attention reasonably soon after it had become established and popularized.

The Cultural and ideological century over-runs the Chronological century. The nineteenth century did not expire at midnight on 31 December 1900; it was bludgeoned to death on 4 August 1914; and the eighteenth century lingered in a senile state until 1837 when Queen Victoria ascended the Throne.

It should, however, in self-defence be noted that to some minds—particularly the mechanical, fact-and-figure tabulating type—the same idea could be expressed in reverse. 'Coming events cast their shadows before.' Did not the first internal-combustion engine propelled vehicle explode its concussive way along before 1901?

Nevertheless, achievement is not necessarily culture, and gentlemen of the pre-Victorian period could carouse in Seven Dials with the highwayman and the cut-purse—the prostitute being taken for granted—but in Victorian times, and particularly in the Victoria and Albert section, the chasm between the respectable and the rapsallion, the educated and the uneducated, the rich and the poor, became wide, deep and practically impassable.

Robert Peel's Police Force was a sign of the times. By 1837 it had survived its infancy. The population of Seven Dials was 'not to be mentioned to ears polite'.

There were a few outstanding characters who could and did take a full-bodied flying leap over the chasm and return with social and mental hands unsullied by the tar they had touched! Further, such men, though not missionaries, were clearly social reformers, and could not, because of their close contacts with what had come to be uncritically called 'the underworld', be denounced as renegade.

No distinction was observed between the criminal and the pauper: pauperism was regarded as a negative form of criminality, because such relief as there was for the poor was of a nature that no man of spirit could tolerate, hence, pauperism led to crime, and the indiscriminating, dignified, bewhiskered Victorian, too sincere in his hypocrisy to be lightly dismissed as a hypocrite; too sure of the sanctity of work—no matter how harrowing and poorly paid, provided it yielded him a profit—to be denounced as indifferent to the needs of the 'industrious classes', could not tolerate the existence of self-supporting poor; and he suspected every street-trader and door-to-door hawker of illicit activities. The overt occupation was condemned as merely a cover for procuring information for house-breakers.

Henry Mayhew, and to a lesser extent, Charles Dickens, ought, by

their works, to have enlightened their contemporaries, but no mass mental disease is so far removed from the sphere of curability as current public opinion is, hence 'the underworld' of the mid-nineteenth century was a vastly greater territory than the character of its inhabitants justified.

Henry Mayhew, who possessed the rare ability of making an intimate sociological investigation without poisoning his system with statistics and by so doing losing sight of the fact that his material was human, discovered the street poet who, referring to the Great Exhibition of 1851, said: 'I shall be there. Me and my mates. We are going to send in a set of verses in letters of gold for a prize. *We'll* let the foreigners know what the real native melodies is, and no mistake!'

Notwithstanding, Mayhew made no specific mention of rhyming slang, with which he must have been familiar.

Francis Grose, whose (third edition) *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* made its appearance in 1796, gives but a vague hint at the possibility of a rhyming form of 'flash language', and even the fifth edition (1823), with extra, early nineteenth-century additions by Pierce Egan, the author of *Tom and Jerry*, does no more.

In 1839 'H. Brandon Esq.' edited *Poverty, Mendicity and Crime, or the Facts, Examinations &c. upon which the Report was founded, presented to the House of Lords by W. A. Miles Esq.* to which he 'added a Dictionary of the Flash or Cant Language, Known to every Thief and Beggar', and in that book a negligible number of rhyming slang terms were included.

It is not a very good piece of work—Brandon does not seem to have made a personal study of slang in the field but simply to have reprinted goodly extracts from *The Flash Dictionary*, a 48mo volume designed for the waistcoat pocket—its overall dimensions are $4 \times 2\frac{1}{2}$ inches—it has an engraved title-page, and was 'sold by C. Smeeton, St. Martins Churchyard' in 1821. It has fifty-five pages of Glossary, with twenty-nine lines to the page. Most of the definitions are on one line, a few extend to two or three. The rest of the pages are consumed in preliminary 'Advertisement', and appended 'The Sixty Orders of Prime Coves', and some 'Flash Songs'.

This fascinating little volume was, with a few additions and no acknowledgements, again reprinted as the appendix of *Sinks of London Laid Open* (1848), 'embellished with Humorous Illustrations by George Cruikshank, published by J. Duncombe'.

By this time, Victorianism was firmly established. The gentleman who was 'something in the City' was something quite different in the suburbs. All classes were users of slang, each according to the orbit of his activities, but the conventional, respectable attitude was one of shocked disapproval.

Charles Dickens, not in his capacity of great-hearted humanitarian and humorist but as the personification of *vox populi*, wrote a poor and priggish article denouncing the use of slang which he printed in *Household Words*, No. 183, 24 September 1853. He gave examples of slang usage in various strata of society, but he did not so much as mention rhyming slang even casually. Apart from three or four examples that had by mid-century unostentatiously crept into print, where they nestled quietly, innocent of comment, one would conclude, from the lack of evidence, that the system was not yet established. There is, however, good reason to believe that it was already a lusty youth, safely past the perils of infancy.

II

Wise men do not tempt fate, nor set the avalanche in motion; hence, in a period when parsons preached against the use of slang,¹ and shocked parents addressed letters on the subject to the press,² a philologist who felt that a dictionary of slang would be a desideratum would proceed with caution and conceal his identity behind the opacity of a pseudonym.

Such a one was 'Ducange Anglicus' who was so effective in his self-effacement that a fair amount of research has so far failed to reveal the man behind the name.³

He produced a book of eighty pages 6 × 4 inches overall, entitled: *The Vulgar Tongue: a glossary of slang, cant, and flash words and phrases, used in London from 1839 to 1859*. . . . The first edition made its appearance in 1857 (the second in 1859); and both editions were published by Bernard Quaritch.

In the 'Preface to the first edition', reprinted in the second, the author says:

'This little volume has been printed with the view of assisting Literary Men, the Officers of the Law, and Philanthropists, in their intercourse with Classes of English Society who use a different Phraseology, only understood by their own fraternity.'

The intention is both laudable and sincere, each edition being limited to two hundred and fifty copies, thus prohibiting a popular market and proportionately reducing profits.

The main glossary, containing about seven hundred and thirty entries, has sixty-two specimens of rhyming slang, of which number a surprisingly large proportion are still current.

Between *The Flash Dictionary* of 1821 and *The Vulgar Tongue* of

¹ See Appendix.

² See Appendix.

³ The choice may have been influenced by the name of Charles du Fresne Ducange, a French historian and philologist (1610-88).

1857, rhyming slang has come to life and attracted enlightened attention.

The evolution of slang words, or phrases, or systems of usage, is as mysterious as is that of standard language. The word is evoked by some complex of circumstances at a certain level of society, and like a spilled liquid it spreads at that level, runs rapidly downward, and seeps slowly upward, the rate of dispersal being controlled by viscosity. Rhyming slang, as mobile as mercury, has thus got into print at an early age.

Among the numerous reasons for the adoption of slang expressions is the need felt by certain classes of the community for a secret language: thieves may wish to discuss, in the presence of their intended victim, the prospects of their accomplishing a successful robbery, and they may conveniently do so in the strong underworld cant, the terms of which being unrelated to, do not suggest the standard words for which they are substitute: the backslang of the coster distorts the inverted words so severely that recognition without specific knowledge is impossible, and the coster himself, in the days of backslang usage, would not, upon meeting a hitherto unknown contemporary, automatically commence a conversation in that system. He first enquired, in the language, whether its use would be acceptable.

Because the secret language theme is so well understood by philologists, all who have written on the use of rhyming slang have accepted the theory that it came into being as a secret language of the underworld. It is, however, time to revise that theory and to re-assess the value of the evidence.

That rhyming slang was discovered lurking in the underworld where it was doing duty as thieves' secret language is not evidence of its place of origin. It was annexed by the true underworld from those who inhabited the Victorian extension and that included the indigent workman.

There is a striking difference in fundamental character between the cant or flash language evolved and used by thieves and vagabonds, and the rhyming slang which they adopted. The former is grim, harsh and humourless; the latter, gay, frolicsome and amusing. The former must be learnt as a foreign tongue must be learnt, the latter is, in the main, intelligible to the uninitiated.

The reason why rhyming slang was discovered where it was discovered when it was discovered is because 'Officers of the Law' did (and they still do) make it part of their business, in the interests of public security, to learn thieves' lingo: there was (and is) no need to study that of law-abiding although humble citizens, hence, rhyming slang from its place of origin, *via* the true underworld and the police, reached respectable attention through the work of Ducange Anglicus. This took place about twenty-five or thirty years after the system was forged on the anvil of culture-clash by the hammer of friendly rivalry.

The word *navvy* made its first appearance in the language in 1832, when it could be classified as slang. In a quarter of a century it had become standard English, and soon it became a linguistic habit to prefix it with the word 'Irish'. A navvy is (or was, for the result of mechanization is the extinction of this hardy race) a semi-skilled labourer engaged on excavation, embankment, and other work demanding both strength and endurance.

The early nineteenth century was a period of titanic activity. Docks were laid down, canals were cut, railway embankments thrown up. Every pound of earth and stone displaced in these vast enterprises had to be shovelled by hand into bushel-baskets and carried on a man's back either to or from the site of the works, hence, a huge army of navvies was in employment. The ranks were filled by brawny uneducated Cockneys and massive Irishmen.

These two ethnic groups, so far asunder in many ways, yet have much in common. Each is fond of the sound of his own voice, both are lovers of words. The Cockney is renowned for his sense of humour, the Irishman for his quick temper, but the fact is, Cockneys will fight when fisticuffs are necessary, and the Irishman loves a joke. The difference in reaction is that the Cockney is tolerant and takes a great deal of annoyance, but the Irishman, considering himself a son of an oppressed nation, has developed, in common with all persecuted peoples, a tendency to make a major issue out of a minor incident. The Cockney arranges to have his fight in private, the Irishman leaps to his in public. The Cockney is amused at the Irishman's boastfulness and excitability, the Irishman amazed at the Cockney's modesty and stolid endurance.

The two people, on the whole, like each other and work well together, but while they work they talk, laugh at and chaff each other; the Irishman telling long, tall stories of which he is the hero, and the Cockney 'capping' them with brisk comment, and the assumption of Metropolitan superiority.

In this atmosphere, and under these conditions, the quick-witted Cockney created rhyming slang, as a means of mystifying 'the Micks', and having the last laugh. Verbal competition is a fine forcing house for linguistic agility. The Irishmen did not remain mystified for long; they soon mastered the system and paid back in Irish-flavoured rhyme. What could 'Rory O'More' mean to a Cockney?

This is not the only Irish name that appears in the lists of early rhyming slang, and since the Cockneys probably could not and certainly did not read Irish folk-tales, or even newspapers, these Irish references cannot be accounted for in any other way.

III

An unemployed navvy, having nothing to support him, rapidly drifted into the ranks of the Victorian underworld, where he learned from professional beggars how to beg; and probably from professional thieves how to thief; and they in turn learned from him the rhyming slang that had helped to laugh the day away when all was well.

Rhyming slang, having thus been adopted as a secret language by thieves, became a subject of study by the 'Officers of the Law', and grist to the mill of the lexicographer. In 1859 a far more ambitious book than *The Vulgar Tongue* of Ducange Anglicus made its appearance. This, entitled *The Slang Dictionary*, was by 'A London Antiquary', and the publisher was John Camden Hotten.

This book, a full-size dictionary, was accepted as a serious work and in the subsequent editions the 'London Antiquary' revealed his identity—none other than John Camden Hotten himself. This would have surprised no one, for he was almost a scholar and quite a gentleman: a 'bookseller' by occupation, and one who did not hesitate to compile works for his press when he felt them to be needed and could find no author to undertake their production.

The books published by John Camden Hotten have never become inhabitants of the second-hand book dealer's twopenny shelf, unless the dealer happens to be more than normally ignorant: rather have they become the catalogued stock of antiquarian booksellers. This applies very strongly to such works as *The Slang Dictionary*, and *The History of Sign Boards* (Larwood and Hotten).

The Slang Dictionary, which was the standard work of reference on the subject for many years, ran through five editions, the fifth appearing in 1874, fifteen years after the first, and just after John Camden Hotten's death. It had, however, clearly been edited and enlarged with its additional matter by himself.

A new impression was issued as recently as 1922 by Messrs Chatto and Windus, who took over the goodwill and assets of a number of the old-time booksellers, including the famous Moxon, who had published for Tennyson.

John Camden Hotten, who took himself and all his works very seriously, was not the man to make a mere rehash-up of older glossaries. He seems to have made contact with characters of the underworld, and to have employed them to supply him with information on the current usage of slang. He often refers to his 'informant', but he is unaware of how dangerously misleading the uneducated informant can be through no fault of his own: from no perverse desire to misinform and mislead.

In addition to his getting practical contemporary information, he studied the history of his subject and gave, as an appendix, a useful Bibliography of the literature. He was, in this, perhaps, not altogether original, for Ducange Anglicus printed a 'Bibliography of the canting and slang literature with glossaries'. The arrangement is approximately chronological and the List is a very small proportion of the entire range of that Literature; it contains only the books then being offered for sale at the publishers, hence, it may be regarded as more in the nature of an advertisement by Bernard Quaritch than as a scholarly addendum by Ducange Anglicus.

John Camden Hotten includes Ducange Anglicus in his own bibliography and comments: 'A silly and childish performance, full of blunders and contradictions.' This remark is unfortunate because John Camden Hotten's own dictionary is not innocent of errors: indeed, no glossary of slang (including that in this volume) can be totally accurate in spite of the care taken by the author, for the very nature of the subject prohibits it.

In *The Slang Dictionary*, special sections are devoted to special vocabularies, and rhyming slang enjoys a section to itself prefaced with an essay on the subject. This is the first commentary on rhyming slang and it is therefore somewhat nebulous, but its being the first makes it worthy of reproduction:

"There exists in London a singular tribe of men, known amongst the "fraternity of vagabonds" as chaunters and patterers. Both classes are great talkers. The first sing or chaunt through the public thoroughfares ballads—political and humorous—carols, dying speeches, and the various other kinds of gallows and street literature. The second deliver street orations on grease-removing compounds, plating powders, high-polishing blacking, and the thousand-and-one wonderful pennyworths that are retailed to gaping mobs from a London kerbstone.

"They are quite a distinct tribe from the costermongers; indeed, amongst tramps, they term themselves the "harristocrats of the streets", and boast that they live by their intellects. Like the costermongers, however, they have a secret tongue or cant speech known only to each other. This cant, which has nothing to do with that spoken by the costermongers, is known in Seven Dials and elsewhere as the "rhyming slang", or the substitution of words and sentences which rhyme with other words intended to be kept secret. The chaunter's cant, therefore, partakes of his calling, and he transforms and uses up into a rough speech the various odds and ends of old songs, ballads and street nick-names, which are found suitable to his purpose. Unlike nearly all other systems of cant, the rhyming slang is not founded upon allegory; unless we accept a few rude similes, thus—"I'm afloat" is the rhyming cant for "boat", "sorrowful tale" is equivalent to "three months in jail", "artful