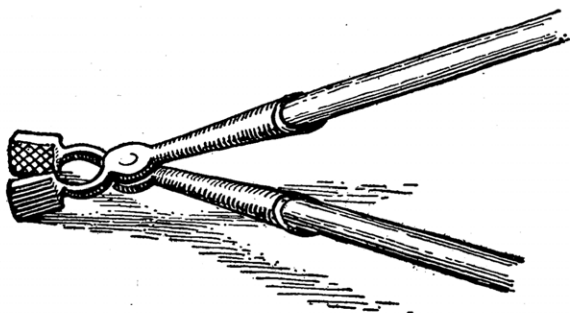


ART. XIII.—*The Luking-tongs : their Meaning and Use.*
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THE accompanying illustration shows a pair of luki-tongs, an implement once in constant use, but now obsolete. It embodies also a dialect word of distinction and interest, likewise obsolete, which, through an unfortunate coincidence in spelling with the common word look—to see, is often passed over without recognition, like a face beneath a mask. This word was a familiar expression until recent times in the districts that were originally settled by Danes or Norsemen.



The Rev. T. Ellwood, in his glossary *Lakeland and Iceland* (1895), gives it thus:—

Look. To pluck out weeds from among the corn, generally performed by an instrument called looking-tongs . . . Danish, *luge*=to weed an orchard.

The Rev. M. C. F. Morris, in *Nunburnholme*, tells us that in the Wold country those who weed the corn are

said to be *lukin'*, the work *lúk* being derived from an Icelandic root *lok*=a weed, its equivalent being found in the modern Danish *luge*=to weed.

The Rev. J. C. Atkinson, in his Cleveland Glossary, has it "look=to pick the weed from among the growing corn."

Dr. Prevost's edition of Dickinson's Glossary gives "Look, C., N., E.; Lowk, SW.=to weed corn."

Dr. Wright's Dialect Dictionary, under the heading "Lowk," notes that the word, meaning "to weed, especially to weed corn," is used in Northumberland, Durham, Lakeland, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cheshire, Staffordshire, Lincolnshire, and Worcestershire; and a derivation is suggested from O.E. *lucan*, to pull up; Low German and East Frisian *luken*, to pull up weeds. The look-crook, lowkers (pincers), and looking-tongs are mentioned.

The word and its variants occur often in old papers and account books. A few references to these will be sufficient. The Rydal Hall year book of husbandry (called the "Setting-book") shows an entry in 1697 of 6s. 8d. paid "to the corn-lookers." In the great Rydal account book, too, payments are made to women from 1657 onwards for "looking in ye garden." A most interesting allied word has turned up in a deed of 1575, which concerns the letting of the precincts of the old Rydal Hall. Among other enclosures specified is the *lookegarth*, or garden. Again there is *Lok-howe*, a fifteenth century place-name, which may possibly be referred to the same derivation, for it occurs near Calgarth, the farmstead and clearing in the lord's deer forest, which once extended from Kendal to Ambleside.*

A pithy saying of the folk, expressive of extreme contempt, recalls the old implement. It is given by Mr. William Satterthwaite in the dialect of the Esthwaite valley, which differs greatly (he says) from that of West-

* Min. Acc., Henry VII., 877, m. 1, d.

morland in pronunciation, the *oo* sound often becoming as soon as it crosses the Brathay *ow*:—"Ah wouldnt tak hod on him wi' a par o' lowkin' tangs."

Enquiry after this implement at first met with no success. An old Westmorland man could describe it, and stated that it had been formerly used, about June time, for clearing the corn field from weeds, and more especially from thistles, as these were apt to lacerate the hand of the reaper the while he swung the sickle. Cutting machines had put it out of use; finally he doubted if one could now be found. He spoke of it as a "gripe," but by birth he belonged to the Appleby division of the county.

An opportune visit to old-world Furness, where fertile fields of corn stretch above the great bay, brought success to the quest. No need to explain to Mr. James Wood of Sunbrick the meaning of *lowking-tongs*; he had a pair on the premises, and a little search in dark corners of out-houses produced it.

This gift furthered talk. A middle-aged native of Bardsea said he had used the tongs till he was about 26 years old, "but farming was all changed now." He ascertained that some half-dozen pairs still lay at one farm in the village.

As an illustration of the narrow geographical limits of dialect words that result from racial settlement, it may be mentioned that Burns knew the implement as "weeder-clips." See his versified "Epistle to Mrs. Scott."

The lukiing-tongs consist of a pair of irons fastened crosswise by a pivot at three inches from the tips. They are lengthened by a pair of wooden handles, measuring together $41\frac{1}{2}$ ins.—a length which brings them well up to a man's elbow. When closed, the handle ends are 18 ins. apart. The iron tips are flattened into small square plates of one inch, which are grooved or patterned inside, and this irregularity of surface prevents the weed from slipping as the worker wrenches it from the ground.