

On the Berkshire Dialect.

By G. W. B. HUNTINGFORD.

THE dialect of Berkshire, and more particularly that of north and west Berkshire, has been described as "the purest Saxon now spoken." This statement is perhaps not altogether incorrect as regards vocabulary, for some sixty per cent. of the words are of direct AS. origin, while the remainder are mostly from the following sources: Middle English (13th—15th cent.), French from Latin, and corrupted modern English. Next to AS, ME. provides the greater number of words; corrupt forms of modern standard English are very few. The verb has, in common with modern English, lost nearly all the AS. suffixes, and retains only —st as suffix to the 2nd person singular. And while many words are AS., in a large number local conditions have produced certain peculiarities common to Berks, Wilts, Somerset, and Dorset, some of which are purely local, though others may be due to (1) ME. pronunciation; (2) Teutonic, but non-AS. influence.

DIALECTIC PECULIARITIES.

(1) VOWEL-LENGTHENING. This takes place mostly in the case of a and o; e.g. we find aal, thaay, waay, yaard, zaay, etc.; mwoare, swoord, etc. This is not due to AS. forms, which are eal, (ME. thai), weg, gyrd, secgan; ma, sweord, respectively. In the case of o, the lengthening may possibly be due to the inserted w (see (3) below) tending to have an o-sound; for sword we have the Dutch equivalent zwaard. The same occurs in Wilts, e.g. praaper, ME. propre.

(2) A FOR O. Berks harn, harnet, harse, tharn, occur for AS. horn, hyrnet, hors, thorn; as also in Wilts harnet, etc.

(3) INSERTED LETTERS. (a) In some words where the vowel is a, an e is inserted before it, as in neame, pleave, bleaw, AS. nama, bláwan. (b) In a number of words an intrusive w occurs, as in dwon't, mwoare, mwoast, spwile. This is not warranted by AS. or ME. forms; though in a few examples, such as bwone, gwo, stwun, whoam, it is possible that the intrusive letter may be due

to ME. pronunciation, as the forms are boon, goon, stoon, hoom; AS. bān, gān, stān, hām.

(4) METATHESIS. (a) Of r, not warranted by AS. or ME.: gurt, AS. gréat, ME. greet. (b) Of s: as in AS. : ax, wopse, AS. áesian, waeps. This is fairly common; cf. AS. haeps, grap, and ME. clapsen, for which modern English has hasp, grasp, clasp:

(5) SOUND-CHANGE FROM BREATH TO VOICE. (a) z for s: zaay, zee, zich, zowl, AS. secgan, seon, swylc, sáwel. The Dutch forms corresponding to these are zeggen, zien, zulk, ziel, and it is possible that a Teutonic, though not AS. influence has changed the sound of this consonant. Modern Dutch pronounces z like our s (just as German z = ts); but the early pronunciation may be presumed to have given z a sound like dj as in our z. (b) v for f: here again we have voiced sounds in Berks for AS. breath-sounds, as in vor, veaw, vower (not constant), AS. for, feáwe (plur.), feówer; the Dutch equivalents are voor and vier. (Dutch has no word corresponding letter for letter to our 'few.') Perhaps the same influence is at work here as above. (c) d for th: the same may apply to drie, drough, drow, AS. thréo, thráwan, thurh; Dutch drie, draaijen, door.

PRONOUNS.

The personal pronouns have lost a good deal of their AS. characteristics, and except in the nominative, the ME. feminine in sch—, sh— has crept in; and while AS. had four distinct cases (nom., acc., gen., dat.), Berks has practically retained only two (1. nom., acc., dat; 2. gen.).

BERKSHIRE :

ANGLO-SAXON :

Sing.	First	Second	Third	First	Second	Third
NOM :	I	{ Thee Ee	He ; { She Her	ic	thú	hé ; heó
ACC :	I	Ee	He ; She	mé	thé	híne ; hí
GEN :	Mine	Thine	Hizn ; Shizn	mín	thín	his ; hire
DAT :	I	Ee	He ; She	me	thé	him ; hire
Plur.						
NOM :	We	You	Thaay	wé	ge	hí
ACC :	Us	{ You Ee	Them	ús	eów	hí
GEN :	Our(n)	Your(n)	Their(n)	úre	eówer	hira
DAT :	We	You	Them	ús	eów	him

SOME VERB-FORMS.

The verb " BE "

	PRESENT:	PAST :
S. 1.	I be.	I wur.
2.	Thee bi'st.	Thee wur.
3.	A be.	A wur.
P. 1.	We be.	We was.
2.	You be.	You wur.
3.	Thaay be.	Thaay wur.

The verb " SEE."

	PRESENT :	PAST :
S. 1.	I zee.	I zeen.
2.	Thee zeed'st.	Thee zeed.
3.	A zee.	A zeed.
P. 1.	We zee.	We zeed.
2.	You zee.	You zeed.
3.	Thaay zee.	Thaay zeed.

The verb " HAVE."

S. 1.	I hev.	I hev.
2.	Thee ha'st.	Thee hev.
3.	A hev (s).	A hev.
P. 1.	We hev.	We hev.
2.	You hev.	You hev.
3.	Thaay hev.	Thaay hev.

The verb " MAY."

PRESENT AND PAST :

S. 1.	I med.
2.	Thee med'st.
3.	A med.
P. 1.	We med.
2.	You med.
3.	Thaay med.

GLOSSARY.

ABBREVIATIONS. : AS. = Anglo-Saxon (or OE = Old English as it is now sometimes called) ; ME. = Middle English ; mod. E. = modern English ; OHG. = old High German ; OWSax. = old West Saxon ; G. = modern German ; OFr., Fr. = old

French, modern French ; Du. = Dutch ; Low L., L. = Low Latin, Latin.

A—, pfx., as in a-gwaen, 'a-going,' represents AS. an, 'on.' e.g. gán on huntunge, 'go a-hunting.' A common pfx. in provincial dialects.

Aal, a. all. AS. eal.

Akkerdish, a. awkward. Perhaps a contraction of ME. awkward, from awk-, 'perverse,' and ward, AS. weard, 'in the direction of' ; with AS. sfx. -isc (Greek -ισκ-), a diminutive, represented in mod. E. by -ish, which has also the force of 'like' as in child-ish, AS. cild-isc. Akkerdish = 'awkward-like.'

Allus, adv. Contracted from always, AS. ealne weg.

Athert, adv. across, athwart. AS. on thwyr̥t.

Auver, adv. over. AS. ofer, ME. ouer.

Ax, v. ask. AS. ácsian, OWSax. ax.

Backswoord plaay, s. the famous Berks and Somerset form of singlestick, played with cudgels.

Bleaw, v. blow. AS. bláwan.

Bruk, s. brook. AS. bróc.

Butt, s. a strip of plough-land less than the average furlong in length. Common in field-names.

Bwone, s. bone. ME. boon from AS. bān.

Caddle, v. worry, harass ; tend carefully. Dialect form of coddle, with change of o to a ; orig. to castrate, whence 'render effeminate.' and less violent meanings. AS. codd, bag, allied to Icelandic Kothri, scrotum.

Callow, a. bare. AS. calu, bald, ME. calewe ; Lat. caluus. Found in field-names.

Climm, v. climb. AS. climban. Possible influence of MHG. and Du. klimmen.

Consate, s. conceit.

Conygre, s. rabbit-warren. ME. coni ; AS. geard, enclosure. Common in S. England, especially as a field-name, in various forms such as Coniger, Conygarth, etc.

Copy-thorn, s. pollarded thorn, copped thorn. OFr. coper, cut ; Low L. copecia, underwood frequently cut, whence coppice and copse.

Crass, v. cross.

Cutt, s. (1) drain, as in field-names ; (2) contraction of croft, e.g. Norcutt in Newbury = North croft. (Berks. Arch. Journ., I. 113).

Dale, s. deal. AS. *dǣl*, share.

Disturbe, v. disturb.

Drattle, v. wish bad luck to, etc. Cf. 'drat,' a shortened form, and not a corruption of 'God rot,' as is sometimes said.

Dree, a. three. AS. *threo* ; Du. *drie*.

Drenk, v. drink. Cf. AS. *drencan* (whence 'drench') causal form of *drincan*, drink.

Drow, v. throw, AS. *thráwan*. Cf. Du. *draaijen* ; G. *drehen*.

Drough, prep. through. AS. *thurh* ; cf. Du. *door*.

Drudge, s. a field sown with oats and barley.

Dummel, a. dull, stupid. Allied to dumb ; G. *dumm*, stupid.

Dunch, a. deaf. Perhaps allied to dunce.

Faär, s. fair, holiday. ME. *feire*, from Lat. *feria*(e).

Fermer, s. farmer, as on a brass in Gt. Coxwell church :
 HERE
 LIETH WILLM̃ MORYS S̃NTYME FERMER OF COKYSWELL ON
 WHOSE SOULE JHŪ HAVE MERCY AMEN. From AS. *feorm*,
 property. Mod. Berks, *varmer*.

Folly, s. (1) a hill planted with trees ; (2) an upland farm surrounded by trees. Perhaps from Fr. *feuillée*, copse. It is sometimes regarded, though without justification, as being an indication of Roman remains.

Fower, Vower, a. four. AS. *feówer*.

Frith, s. (1) brushwood ; (2) wood, copse.

Fromm, a. used of anything early or forward, e.g. early wheat. AS. *from*, 'from.' OHG. *fram*, as in 'froward,' AS. *from* weard.

Fust, adv. first. AS. *fyrst*.

Fuz, n. Fuzzy, a. *furze*, *furzy*. AS. *fyr*s. The loss of *r* in *fuz*, *fust*, etc. is a common occurrence ; examples can be found in mod. colloquial E. as *bust* for *burst*, *cuss* for *curse* (also Berks.) etc.

Gamester, s. a term applied to those who are expert in backsword play and wrestling.

Geat, s. gate. AS. geat.

Gurt, a. great. AS. greát, with r-metathesis.

Gwo, v. pres. part. gwaen, go. ME. goon, AS. gán.

Hade, s. a ridge of land. ? Corruption of AS. heafod, ME. hēved
= head.

Harn, s. horn. AS. horn.

Harnet, s. hornet. AS. hyrnet.

Harse, s. horse. AS. hors.

Heish, a. high. AS. heáh ; but cf. G. hauhs.

Hev, v. have. AS. habban, past t. haefde.

Hitchen, s. a field of which part is sown while part lies fallow.

Jam norum, s. furze.

Kip, v. keep. AS. cýpan.

Lang, a. long. AS. lang.

Leer, a. hungry. Perhaps a contraction of liēfer, 'wanting,'
from AS. leóf, ME. leef.

Likker, s. liquor, drink. ME. licur.

Louze, v. turn cattle to pasture. ME. lousen, to loose. Hence
the adj. louzy = pasture.

Main, adv. very. AS. maegan, strength ; ME. main, as in
the phrase "with might and main."

Marnin, s. morning. ME. morwen, with subst. prefix -in (g) ;
and change of o to a.

Med. v. may, might. AS. mihte, past t. of mukan, be able ; with
change of breath to voice (d. for t).

Mwoare, Mwoost. more, most.

Narrun = never a one, AS. na, not ; aéfre, ever ; án, one.

Neame, s. name. AS. nama.

Ould, a. old. ME. old.

Pastime, s. in Berkshire refers particularly to the Scowering of
the White Horse, and the festival connected with it.

Peart, a. brisk, saucy, lively. The source is perhaps to be found
in mal-apert, where the second element is OFr. apert, 'open.'

Peg, s. pig. AS. pecg.

Pen, Pin, s. fold, stall. AS. *pennan, fasten.

Picked, a. having a peak or acute angle. ME. pec from Keltic
(Irish peac, Welsh pig, point).

Piddle, Pightle, s. small enclosure, field.

Pleace, s. place.

Powl, s. pole. ME. pole.

Purly, a. blind, blind drunk. ME. pirl, mod. E. purl, 'upset,' with sfx.-ly = AS. -líc, like. "Like to be upset." (Not a corruption of 'purblind.').

Quab, s. bog, marshland.

Race, s. small stream. AS. *rāēs*, swift course, from VARS, flow.

Reeve, s. pen, fold.

Rep, v. reap. AS. *répan*.

Rid, v. clear, clean. AS. *hreddan*. "To pay John Tilling seven pounds for Riding the town'd pond," Goosey Vestry-book, 1766. (Antiquary, LI. 347).

Sarsen, s. or 'Grey wether,' the name applied to rocks of saccharoid sandstone found scattered over the Downs in Berks and Wilts. The Blowing Stone, Wayland's Smithy, and part of Stonehenge are made of them; and the name may be a corruption of Saracen, applied to Stonehenge in the Middle Ages as a pagan work. (F. Stevens, "Stonehenge," 1916).

Scrat, v. scratch. ME. *skratten*.

Scrow, a. angry, annoyed. AS. *screáwa*, shrew mouse; ME. *screwe*, scold; prov. E. screw, vicious horse.

Shilling, s. rough shed. AS. *scilling*.

Ship. s. sheep, AS. *scéap*, local AS. *scyp*, as in *scypen*, a shippon or sheep-pen; Shippon, a place near Abingdon, Domesday Bk. *Sipene*; ME. *shepne*: "The shepné brenning with the blaké smoke," Chaucer, Knight's Tale, 1142.

Slade, Slad, s. low-lying ground; valley. AS. *slaed*.

Spend, v. consume, be consumed. AS. *spendan*, from L. (dis) *pendere*. (Active form with passive sense).

Spwile, v. spoil. ME. *spoil*.

Spwoort, s. sport. ME. **sporten*.

Stabble, v. tread dirt about. Allied to stable, L. *stabulum*, lit. "place for standing in."

Stert, s. promontory, tongue of land. AS. *steort*.

Stwun, s. stone. ME. *stoon*, AS. *stán*.

- Swarth, s. cut grass. Allied to sward, AS. sweard, and possibly confused with AS. swathu, mod. E. swathe.
- Tang, v. lure bees to swarm by banging something, e.g. a shovel with a key. Lit. "hold," AS. tang, tongs, "things that grip." ME. tange.
- Teg, s. sheep.
- Tharn, s. thorn.
- Tharnin-tree, s. thorn-tree. AS. thorn, with subst. pfx. -in(g), AS. -ung.
- Thenk, v. think. ME. thenken.
- Town, s. AS. tún, village, a term used by the inhabitants to describe their own village or hamlet, however small.
- Unked, a. lonely; uncanny. ? AS. uncuth, unknown, mod. E. uncouth.
- Veast, s. feast, festival, village fair, etc. ME. feste.
- Veaw, a. few. AS. feá, pl. feáwe.
- Vinish, v. finish.
- Vor, prep. for. AS. for; Du. voor.
- Wag, v. move. AS. wegan, past t. waeg, move.
- Whoam, s. home. ME. hoom, AS. hám.
- Wopse, s. wasp. AS. waeps.
- Wosbird, s. bird of woe. AS. weá, woe.
- Wunt, s. mole.
- Yead s. head, with intrusive initial y.
- Yuth, v., s. earth; earth up. AS. ierthe, eorthe.
- Zee, v. see. AS. seon; Du. zien.
- Zet, v. set. AS. settan.
- Zich, a. AS. sywle; Du. zulk.
- Zowl, s. soul. AS. sáwel; Du. ziel.

SPECIMENS OF THE DIALECT.

As an example of the Berkshire dialect, I give an old song called "Tovey's Tap," which illustrates some of the peculiarities.

Ould Tovey wunce brewed a barrel o' beer,
 Vor he wur a man as lovèd good cheer;
 And zays he, "I'll just ax a veaw of my vriends
 To come and try how the likker spends.

" Ther's long Tom Ockle, he shall be wun,
 And little Jack Smith who's as round as a tun,
 And ould Jaarge Mabbott who's allus a-dry—
 I'll warned thaay'll maaake good company."

The barrel wur tapped, and the beer runned well :
 How much thaay vower drenked I never heer'd tell ;
 But zomehow or other thaay wun and aal
 Did zwear as how the beer wur smaall.

Ould Tovey at this did look main scrow :
 Zays he, " My vriends, I'd hev ee to know
 That my beer hev made ee as drunk as pegs,
 And not wun of you dree can kip on his legs."

Thaay left the house, and the path thaay tuk
 Athert the medow as leads to the bruk ;
 And you plainly med zee as every man
 Had a paair o' crooked stockings an.

Zays Mabbott to Ockle, " Ould Tovey wur zurly,"
 Zays Ockle to Mabbott, " I'm uncommon purly.
 Be mindvul, I zay, vor yer missuses' zaakes
 Which o' thaay two narrer bridges you taakes."

" The bruk be main deep," Jaarge Mabbott then zaid,
 As he looked at the water and scratted his yead,
 " And I owns I should maazingly like vor to know
 Auver which o' thaay bridges you aims for to gwo.

" 'Tis a akkerdish pleace to crass in the night,
 And to stand here till marnin would'n be right ;
 'Tain't a mossel o' use to bide stablein' here,
 Zo let's gwo back and vinish the barrel o' beer."

As an example of local AS., with a mod. Berks version, I take the following extract from the bounds of Uffington, A.D. 924-941. (Birch, Cart. Sax., 687 ; Chron. Monast. Abingdon, I. 70) :

Of Aegelwardes mearce upp-	From Aylward's bound
rihtes be tham heafde in to	right up by the hade in to
Hremnes byriges north geate.	Ram's Hill by the noorth geat.
Thurhut tha byrig ut aet tham	Drough the town out at the
suth geate. Sudrihte be than	south geat. South right alang
hefde uppen Hodeshlaewe.	by the hade auver Hodslow ;
Of Hodeshlaewe uppan tha	from Hodslow auver the
Stanhlaewe. Of thaere Stan-	Stwunlow ; from the Stwunlow
hlaewe innan than hwitan hole.	into the white hoale ; from the
Of tham hwitan hole into tham	white hoale into the red
readan hole. Of tham readan	hoale ; from the red hoale into
hole into tham dunnan hole.	the dun hoale.

Some local sayings :

'Tis waaste ov sooap to lather an ass.

Wher ther's stwuns ther's carn.

Ther's a sight o' odds atween whoam-maade troubles and thaay as the Loord zends ; and whoam-maade wuns be nine out o' ten o' aal as comes to a man.

Ther be mwoare waays o' killin' a cat besides chokin' on un wi' crame.

'Tis a wunnerful thing to be a schollerd.

Talkin' cums as nateral to he as buttermilk to a litterin' zow.

A charm against nettle-stings :

Out nettle,

In dock :

Dock shall hev

A new smock ;

Nettle shan't

Ha' narrun.¹

Lastly, as an example of the very similar Wiltshire dialect, the first stanza of a poem on the Hornet :

A harnet zat in a holler tree :

A praaper spwitful twoad wur he ;

And a merrily zung as a did zet

His zting as zhaarp as a bagginett.²

¹ T. Hughes, "*Tom Brown at Oxford*."

² J. Y. Akerman, "*Wiltshire Glossary*."