

MEANING OF WORDS.

We know the meaning of most words
By sound as well as sight;
They mean, although they have no mien,
So mind and write them right.

For thus—in "eccentricity,"
One sees good many c's,
Also, in "hubbubububulous,"
The b's are thick as bees.

There are no i's in English "eyes,"
But e's there are in "ease,"
A does want ye to make it "aye,"
There's but one p in peas.

Some judges judge the English tongue
But kill it with a breath;
With wind and words they sentence some
Fine sentences to death.

A sea-horse is a sea-horse, when
You see him in the sea;
But when you see him in a boy,
A bay horse then is he.

Of course a race course isn't coarse,
A fine is far from fine;
It is a saddening sight to see
A noble pine tree pine.

If miners are all minors, then,
Their guardians get their gains;
All glaziers extra pains should take
To put in extra panes.

A kitchen maid is often made
To burn her face and broil it,
A lady knows no labor but
But to toil it at her toilet.

How do you do? said Sal to John,
'So, so,' replied he:
'How do you do?' said John to Sal;
'Sometimes sew, sew,' said she.

If one were ridden o'er a lot,
He might his lot bewail,
But 'twould be of no use to him
To rail against a rail.

A bat about a farmer's room,
Not long ago I knew
To fly, He caught a fly—and then
Flew up the chimney flue;

But such a scene was never seen,
(I am quite sure of that),
As when with sticks all hands essayed
To hit the bat a bat.

A vane is vain, one would suppose,
Because it wants a mind;
And furthermore, 'tis blown about
By every idle wind.

'Tis punishment for me to pun;
'Tis trifling, void of worth;
So let it pass unnoticed like
The dew that's due to earth.

THE BLACK-INDIES!

By JULES VERNE.

CHAPTER I.

TWO CONTRADICTIONARY LETTERS.

"MR. J. R. STARR, 30 Canongate, Edinburgh:—If Mr. James Starr will present himself to-morrow at the Aberfoyle Coal Mines, Dochart Pit, Yarrow Well, he will receive a communication of an interesting nature. Mr. James Starr will be waited for all day at the small dock at Callander by Henry Ford, the son of the old overseer, Simon Ford. He is besought to keep this invitation a secret."

Such was the letter received by James Starr by the first mail, December 3, 18—; a letter which bore the stamp of the Aberfoyle Post-office, County Stirling, Scotland.

The engineer's curiosity was excited to the utmost. It did not even occur to him that this letter might be a mere hoax. He had long been acquainted with Simon Ford, one of the old overseers in the Aberfoyle mines, of which he, James Starr, had been for twenty years a director—what in the English mines is called a "viewer."

James Starr was a man of strong constitution, who carried his fifty-five years as if they were but forty. He belonged to an old Edinburgh family, of which he was one of the most distinguished members. His works did honor to that respectable corporation of engineers, who demolish, little by little, the carboniferous subsoil of the United Kingdom, as well at Cardiff and at Newcastle as in the lowlands of Scotland. Nevertheless, it was more particularly at the bottom of the mysterious Aberfoyle mines, which lie adjacent to the mines of Alloa, and occupy a part of Stirling County, that the name of Starr is held in general esteem. There he had spent the greater part of his life. Besides, James Starr was a member of the Society of Scotch Antiquaries, of which he had been elected president. He was reckoned among the most active members of the "Royal Institution," and the Edinburgh Review frequently published remarkable articles over his signature. He was, we see, one of those practical savants to whom is due the prosperity of England. He held a high rank in this old Scotch capital, which, not only from a physical, but also from a moral point of view, has been deemed worthy the title, "Athens of the North."

It is known that the English have given the

whole of their vast mines a very significant name. They call them, very justly, the "Black-Indies;" and these Indies have, perhaps, contributed more than the East Indies to increase the surprising riches of the United Kingdom. There, in effect, a nation of miners work night and day to extract from the British substratum the coal, that precious combustible—indispensable element of industrial life.

At this epoch, the limit of time assigned by scientists for the exhaustion of the mines was far distant. There were yet to be largely worked the carboniferous deposits of the two worlds. The manufactures, appropriated to so many different usages—the locomotives, the machines, the steamers, gas works, etc., were not in danger of failing for want of combustible mineral. However, the consumption has been of late so largely increased that certain beds have been exhausted, even in their poorest veins. Abandoned now, these mines bored and intersected uselessly the soil of their forsaken wells and deserted galleries.

Such was precisely the case with the mines of Aberfoyle.

Ten years before the last ton of coal had been raised from this mine. The material of the "interior," machines designed for transportation over the rails of the galleries, berlines forming subterranean trains, underground tramways, cages used in the shafts, flues—in a word, all that constituted the mining apparatus, had been drawn up from the depths of the pits, and abandoned to the surface of the earth. The mine, exhausted, was like the carcass of a mastodon, of fantastic magnitude, from which the various organs of life had been withdrawn, and only the skeleton left.

Of this material there remained only the long wooden ladders extending into the depths of the mine by the Yarrow Well—the only one which afforded access to the lower galleries of the the Dochart Pit, since the cessation of the works.

Outside, the building which formerly sheltered the exterior works, still showed the place where the shafts of the pit had been sunk, completely abandoned, as were the other pits comprising the mines of Aberfoyle. It was a sad day when for the last time the miners left the mine in which they had lived for so many years.

The engineer, James Starr, had gathered these several thousand workmen who composed the brave and active population of the mine. Overseers, rollers, conductors, banksmen, woodmen, road members, receivers, carpenters, gatemen, blacksmiths, all, women, children, old men, outside and inside workmen, were assembled in the immense yard of the Dochart Pit, formerly encumbered with the overplus of the mine.

These brave men, about to be dispossessed of the necessities of life—those who, during long years had succeeded generation of generation in the old Aberfoyle, were waiting, before leaving it forever, the last farewell of the engineer. The company had distributed among them, under the name of a gratuity, the profits of the current year. This amounted to very little, for the product of the veins had but slightly exceeded the cost of working them. Still it would enable them to wait till hired in the neighboring mines, on the farms, or in the factories of the county. James Starr stood before the door of the vast shed under which the steam engines of the shaft had so long performed their functions. Simon Ford, the foreman of the Dochart Pit, then fifty-five years of age, and several other overseers, surrounded him.

James Starr raised his hat. The miners, hats off, preserved strict silence.

This farewell scene had a touching character, which did not lack grandeur.

"My friends," said the engineer, "the moment of separation has come. The Aberfoyle mines, which for so many years have united us in a common work, are now exhausted. Our efforts have not led to the discovery of a new vein; and the last piece of coal has just been drawn from the Dochart Pit."

In support of his words, James Starr showed to the miners a block of coal which had been kept in the bottom of the bucket.

"This piece of coal," continued James Starr, "is as the last drop of blood which circulated through the veins of the mine! We shall preserve it, as we have preserved the first fragment of coal taken from the Aberfoyle bearing, one hundred and fifty years ago. Between these two pieces many generations of laborers have succeeded each other in our pits! Now, it is finished! The last words spoken to you by your engineers are words of farewell. You have lived by the mine which your hands have emptied. The work has been hard, but not without profit for you. Our large family is about to separate, and it is not probable that the future will ever re-unite the scattered members. But do not forget that we have lived a long time together, and that with the Aberfoyle miners it is a duty to help one another. Your old chiefs will never forget this. When people have worked together they not how to be strangers to each. We will watch over you, and whenever you go as honest men our recommendations will follow you. Farewell then, my friends, and God bless you!"

James Starr embraced the oldest workman in the mine, whose eyes were dim with tears. Then the overseer of the different pits came to shake the hand of the engineer, while the miners waved their hats and cried:

"Farewell, James Starr, our chief and our friend!"

These farewells should leave an imperishable souvenir in all these brave hearts. Gradually this multitude silently quitted the large yard. The black soil of the road leading to the Dochart Pit echoed for the last time under the miner's feet, and silence succeeded the noisy life which had heretofore filled the Aberfoyle Mine.

One man alone had remained near James Starr.

It was the overseer, Simon Ford. Near him stood a lad of fifteen, his son Harry, who already for several years had been employed in the mine. James Starr and Simon Ford were acquainted, and knowing each other, their esteem was mutual.

"Farewell, Simon," said the engineer.
"Farewell, Mr. James," replied the foreman, "or, rather, let me say, 'till we meet again.'"

"Yes, 'till we meet again,' Simon," replied James Starr. "You know that I shall always be happy to meet you and talk over old times in Aberfoyle."

"I know it, Mr. James."

"My house in Edinburgh is open to you."
"Edinburgh is far away," said the foreman, shaking his head; "yes, far away from the Dochart Pit."

"Far, Simon! Where then, do you intend to live?"

"Just here, Mr. James. We shall not desert the old mine, our old nurse, because her milk is dried up! My wife, my son and my self will remain faithful to her."

"Farewell, then, Simon," said the engineer, whose voice, in spite of himself, betrayed emotion.

"No, I say again, 'till we meet,' and not 'farewell.' By the word of Simon Ford, Aberfoyle will see you again."

The engineer did not care to destroy this last illusion. He embraced young Harry, who was looking at him with great, yawning eyes. He again pressed Simon's hand, and finally left the mine.

This scene had taken place ten years before our story opens. In spite of the desire to see him again, expressed by the foreman, James Starr had never heard tidings of him.

It was after these ten years of separation that Simon Ford's letter reached him, inviting him to hasten to the old mines of Aberfoyle. A communication of an interesting nature! What could it be? The Dochart Pit, the Yarrow Well! How these names recalled the past! Yes, those were happy days—those of work, of struggle—the best part of the engineer's life.

James Starr re-read the letter. He considered it from every point. He was sorry that Simon Ford had not added a line.

Was it possible that the old foreman had discovered a new vein? No!

James Starr remembered with what minute care the Aberfoyle mines had been explored before the final cessation of work. He had himself gone to the last borings without finding any deposit in this soil, ruined by exhaustive working. An attempt had even been made to work the rock coal under the layers, which are usually of an inferior quality, such as the red Devonian sandstone, but without result. James Starr had then abandoned the mine, absolutely convinced that it no longer held a piece of combustible material.

"No," he repeated, "no! How admit that what escaped my researches could be revealed to those of Simon Ford? Meanwhile the old overseer well knows that there is but one thing in this world that interests me, and this invitation, that I must keep secret, to present myself at the Dochart Pit!"

James Starr always returned to this idea.

On the other side, the engineer knew Simon Ford to be a skillful miner, particularly endowed with the knowledge of his craft. He had not seen him since the abandonment of the Aberfoyle Mine; he was even ignorant of what had become of the old overseer. He could not have told where he was employed, nor even where he lived with his wife and son. All that he knew was that a meeting had been arranged at the Yarrow Well, and that Harry, Simon Ford's son, would wait for him at the Callander Dock during the whole of the day after that on which he received the letter. It is evidently his duty to visit the Dochart Pit.

"I shall go!" I SHALL GO!" said James Starr, who felt his curiosity and excitement increase as the time approached.

This worthy engineer belonged to that category of impassioned men, whose brain is always working like a kettle placed over a strong flame. It is in such kettles that ideas foam and boil over, while in others they simmer peaceably. On this day James Starr's were in a bubbling condition.

But, then, a very, unexpected incident occurred. It was the drop of cold water, which instantly condensed all the steam of the brain.

In fact, about six o'clock in the evening, the third mail brought James Starr a second letter. This letter was enclosed in a coarse envelope, the superscription indicating a hand little accustomed to using a pen.

James Starr tore off the envelope. It contained but a scrap of paper, yellowed by time, and which looked as if torn from an old copy book. On this paper was a single phrase, thus expressed:

"Useless for the engineer, James Starr, to trouble himself—Simon Ford's letter being now motiveless."

And no signature.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE WAY.

James Starr's train of thought was rudely arrested. This second letter was contradictory of the first.

"What does this mean?" he asked himself.

James Starr took up the half-torn envelope. It bore, like the other, the stamp of the Aberfoyle Post-office. It had then been sent from the same part of the County Stirling. Evidently it was not the old miner who had written it. But not less evidently the author of this second letter knew the overseer's secret, because he formally countermanded the invitation given to the engineer to repair to the Yarrow Hall.

Was it, then, true that this first invitation was now motiveless? Would they prevent James Starr from troubling himself, whether needlessly or otherwise? Was it not rather a malicious effort to thwart Simon Ford's projects?

After serious reflection, James Starr reached this conclusion. This contradiction which appeared in the letters, simply produced in him an ardent desire to go to the Dochart Pit. Besides, if this were all a hoax, better be sure of the fact. But it seemed right to James Starr to place more reliance on the first letter than on the second—that is to the request of such a man as Simon Ford, rather than to the advice of his anonymous contradictor.

"The truth is," he reflected, "if they wish to influence my resolution, it must be for the reason that Simon Ford's communication is of extreme importance. To-morrow I will be at the appointed rendezvous at the hour mentioned."

In the evening James Starr made his preparations to go away. As it was possible that his absence might be prolonged for some days, he notified by letter Sir W. Elphinston, the President of the Royal Institute, that he could not be present at the next meeting of the society. He also excused himself from several engagements which would have occupied him during the week. Then, having told his servant to pack his valise, he lay down, perhaps unnecessarily impressed by this incident.

The next morning, at five o'clock, James Starr sprang out of bed, dressed himself warmly—for a cold rain was falling—and left his house in the Canongate to take at Granton dock the steamboat, which, after a three hours' sail up the Forth, reaches Stirling.

Perhaps for the first time, in going through the Canongate, James Starr did not turn for a look at Holyrood, the palace of the old kings of Scotland. The Canongate is the principal and most celebrated street in the old town of Edinburgh. Before the palace gate stood stentinals, dressed in the old Scotch costume. This consists of a green stuff skirt or kilt, a scarf or plaid, and a goat-skin purse, the long white hair of which rests on the thigh. Although an enthusiastic admirer of Walter Scott, as is every true son of old Caledonia, the engineer, for the first time, failed to glance at the inn where Waverley alighted, and in which the tailor brought him that famous chieftain's costume which the Widow Flockhart so artlessly admired. Neither did he salute the little spot, where, at the risk of killing Flora MacIvor, the mountaineer's discharged their pieces after the Pretender's victory. The prison clock showed, in the middle of the street, its mournful dial. He only looked at it so as to assure himself that he would not be too late for the boat. We must also admit that he did not glance when in the Nelher Bow at the house of the great reformer, John Knox, the only man who resisted the smiles of Mary Stuart. But, taking the High street, the popular street so minutely described in the romance of the "Abbot," he hastened toward the gigantic bridge of Bridge street, which connects the three hills of Edinburgh.

In a few minutes James Starr arrived at the terminus of the General Railway, and half an hour after he left the train at New Haven, a pretty fishing village, a mile from Leith, which forms the port of Edinburgh. The rising tide covered the blackish and pebbly line of the sea shore. The first waves bathed the stockade, a kind of pier, supported by chains. On the left a boat which plies between Edinburgh and Stirling was moored to the Granton pier.

[To be Continued.]

AN AMATEUR CIRCUS.

The following antique announcement was found tacked on to a Straight Shore fence:

NOTICE.—Rope Walking commenced on Saturday half past 2 o'clock. On Saturday night With Torches by Louis Collins. Thomas McNally tak of drunken woman, Louis Collins drunken man. Mr. gorge donelson Will go through his proforms half past 7 o'clock. Nealey quinn also tumbler.

After a man, who has always maintained the highest standing in the religious community, has once run across the yard after dusk and tried to cut the clothes line in two with his chin, he always has to explain to his horrified wife that he got into the habit of swearing in the army. And, very probably, he did.