

these wanderers spoke an Oriental language—even Mr. Edward Gosse, in his “Memoir of Samuel Rowland,” says that “‘Martin Markall’ is entirely in prose, except some queer *gypsy* songs”—the “*gypsy* songs” in question having less resemblance to *gypsy* than English has to Spanish or French. The editor has before him a work written and published within a few years, called “The New York Slang Dictionary,” in which the writer tells us that “*bilk* is a word in the *gypsy* language, from which most English slang is derived” (*bilk* not being Romany at all), and assures the reader that his book (which is simply a re-hash of Grose, with the addition of some purely modern Americanisms) will enable him to make himself understood in the slums of St. Petersburg, Paris, or in any country in the world! In common with far greater critics and scholars, he believes that *gypsy* is a mixture of all European tongues and corrupt English, when, in fact, it does not contain a single French word.* Hotten had a far better knowledge of the constituent elements of slang, unfortunately he had not even an average “smattering” of the languages which *must* be understood, and that into their very provincialisms, argots, and corruptions, in order to solve the origin of all the really difficult problems in it. He knew that the poet, Thomas Moore, made a great mistake in believing that canting was *gypsy*, but he knew nothing whatever of Romany, and asserts that it is mingled up and confused with canting, and is ignorant enough to declare that “had the *gypsy* tongue been analysed and committed to writing three centuries ago, there is every probability that many scores of words now in common use could be at once traced to its source.” This was the result of an erroneous belief that Mr. Borrow knew everything of English Romany that could be known, while the fact is that by comparison with Continental dialects, and with the aid of what Mr. Borrow did *not* know, it is tolerably certain that the English *gypsy* of three centuries ago is by no means the lost language which he assumed it to be.

The last and not least important element in English slang consists of Americanisms. The original basis or beginning of these is to be found in Yankeeisms or words and phrases peculiar at first to New England. They consisted chiefly of old English provincialisms,

* George Borrow thinks that the word *būddika*, a shop, is from the French *boutique*. It is much more probably the Italian *bottega*, though it still more resembles the Spanish *bodega*.