

**THE PEASANT
SPEECH OF DEVON**

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The Peasant Speech of Devon by Sarah Hewett

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SARAH HEWETT

**THE PEASANT
SPEECH OF DEVON**

THE PEASANT SPEECH OF DEVON.

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THE PEASANT SPEECH
OF
DEVON.

*AND OTHER MATTERS CONNECTED
THEREWITH.*

BY
SARAH HEWETT. E

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

1892.

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1895

leads those who have left their native county in search of success elsewhere, to think again of the home of their childhood, and to recall its racy accents to their ears, the leisure of many years will not have been spent in vain.

SARAH HEWETT.

TIVERTON.

October, 1892.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

I HAVE spent a quarter of a century in collecting the words and sentences of which this work is composed. No attempt is made to claim the prerogative of using them in Devon alone, for it is certain that the people of East Cornwall and West Somerset speak the same '*heathenish jargon*'; but having moved about amongst the people in every corner of 'dear old Devon,' I record that which I have heard without desire to claim originality or exclusiveness.

There are many books written in the dialect in a more popular form, yet I venture to hope that this will find readers among Devonshire men and women throughout the world, and those who are interested in the study of dialect as a science.

The speech of the peasantry of Devon and the adjacent counties is undoubtedly the purest remains of the Anglo-Saxon tongue extant in England at the present time. Many words are almost as pure as when spoken by our Saxon ancestors. Compare for example :

DEVONIAN.		ANGLO-SAXON.
Dring	with	thringan
Bide	"	bidan
Wap	"	waepan
Athurt	"	thweorh
Cussen	"	cursen, etc.

Changes have been introduced and modifications wrought, but in the dialect of the people inhabiting the villages impinging on Haldon, Dartmoor, Exmoor, Gibbetmoor, and Blackdown is identified the Anglo-Saxon of the ninth century.

In some parishes family surnames retain their original spelling. The Cruwys of Cruwys Morchard are proud to add their name to the list. 'Cruwys, Coplestone, and Crocker were found at home when the Conqueror came.'

For high buoyant spirits and dare-devil recklessness, no county can produce a race to surpass, or even equal, the youth of both sexes in Devon. Nor is this elasticity of temperament confined to the peasant population. High and low, rich and poor, all are brimful of fun, and bubble over with laughter-provoking jokes. In most of the men, and not a few of the women, this may arise from the effects of the genial climate and the out-of-door life led by them in the pursuit of 'sport' across their breezy moors and heathery wilds. Travel from the Blackdown Hills on the east, to Barum town on the west, a-foot, a-horse, or on wheels, meet man, woman, or child, a smile and a warm clasp of the hand will be given to you, and 'Güde marning, zir! fine marning 's marning!' will greet you as you pass on.

If it be warm, and you a pedestrian, some hospitable farmer will accost you with: 'Tez mortel 'ot tü-day, zir; wantee plaize tü come inside an' 'a' a drap ov zyder? Ours be a prime zort, I zuree!'

Devonians are very keen in their superstitions; they believe in 'whitwitches,' 'charms,' and 'magic.' Persons of good position, and presumably of education, are ready to engage the services of the white witch (vide *Tiverton Gazette*, January 6th, 1891).

In years gone by, not unfrequently has Caulks, of Exeter, been waited upon by people from distant towns and villages wishing to obtain advice as to how their 'awverlüked' cattle, children, friends, or wife, may be cured. Many country lads and lasses have consulted Caulks as to their future wife and husband, and to know 'Whot's agwaine tü 'appen tü 'm bimbye.' Many a bright sovereign has been added to Caulks' store on Exeter market-days by the charming way in which he 'Cast the Future,' 'Ruled the Planets,' and 'Put the Cards' for the fair maids of Kirton, Woolsery, and Ban'ton. He sold charms to release 'all' and 'everything' from the mischievous effects of the 'Evil Eye.' Did a ghost appear, a cow withhold her milk, a pig have staggers, a sheep become maze-headed, a child fall down in a fit, a bird flutter against the window, the chimney smoke, the dog howl, and a thousand and one other disagreeable things happen, then old Caulks was consulted and prayed to cure them, which *for a consideration* he would obligingly do. To effect a cure he would teach a prayer (N.B., repeat the Lord's Prayer backwards) to be said over the head of the afflicted; give a charm to tie round the neck of the victim, or to be nailed against the wall, or placed in the chimney; or would, *for an extra fee* and a few days' free board and lodgings, obligingly put himself to the inconvenience of going into the country to personally superintend the cure.

The charms were to be sewn up singly in a linen or silk bag *one inch square*, and worn about the person or attached in some convenient way to the animal or place 'awverlüked.' The charm itself consisted of either :

The forefoot of a toad.

The head of a snake.

The liver of a frog.
 The tongue of a viper.
 The front tooth of a dead child.
 Or a piece of rag saturated with dragon's blood.

Pixies, too, hold a high place in the imaginations of Devonians. The villagers around Haldon and Dartmoor assert that these little people have their homes among the tors, and keep their houses spotlessly clean; that they enjoy mad gallops at night on colts, making stirrups in their manes and weaving them so tightly that it is impossible for mortal man to comb them out. If a horse be seen going at a madder pace than usual, the farmer who owns it will say, 'Bagger they pixies, if they bant at they colts again! Zee 'ow they be a-tearing acräss tha moor!'

Again, these pixies are supposed to make raids on the dairies and larders, coming and going through the keyholes. They hold their revelries at midnight, and should they encounter a belated traveller they at once trot him round and round a dreary waste until there is no more 'spoil' left in him. A wise traveller always provides against these machinations by wearing at least one garment wrong side out. Should this precaution be omitted at the outset, it is advisable to turn a garment immediately on becoming fogged. I have known persons wear one stocking inside out when on a journey to prevent being pixy-led, or at least for 'good-luck.'

Educated people who have lived only in cultured, refined homes can never understand the music of the 'Peasant Speech of Devon,' unless they have been reared in the county. A knowledge of the tone is as important as of the words themselves. The inimitable pathos of such sentences as: 'Aw, my dear saw!' 'Aw, my eymers, whot