AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH AND THE PHILOLOGIST*

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WHEN I was asked to speak on some aspect of Australian English, I must confess that I at first refused. I had, apart from mere indolence, two reasons. The first was that it seemed to me that Australians must be tired of hearing visitors from overseas talking about Australian English—indeed, it seemed to me possible that they might have tired of hearing anyone talk about Australian English, for the subject is well-worn, and, to be candid, not of great importance except to Australians—a matter of a few paragraphs, so to speak, in the long history of the English language. The second reason was that though I am myself an Australian, and a graduate of this university, I have lived for over thirty years in England and I have never made any special study of Australian English. The proper place for such study is here in Australia, where the materials for it are chiefly available, and it is here that it has been conducted. If one wishes to know about the Australian vocabulary and the special Australian meanings of words, one goes to the Australian lexicographers—most recently Dr. Ramson, formerly of this university and now of the Australian National University in Canberra. If one wants to know about Australian pronunciation and its detailed phonetic analysis, one goes to Professor A. G. Mitchell and Professor Delbridge, also formerly of this university and now of Macquarie University.

My own studies have been in the general history of the English language, and in particular in the history of English pronunciation, especially between 1500 and 1700. That of course ends, in round terms, just about 100 years before the history of Australian English begins—which is one reason why I cannot claim any specialist knowledge of its history. What I propose to do is not to discuss details—which I am not competent to do—but certain general topics, from the point of view of one who is a trained philologist and has worked on the sort of problems that arise when one is tracing the history of a language ; and in particular, as I spent many years working on evidence of the history of English pronunciation, I should like to consider some of the general problems that arise in connexion with the history of Australian pronunciation, and the things that historical evidence on pronunciation can tell us and, what is equally important, the things that it can not.

One possible view of the development of a distinctive mode of pronunciation in Australia is that it is a new form of English evolved here by the blending of various types of British dialectal speech in the early days of the Australian colonies, or at least by the interaction between such forms of dialectal speech and the educated speech of Southern England, which for convenience I shall call by the commonly accepted term " Standard English " (by which neither I nor anyone else means any disrespect to the Scots or Irish or Americans or Australians, and so on). I must say at once that in general I think this an incorrect view. It is within the experience of all of us that immigrants to Australia from the British Isles often bring with them their own local forms of speech. My father had successively a Scottish gardener and one from the North of England, and the first spoke like a Scot and the second like a Northern Englishman. My own aunt, who was born in England but brought to Australia as an infant in arms, to the end of her long life pronounced the word *iron* as [airən]. But though she would certainly have counted herself, and rightly, as an Australian, no one could properly say that this was an Australian pronunciation— it was an isolated English dialectal pronunciation which she had obviously learnt in childhood from her parents, who came from Cumberland. It is certain that many of the earliest settlers were speakers of British dialects. This is shown by the spellings used in early documents written by people who were imperfectly educated and had not mastered the conventional English orthography and who made spelling-mistakes which often (though not always) serve to reveal their pronunciations. There are, for example, documents which on internal evidence alone were pretty certainly written by immigrants from Ireland. But these are not documents in the history of Australian English merely because they were written in Australia. Exactly the same sort of documents, with the same sort of misspellings, can be found in the British Isles themselves in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They are documents in the history of British English, and they show that British provincialisms were exported to Australia along with the English language itself. The effective history of Australian English, as an independent entity, cannot have begun until the Australian-born, or at least those who had been brought to Australia as young children, had begun to be a sizeable proportion of the population ; and that can hardly have been before 1830 or so. To expect earlier evidence of specifically Australian developments would be contrary to probability.

But what are the specifically Australian developments in pronunciation ? Anyone carrying out detailed research into the history of pronunciation, and hunting for evidence, must have a clear idea of what he is looking for and of the sort of evidence by which it can be revealed. I would choose first—though it is not the most obvious choice—the development (or rather, the loss) in Australian English of the Standard English unstressed vowel [ɪ]. In final position, in e.g. *pity* or *Sydney*, it is commonly lengthened and slightly diphthongized, and indeed tends to receive a light secondary stress ; it certainly does not remain the characteristic Southern English short unstressed vowel. Everywhere else, i.e. in medial syllables or when followed by a consonant, it becomes the unstressed vowel [ə]. Thus an

Englishman says [hauzɪz], [krɪkɪt], an Australian [hauzəz], [krɪkət]. This even goes so far that the pronoun *it*, when unstressed (e.g. when used as the object of a verb), becomes [ət] : [ai faund ət]. I pick this as characteristic because it is a feature of the speech of (I should be inclined to say) almost all Australians, however well educated and careful in articulation, and it is also the feature which is hardest to lose (if one wants to lose it). I still cannot pronounce the name *Philip* in a way that sounds natural to an Englishman.

Now this is the sort of sound-change of which one usually expects to find evidence in written sources, for it involves the loss of the difference between two previously distinct sounds (in this case, Standard English unstressed [ə] and [ɪ]), so that spellings appropriate to the one can be substituted for spellings appropriate to the other, either inadvertently or by someone who is deliberately setting out to indicate a change of pronunciation by means of the conventional alphabet. Unfortunately in this case there is no English spelling which consistently represents unstressed [ɪ] as against [ə], so that in practice the amount of spelling-evidence for this Australian sound-change is likely to be limited. But it is worth looking for. One would, however, have to be careful. There is always the risk of taking as a proof of a general change what is in fact a special case. Or again, abnormal spellings usually come from people of imperfect education whose spellings may not be representative of normal pronunciation—if indeed they represent pronunciation at all, and are not merely muddled. Philologists have not always been proof against the inverted snobbery of taking vulgar and careless pronunciation as the norm, and educated careful speech as something artificial, abnormal, and indeed reprehensible—especially when they are dealing with a period safely in the past. People admire bushrangers who would hate to be held up by a modern gunman. Again, there are many English provincial dialects which use unstressed [ə] where Standard English uses [ɪ] ; one would have to ensure that any document one was using as evidence of Australian speech was not in fact written by someone native to such an English dialect. Indeed, I once thought that the prevalence of unstressed [ə] in Australian speech was probably due to the influence of non-standard forms of British English ; but it is so generally used, by virtually all speakers and in all possible phonetic contexts, that it is now my opinion that it is a genuine case of an indigenous Australian sound-change ; and this, I understand, is also Professor Mitchell's opinion.

A second general difference between Australian and Standard English is in the pronunciation of the vowel [ɑ:] in such words as *dark, half, path* ; the Australian vowel is commonly a low front vowel [a:], the English a mid-back or even fully-back [ɑ:], and the difference is often accentuated by the nasalization of the Australian vowel. Now this is the sort of difference that can only be accurately described by a trained phonetician using precise methods of phonetic analysis and a sophisticated phonetic alphabet designed to correspond to his analysis. An amateur observer can notice and mimic it easily enough, but he would find great difficulty in describing it in writing. There is no way of expressing it by the letters of the ordinary alphabet,

and for this reason it would never be revealed by spelling-evidence. The most one could hope for would be some remark, by an observer, that there was a difference between the Australian and English vowels in *dark* &c., perhaps with some impressionistic judgement that the Australian sound was "thinner" (or some such phrase) ; and though this would not really be an adequate description, it would probably be legitimate to assume that the observer was trying to describe the same difference as is now known to exist, for it is really only a very slight phonetic difference and could not be significantly reduced without disappearing.

The third, and most obvious and important, general difference between Australian and Standard English speech is a series of related changes in the Australian pronunciation of what are popularly called " long vowels " but are really, in Standard English and in Australian, diphthongs. The so-called " vowel " of *beet* (or *beat*) is in Standard English really a slight diphthong [ɪi] ; in Australian the diphthongal glide is usually longer and the starting-point of the diphthong is somewhat centralized, [əi]. The corresponding sound produced in the back of the mouth is the so-called " vowel " of *boot* or *true*, which again is in Standard English a slight diphthong [ʊu] and in Australian English has commonly a longer diphthongal glide. The so-called " vowel " of *tame* or *day* or *great* is in Standard English markedly a diphthong [ei], beginning with a fairly close starting-point or " first element " [e] ; in Australian English the " first element " is normally more open, thus [ɛi], and in extreme forms of Australian speech this " first element " may be as low as [æ], thus [æi]. The more extreme forms of this sound pass beyond what are, to most non-Australians, the acceptable limits of the " long *a* " sound (in more technical terms, beyond the boundary of the English or American [ei] phoneme), with the result that the Australian sound is liable to be heard, by a non-Australian, as [ai]— hence the accusations that Australians pronounce *tame* as *time*, and so on. Now I know that this accusation is very irritating to Australians, who are perfectly well aware that they distinguish between *tame* and *time*, and would also claim, usually quite correctly, that they do not even pronounce *tame* in the way that an Englishman or American pronounces *time*. Nevertheless they must recognize that the Englishman or American is not deliberately exaggerating ; he is honestly stating what the sound seems to him to be. One's apprehensions of speech-sounds are conditioned by what one constantly uses and hears in use in one's own form of a language, and the same sound can *seem* different to different observers. Corresponding to the diphthong of *tame* there is, at the back of the mouth, that of *bone* or *boat*, which is in Standard English (or rather, in its more conservative forms) a diphthong [ou] beginning with a fairly close [o] ; the Australian diphthong has a longer glide and the " first element " is often centralized. In extreme forms it can sound almost like [au] to a non-Australian. And finally, because of the development of the diphthong in *tame* in the direction of [ai], the [ai] diphthong of *time* is often, especially in the more extreme forms of Australian speech, modified to preserve its distinctness and is pronounced with a back [ɑ] as its " first element ", i.e. it moves in the direction of [ɔi] and may seem like [ɔi] to a non-Australian, though in fact the distinction between *by* and *boy* is not lost.

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What we have here is a systematic modification of the modern English diphthong-system. The system is not destroyed, either in whole or in part, since none of the distinctions is lost ; but the distinctions are differently realized, which may—and does—cause difficulties for non-Australians, and even for Australians whose speech preserves essentially the Standard English forms of the diphthongs and whose speech-perceptions resemble those of an Englishman. An Australian lady told me recently of how, in a strange town, she had been directed to a shop in High Street, and eventually found it, after some embarrassment, in Hay Street. Now this sort of systematic modification of a sound-system is something that English philologists are very familiar with ; the Australian changes in the modern English diphthongs are in fact just one more stage in a great transformation of the English long vowels and diphthongs which has been going on since 1400 and which is known as the English vowel-shift. But though general and systematic changes of this sort can produce, and in the case of English have produced, extreme alterations in the way in which a language is pronounced, they are not easy to trace from historical evidence. So long as the changes are systematic and the distinctions between one sound and another are preserved, they are unnoticed by speakers of the language or dialect in which they are occurring ; moreover they do not occasion any alteration of the spelling-system, for as the sounds change so do the values of the letters of the alphabet by which they are written. Regular sound-changes which do not result in the loss of the separate identity of the sounds affected will never be revealed by spelling-changes unless a language is radically re-spelt in accordance with some standard external to itself—as English was largely re-spelt in the Middle Ages, between about 1150 and 1350, under the influence of Old French spelling-conventions. But this is an abnormal situation ; the normal situation is that the spelling remains unchanged but is taken to mean something different in terms of sound. A generation or so ago, many English philologists thought that this was not so, that (for example) if a man about 1400 pronounced the word *name* as [naːm] but a man about 1600 pronounced it [nɛːm], it would be natural for the spelling to change from *name* to (say) *neme* if only tradition did not prevent it, and that the man in 1600, if he was unfamiliar with the traditional spelling and was writing words as he heard them, would naturally write this word as *neme*. But the argument is now, I think, generally recognized to have been mistaken. It assumes that the letters of the Roman alphabet, and especially the vowel-letters, have fixed and eternal values, or at least that anyone uncorrupted by tradition will attribute to the vowel-letters, when they represent long vowels, the values that a phonetician would recognize as corresponding to their values when they represent short vowels. But in fact no one is uninfluenced by tradition. As sixteenth-century scholars realized, the values of the letters of the alphabet are a matter of convention, or as they put it of agreement among the users of a language. In particular, as the Roman alphabet has far too few vowel-letters, it has from the beginning been necessary to attribute to each of them more values than one ; and although in classical Latin there was a phonetic relationship between these values, in any modern language the relationship may be purely historical, as

English abundantly demonstrates. To Chaucer *name* meant [na(:)mə], to Milton [nɛ:m], to Johnson (or a modern Scotsman) [ne:m], to a modern Southern Englishman [neim], to an Australian [nɛim], but for all of them *name* was or is a perfectly adequate and (within the changing conventions of English orthography) a practical phonetic spelling. None of them would have thought of changing it unless the whole conventions of English spelling were to be changed ; in particular, so long as the vowels represented by the letter *a* remained distinct from those represented by *e* (or *i*), it would be inconceivable to alter the spelling from *name* to *neme* (or *nime*). Only phoneticians and philologists expect there to be a phonetic relationship between the various sounds that a letter represents ; ordinary people accept unquestioningly the values that the letters have come to have in their own language. It is hopeless to expect spelling-evidence of sound-changes which only modify the pronunciation without causing the loss of the identity of hitherto distinct sounds ; and the Australian modifications of the English diphthongs are of this sort. You will not find spelling-evidence of them—nor for that matter rhyme-evidence, since they do not affect rhyming.

Such changes are in general revealed by evidence which may, for my present purposes, be classified under two headings. The first is by analyses of the pronunciation made by men who possess some understanding of how the sounds are produced and in particular (in this context) of the nature of diphthongs and how to describe them—in other words, by men who have at least a practical understanding of phonetics ; and by new phonetic spelling-systems devised by men who have such knowledge. Unfortunately, between 1750 and 1850 there were few Englishmen who possessed much understanding of phonetic principle, and I doubt whether even the best of them would have been capable of any analysis of diphthongs sufficiently exact to discriminate between the English and the Australian pronunciations of the sounds that I am discussing. After 1850 phonetic knowledge increased again, but it was still restricted to comparatively few men and was, even so, much less exact than it has since become ; it was, as far as I know, not until quite late in the nineteenth century that there was any attempt to apply it to the description of Australian pronunciation, and for descriptions at all precise we have to wait until this century, after the distinctive Australian differences from Standard English pronunciation had certainly been fully developed.

The other main type of evidence of general sound-changes is what may be described as the observations of outsiders, and comparisons with the sounds of foreign languages, whether made by foreigners or by natives of the language being described. This sort of evidence is not always very precise, for there are often approximations when the sounds of one language are compared to those of another ; an exotic sound which does not exist in the native language of the observer may be grossly mis-apprehended. As far as Australian English is concerned, " outside observers " includes (and in practice means) speakers of other forms of English, in particular Englishmen themselves, and " comparisons with foreign sounds " can mean com-

parisons with Standard English (or with American) sounds ; and in a sense " outside observers " can also cover Australians whose speech, and whose apprehensions of speech, are similar to those of Englishmen, when such an Australian comments on other and more extreme forms of Australian speech.   And this is in fact, as far as I know, the earliest sort of evidence which is to be found of the special Australian developments of the English diphthong-system.   In particular the most obvious feature, the pronunciation of the diphthong in *tame* in such a way that it sounds like that of *time* to a non-Australian, is very easily described by saying simply that Australians pronounce *tame* like *time*—though of course it would be unwise to take the statement as literally true ; it means merely that the diphthong has so developed that it sounds like [ai] to a non-Australian.   And as we are dealing with a systematic series of changes, it would be a legitimate and proper deduction, even if only this one feature were directly evidenced, to assume that all the diphthongs that I have specified had undergone their distinctive Australian development.   But at this point I must repeat my disclaimer that I do not know the detailed evidence.   I believe that there is clear evidence that the Australian developments of the diphthongs had occurred by 1890 at latest, and there may well be earlier evidence.   Some evidence that I have seen cited, purporting to prove the development of [ei] to (or rather, towards) [ai] by 1850 or so, seems to me to be invalid ; but it may be that valid evidence will be discoverable, or indeed has already been discovered.   But I should be surprised if the distinctive Australian developments had occurred much before the middle of the nineteenth century ; as far as I know, they are somewhat later.   No doubt there were incipient differences between the English and the Australian diphthongs even earlier, but we never get historical evidence of slight variations ; only when a distinct stage is reached (as in this case, when the Australian diphthong in *tame* begins to sound like that of *time* to a non-Australian) does the evidence begin to appear, at any period before that of phonetic laboratories and of gramophones and tape-recorders.   The difficulty with Australian pronunciation is that its formative period is a bad period for evidence.

If one looks for an explanation of the characteristic Australian development of the diphthong-system, one must take into account that very much the same development has occurred in Cockney English, or more generally in the non-standard speech of the South-east of England.   I know that Australians dislike being told that they speak like Cockneys, because they are clearly aware of differences ; but it is nevertheless true that there are resemblances, particularly in this matter of the diphthongs, and that the general tendency is the same.   Any historical explanation must take this resemblance into account.   One possibility would be that among the early settlers there was a large proportion of migrants from the South-east of England (East Anglia, Essex, and the London area) and that this group became linguistically dominant in the colony and so determined the general direction of development.   I do not know whether there is any historical evidence for such a preponderance of migrants from South-east England at some early stage of the settlement.   I should have thought it more probable, if such considerations were relevant, that Australian

pronunciation would show clear signs of the influence of Northern or Scottish or perhaps above all of Irish English.   But in any case this hypothesis would come up against the difficulty that it would then be necessary to explain how a mode of pronunciation developed because of particular conditions in the early stages of settlement in New South Wales could have spread throughout Australia and even, to a large degree, to New Zealand.   Not even someone born in Sydney can suppose that its influence is likely to have been so dominant.

A purely linguistic explanation is much more likely than a demographic one. It is necessary to consider what English pronunciation was like about 1750 and what was happening to it in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.   In the mid-eighteenth century Southern English used, as Scottish English still does, long pure vowels [i:] and [u:] in *beet* and *boot*, long pure vowels [e:] and [o:] in *name* and *home*.   But in Standard English itself these four pure vowels have become diphthongs ; and the first clear evidence we get of this is from an observer called Batchelor in 1809, who was, perhaps significantly, a Londoner.   The tendency of the pure vowels to become diphthongs was obviously one that was operative at the time when Australia was founded ; and the difference between Standard English on the one hand and Cockney, Australian, and New Zealand English on the other is simply that in the latter the dipthongization of the long pure vowels has proceeded faster and further.   The direction of change has been the same, though in Standard English the extent of the change has been more limited.   Nor is it difficult to see why this should be so.   Standard English was and is, and always has been since its first emergence, the consciously correct speech of an educated class, and such a language is naturally conservative in tendency ; it may not be able to prevent change—indeed Standard English has changed profoundly during the centuries— but it can resist and slow down and limit change.   But in " Cockney " English for social reasons, and in Antipodean English partly for social and partly for geographical reasons—the mere remoteness from the main centre of Standard English in Southern England—there was not the same brake on the progress of the tendency to diph- thongize the eighteenth-century high and mid-high long vowels, and the process has gone further.   And it may be noted that the latest study of the phonetics of Standard English accepts as the norm for the diphthong of *bone* not the more conservative [ou] which hitherto has been taken as the standard pronunciation, but [əu] (though I myself would still regard this as less correct) ; in this respect at least Standard English is catching up with its more advanced varieties.

The concept that Australian English is an offshoot from the educated language of the South of England in the late eighteenth century or the early nineteenth century can be extended to others of the distinctive features of Australian pronunciation. Thus I hold that when in the course of the seventeenth century a long low vowel developed in such words as *arm* or *father* or *path* or *half*, it was originally a low front vowel [a:], not the present-day Standard English mid-back vowel [ɑ:], and there is evidence consistent with low-front [a:] in the eighteenth century also.   It may

be, then, that the prevalence of low-front [aː] in Australian English in such words may be a survival of the eighteenth-century pronunciation, not a modification of the present-day Standard English sound ; in other words, it may be Standard English that has changed.   Or again it is very common, in less correct forms of Australian speech, to pronounce the word-ending *-ing* as [ən], thus [θɪŋkən] for [θɪŋkɪŋ].   Such pronunciations are common in British dialects, and it would be easy to explain the prevalence of this vulgarism in Australia from the influence of provincial forms of British speech.   But it is well established that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was very common, though certainly not invariable, to pronounce the suffix *-ing* as [ɪn] in Standard English itself ; indeed this pronunciation still survives in the conservative speech of the English country gentry, thus [ʃuutɪn] for *shooting*. And if we allow for the regular Australian change of unstressed [ɪ] to [ə], then it is apparent that the Australian [ən] for *-ing* exactly corresponds to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British [ɪn] ; in other words, the Australian variant [ən] may be derived, not from provincial British dialects, but from the variant [ɪn] that formerly was so common within **Standard** English itself.

There are of course some pronunciations current in Australian English that really are due to the influence of non-standard forms of British English—for example, a good many variant pronunciations of individual words, thus [dʒɛst] or [dʒɪst] for *just*, [gɪt] for *get*.   These are not developed in Australia nor are they distinctively Australian ; they merely show the currency here of British variants, for the explanation of which one may have to go back many hundreds of years before Australia was founded—as in the case of the examples cited, which are due to medieval or late medieval variant developments.   A more general instance is the group of words like *chance* or *grant*, in which Standard English uses [aː], Australian English normally [æ].   These words, which with a couple of exceptions are derived from Old French, have varied in pronunciation since the fourteenth century ; the modern variation depends on, though it is not the same as, the medieval variation.   Words of this class are not pronounced consistently in Standard English ; some have [aː], others [æ], others vary between the two.   Australian English more consistently prefers [æ], and there can be no doubt that this greater consistency is due to the influence of provincial forms of British speech (probably North Midland and Northern English), aided by the suggestion of the conventional spelling.   But Australian English is itself not fully consistent.   Thus *aunt*, which despite its spelling belongs to the same class, is not pronounced [ænt].   The reason is obvious : consistency can be bought at too high a price, and it is useful to be able to distinguish *aunts* from *ants*.   This is what is called, in technical jargon, the differentiation of potential homophones. But I must add that an English pupil of mine once told me that her grandmother pronounced *ants* as [aːnts].   It was a pronunciation that I had read about but did not really believe existed.   It did something to make up for the occasion, soon after my arrival in England, when I heard myself saying that I had torn my [paːnts]. English is a very difficult language.

If one turns one's attention from the features in which Australian pronunciation differs from Standard English to those in which the two agree, it immediately becomes obvious that they are closely related forms of the same type of English.   Both have some form of a long [ɑ:] vowel, in contrast with short [æ] or [a], in such words as *path, laugh*, and *cast* ; that is, both show the results of a late seventeenth-century process of vowel-lengthening that did not affect most other forms of British English and most forms of American English.   Both show the loss in pronunciation of the consonant *r* except before vowels, though it is not lost in most forms of British English and of American English ; and this loss of *r* occurred about the middle of the eighteenth century or even a little later.   Both Standard English and Australian English show the consequential loss of the distinction between Middle English ŏ before *r* in words such as *nor* and *short* and Middle English ọ̄ (and other ME long back vowels later identified with ME ọ̄) before *r* in such words as *boar, more, sort, port*, and *court*, though this distinction is still preserved, in one form or another, in many English dialects, in Scottish, and often in American English.   Even in Standard English the distinction seems to have been kept in the late eighteenth century, perhaps into the early nineteenth.   These last two features alone—the loss of *r* and the loss of the distinction between ME ŏ and ME ọ̄ before *r*—are enough to prove that Australian English is, and can only be, an offshoot from Standard Southern English towards the end of the eighteenth century or in the early nineteenth ; for it shares all the characteristic developments of Standard English until the early nineteenth century.

The conclusion to be drawn from the internal evidence of Australian pronunciation (which is, for a philologist, always the most important evidence) is therefore, in my view, clear and definite.   But there is some confirmation from external evidence, in the shape of comments on Australian speech made by certain English observers about the middle of the nineteenth century who remark on the purity of the English spoken by Australian-born citizens of the colony—indeed, if I remember correctly, one of them speaks of " Attic " purity.   Now it is easy to dismiss such remarks as intolerably patronizing and as too vague to be of value, but it seems to me that these men are trying to say something of real importance.   One must make some allowance for nineteenth-century literary style, and much more for the education and experience of a nineteenth-century Englishman.   An Englishman then was, if anything, even more ignorant of linguistic concepts than a mid-twentieth-century Englishman (or Australian).   He was educated almost entirely in the Classics, and was brought up to believe in a " perfected " language—Greek of the age of Pericles, Latin of the age of Cicero, English of the age (perhaps) of Addison or of Johnson ; and within this perfected language he was accustomed to think that there was one pure form— the Greek of Athens, the Latin of Rome itself—in contrast to " dialects ", which were in varying degrees impure, corrupted, or barbarous.   When therefore such a man talks of the " Attic purity " of the language of the Australian-born colonists, all he means is that they speak what later might have been called " Standard Southern

English "—which, as a matter of history, is basically the language of the educated and official classes of London and the London area—and that they do not speak dialect. And if one detects some note of surprise, one must remember the mid-nineteenth-century English observer's experience and what he would expect on the basis of his experience. In England in the early nineteenth century the regional dialects were still in vigorous life, though they had been under some pressure from Standard English for centuries. The poorer and less well educated classes still spoke dialect, and this was true even in London itself, as we can see from the depictions of Cockney speech in the pages of Dickens—though it is also true that Dickens shows that Cockney usage was becoming confused because of the influence on it of educated London speech. An English visitor would know, or could safely guess, that a majority of the colonists, both of the convicts and of the free settlers, would be people of humble station who in Britain would be dialect speakers, and he would doubtless be able to observe for himself that the British migrants in the colony still retained their dialectal speech or evident relics of it. But in Britain itself, at that time, the children of such parents would also be expected to speak dialect; and it is the difference from this expected situation which occasions the comment—I should be inclined to say the admiring comment—on the " purity " of the speech of the Australian-born. This does not necessarily mean that the observers detected no differences at all between Australian pronunciation and that of educated Southern English; they may or may not have been aware of incipient differences. But if they were, any slight differences would have seemed to them of trivial importance in comparison with the great and significant fact that the Australian-born children of the settlers did not speak dialect or some local mixture of various dialects, but " pure " English, recognizably the standard language of educated Englishmen.

These men were in fact being given a preview of what was to happen in England itself. By the early twentieth century students of English dialects were beginning to complain that it was not easy to find speakers of unmixed dialects, and nowadays dialectologists normally take as their informants the oldest members of rural communities—and even their speech is likely to be affected by Standard English. Dialect has everywhere been giving way before Standard English. It is not, as is sometimes superficially thought, because of the influence of radio and the B.B.C., though this of course has been one of several important modern means of spreading the knowledge of Standard English; for the tendency is far older than Marconi's invention of wireless telegraphy. The real reason is that dialects are linguistically far less efficient. They are local forms of speech, developed when society was not mobile but fixed, and a man would normally live all his life in the district in which he was born. Outside the areas in which they were developed they are inefficient as a means of communication because they are not readily comprehensible to the speakers of other dialects, and as a rule they are ill-adapted to the expression of intellectual and even of technical concepts other than those of the traditional crafts of the area concerned. Merely because of their limited usefulness they were unfitted to survive in the more mobile and less stratified society produced by the Industrial

Revolution and by modern means of transport and communication ; and a particular weapon for their destruction was provided by the introduction of compulsory primary education in the later nineteenth century. Dialectal speech is especially unsuitable as a means of communication among the settlers in a new country—except, of course, when all or most of the settlers in a district happen to come from the same part of Britain, in which case one may find for some time a pocket of dialectal speech. But in the ordinary case, when migrants from different parts of Britain are all mixed together in the new community, they cannot for very long maintain their distinct British dialects ; they must modify them to be able to communicate, and their children will necessarily come to adopt a single, common form of speech. There will be, in general terms, two alternatives : to work out some new common speech by mingling and blending the various dialects represented in the community, or to adopt some pre-existing form which is not local, but itself already a common language. And that of course is what Standard Southern English was—a language accepted, with only slight local modifications, by the educated upper classes throughout England, and developed through centuries as a precise instrument for the expression of intellectual and technical concepts. There could in practice be no real choice ; it was inevitable that the existing " national " form of the language should be chosen, especially when it was the natural speech of at least most of the men of education and of position who were the leaders of the colony, and of the teachers who staffed its schools. Its mere superior efficiency is enough to account for the triumph of Standard English over the dialects ; and the conditions in the settlement would ensure that the process was much more rapid than in Britain itself.

It is indeed one of the most remarkable characteristics of modern English that it either maintains a high degree of uniformity over great distances, as notably in Australia and also, in large measure, in America, or else imposes uniformity on a previous diversity, as in the British Isles and again to some extent in America. It is true, of course, that its spread across the world has inevitably produced new national forms of English, each in essentials branching off from Standard Southern English at the point of time when the new country began to have a cultural and linguistic existence independent of that of the old—so America in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Australia in the nineteenth. But the differences between these national forms of English are much less than might have been expected, certainly much less than they would have been after comparably long periods of development in earlier ages ; and there are obvious signs of a tendency not merely to restrain the further increase of the differences, but even to reduce them. People joke about " mid-Atlantic English ", a mode of pronunciation acceptable to and intelligible by both Americans and Englishmen ; but it is a significant development. It is important that the differences should be kept to a minimum, even if it involves, as it is likely to do (and indeed there are already signs of this), the acceptance by Englishmen of American pronunciations in place of those that are traditionally their own. In particular it is important that the idiosyncrasies of the various ways of pronouncing English should not become so marked as to be barriers to understanding.

Nobody minds Australians having their own distinctive pronunciation, just as nobody minds Americans or Irishmen or Scotsmen or even Englishmen having their own ways of speaking—though it is just as well not to ask a non-Australian if he *likes* the Australian pronunciation, for if he is honest he will probably say that he does not ; but people do mind, and legitimately so, if any way of pronouncing English becomes hard to understand for other users of the language. I am afraid that I think that the more extreme forms of Australian pronunciation are reaching, or have reached, this point. It creates genuine difficulty for other speakers of English if people say, or are taken to say, *high* when they mean *hay*, and so on. I know that of course it works both ways, but in this matter of the modern English diphthongs Australian is one of the forms of English which has diverged from the norm. It would be a great pity if the national variants of English were to become so diverse in pronunciation that they ceased to be readily comprehensible to each other ; we should be throwing away the inestimable advantage of being native speakers of the greatest of modern world-languages.