

You Pays Yer Money and You Takes Yer Choice:
British Slang for Pounds and Pennies,
Old and New

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I

“HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT,” asks Simon Potter in *Our Language* (1950), “of the numerous slang terms for ‘money’ which have been fashionable in your own experience?” Well, as a matter of fact, I have. From time to time I hear a new such word in America – obvious such as *kale* or *lettuce* or baffling such as *geedus* – and recently I had the unique experience of collecting terms in London (where I lived for more than a year on sabbatical leave) before D (or Decimal) Day and then returning, some time later, to see what the new currency had led to in the way of the coining of new terms.

Mencken and others list numerous articles on American slang connected with money in all its aspects, but I have found nothing satisfactory on the lively British language that centers around the *hardware* described in Sir Charles Oman’s classic *Coinage of England*¹ and other reference books. Let me just remind you what British currency used to be (until the recent decimal currency) and then comment on it and the words and wonders that surround it that you may or may not find in your dictionaries. Bank-notes were in denominations of ten shillings (10/-, half of a pound), one pound (£1), five pounds (£5), and ten pounds (£10). Coins were the half-crown (2/6 or one-eighth of a pound), the florin (2/-, two shillings, one-tenth of a pound), the shilling (1/-, one-twentieth of a pound), the sixpence (6 *d.*, half a shilling), the threepenny piece (3 *d.*, half a sixpence), the penny (1 *d.*, one-twelfth of a shilling), and the halfpenny ($\frac{1}{2}$ *d.*, “ha’ penny,” one twenty-fourth of a shilling). There was no coin (as there used to be) for the guinea, but this term was used to designate the sum of 21/- or one shilling more than a pound. Around it had grown up over the centuries a fascinating amount of lingo and lore, the richness of which we cannot exhaust but can certainly suggest in this paper.

¹ First published in 1931 by the man who for a decade had been President of the Royal Numismatic Society, this useful book has been reissued in facsimile reprint by H. Pordes (London, 1971).

In *London Labour and the London Poor* (first published in 1851) Henry Mayhew and his collaborators published the first "history of a people, from the lips of the people themselves." Inevitably their "unvarnished" language, as he called it, included the slang and argot of odd coves and colorful *cheap-jacks* and enshrined the street speech of those Victorian days when a *fairy* was not an effeminate man but an ugly old woman,² when a *nut* was an eccentric but not a fool, and (as the old song says) "Fanny was a lady's name." Let us *take a mike* at some of it and attempt some examination of the more *slanticular* aspects of it, for at first sight it can often be as baffling as the ogham inscriptions on old British tombstones. Ask for an explanation and it may turn out to be a joke ("some word that teems with hidden meaning – like Basingstoke," as Mad Margaret says in *Ruddigore*), as rude as the origin of the color *isabel* (derived from the dirty underwear of the Infanta of Castille), or inexplicable but apparently inevitable. (Old Rowley in Aldous Huxley's *Chrome Yellow* echoed many an Englishman's attitude toward onomastics when, observing swine wallowing in mud, he said: "Look at them, sir. Rightly is they called pigs.") The task will *fetch us a circumbendibus* into related areas of folklore and suchlike but a study of the language can yield interesting results, for

The mind of the people is like mud
From which arise strange and beautiful things.³

If we concentrate on money and related matters we are automatically on important ground. Samuel Butler argued that "the three most important things a man has are, briefly, his private parts, his money, and his religious opinions" – and the English have never taken the last too seriously, describing zealots as Quakers, Methodists, and by other unflattering names.

II

Of general words for money, first comes *bees*, with the explanation in "bees and honey" and the Cockney rhyming slang that has *plates* (of meat) for *feet*, *trouble* (and strife) for *wife*, and so on. From the American and, ultimately, the Dutch *boedel* (estate, effects), the English have

² The Players' Club (London) preserves the last vestiges of the once-flourishing music hall, being the successor to W. Evans of Covent Garden (of Evans' – Late Joy's, the first song and supper room) and of Gatti's "underneath the Arches" theatre, and still opens each performance with "Covent Garden in the Morning" and this song:

Oh! the fairies! *whoa* the fairies!
Nothing but splendour and feminine gender!
Oh! the fairies! *whoa* the fairies!
Oh! for the wing of a fairy queen!

³ W. J. Turner, *Talking to Soldiers*.

picked up *boodle* and the expression *oodles of boodle*, though the American suggestion of illicit provenance is absent. Also American in origin is *bread*, jive talk of the Thirties revived in the late Fifties by the *cool cats* of a *hippie* (or Pepsi) generation, and sounding self-consciously “Yank” in the mouths of the *with-it* (British: *trendy*) beautiful people in the King’s Road, Chelsea. Very British, however, is *brass* for money, recalling *I don’t care a brass farthing* and the debasing of the coinage by James II, who issued not only brass farthings but brass halfpennies and brass pennies as well. In America *brass* means nerve or gall (as in Defoe’s “a needful competence of English brass” in *The True Born Englishman*) and as *Brass* (in hobo slang), designates Butte, Montana. Except in rare expressions such as *get up the brass* (raise the money) it is seldom heard in America in the sense of money, as rarely as the American *chicken-feed* (small amount of money) is heard in Britain. The word *crap* for money, recorded in London as early as the seventeenth century, has disappeared: Thomas Crapper’s toilet and America’s *crap* game have superseded it. The few Britons who use it are more likely to intend a vulgar equivalent of the British *rubbish* and everyone thinks of it as American, though H. L. Mencken once suggested that *crap game*, *shooting craps*, etc., must have derived from the earlier English word.

Americans and Britons share the use of *gelt* (infrequently *gilt*) for money, but the American word seems to come from German *via* Yiddish, while the British may derive from the Dutch *geld*. Most words of Dutch origin seem to be connected with the sea (*buoy*, *bulwark*, *freebooter*, *marline*, *skipper*, *sloop*, *dock* and *deck*) though there are some other notable contributions (such as *booze*, *dope*, and *landscape*), including the expression *a forlorn hope* (*verloren hoop*, a lost troop of soldiers). Rivalry with Holland as a sea power produced the derogatory *Dutch courage*, *Dutch uncle*, and *double Dutch* (nonsense), not to mention another word in place of the Latin *ignoramus*: *nitwit* (*niet weet* = I don’t know). But if *stiver* (a small Dutch coin) is not the origin of *not a stiver* (nothing), *stivercramped* (needy), and *a stiver’s worth of copper* (a penny) – well, I’m a Dutchman! In Petticoat Lane as on New York’s Orchard Street one can hear “*No gelt to be got*” when it is hard to make a sale or *make a buck* and the seller is *in Dutch*.

In America the carnival slang yields *mezonny*, which is *m(eiz)oney*, but it has not got into British usage, any more than *moolah* has got into most American dictionaries.⁴ Britons do, however, have a number of other words to use in its place. *Mynt* (gold, money) is at least as old as Thomas

⁴ Harold Wentworth and Stuart Berg Flexner in their standard *Dictionary of American Slang* (1960) have *moola(h)*, common in American usage since the mid-Thirties, but note that it is “*prob. the most common word not in the D. A. E., the DOA, Merriam-Webster, the OED, Mencken, or any of their supplements.*” The *American Heritage Dictionary* (1969) has it, marked “origin unknown.”

Harman's *A Caveat or Warening For Common Cursetors Vulgarely Called Vagabondes* (1567). *Shekels* recalls an ancient Hebrew coin.⁵ *Tin* (from small silver coins that wore thin) was recorded as early as 1836 but may date from the previous century (with *tinny*), while *wherewithal* Partridge can document as early as this 1809 quotation from Malkin: "How the devil does she mean that I should get the wherewithal? . . . Does she take me for . . . treasurer to a charity?" *Push for money* is thoroughly London, and related to *push* as *coit*, *do a push*, *stand the push*, etc., *push penny* (variant of *shove-halfpenny*), and so on, while *scran* (from *scrannel*, broken victuals) for the reckoning (especially in a tavern) and occasionally the *necessary* to pay it is a country word, though *scran* as *food* (especially bread and butter) is widespread in the Services. Old-fashioned now is *stiff* (paper money, bills of exchange), though once widely used to mean any document (including a promissory note: *do a bit of stiff* = accept an IOU). In Austral English *stiff* today means *penniless*. In America it means a *corpse* (a carry-over from Yorkshire, probably, where a *stiff-lifter* was a body-snatcher, a *resurrectionist*) or, as a verb, *to leave no tip*. In Victorian London a *stiff-fencer* hawked writing paper in the street and eventually *to stiff* meant *to forge a banknote* or a negotiable security (as Mencken said it did in his day in the "heavy rackets" in the United States), as well as to put into a race a horse one did not expect (or want) to win. The British have picked up just a few of these usages, along with *spondulicks* – U. S. 1860 say Wentworth & Flexner, U. S. 1857 says Partridge – which G. A. Sala derived from *greenbacks* by "enlarged vulgarization," and *scratch* (U. S. twentieth century, though *Old Scratch* was the Devil since the eighteenth century). It is barely possible that the modern, vulgar equivalent of an old proverb⁶ – usually rendered as *not a sixpence to scratch my arse with* – may be related to the English use of the word *scratch* for money, if it is not as "the root of all evil" connected with *Old Scratch* himself.

Many unusual terms are also associated with counterfeiting, a crime mercilessly punished in Britain in olden days but always keeping plenty of *clippers* of the coinage and *turners out* gainfully employed. Many a *bit faker* produced *dimnick* (base coin) to circulate with legitimate *dimmock* (money, related to *dime* and used in expressions such as *to flap the dimmock* = to display a *wad* of notes).⁷ The Irish faked a halfpenny called a *rap*: *I don't give a rap*, the British equivalent of *I don't give a Continental*. The word *screeve* (to write a begging letter, or even to draw on the pavement as a way of begging) got confused with *screen* (1820–1850), which

⁵ Partridge cites F. Marion Crawford (1883) and "Byron's anticipation of 1823."

⁶ "He has not a penny to bless himself with." John Heywood, *A Dialogue concerning the number in effect of all the Proverbs in the English Tongue* (1564).

⁷ On *dimnick/dimmock* see J. H. Vaux' *Glossary of Cant* (1812) and *Memoirs* (1819) and J. C. Hotten's massive *Slang Dictionary* (1860).

at first meant simply a pound note, and *screen* came to mean a forged pound note. Bad money was *shoful* (also the name of a Hansom cab which infringed Hansom's patent) and its passer a *shofulman*. Another word for counterfeit was *snide*, whence *snide pitching*, used (with *to do some soft*) to mean *passing counterfeit money*. Carew's *Autobiography of a Gypsy* suggests that tribe preferred the word *shoful* (or *schofell*, *shofel*, *shovel*, *showfull*), which seems to have come from the Hebrew *shaphal* through the Yiddish *schofel* (worthless). Counterfeit coins needed *slumming*:

Get a little lampblack and oil, and make it into a sort of composition, "slumming" the coin with it. This takes the bright colour away and makes it fit for circulation.⁸

Slum = to cheat (or to speak cant), *fake the slum* = to do the trick, *up to slum* = alert, *slum-scribbler* = forger, and *slumming* = preparing the fake coins as described and/or passing them. Counterfeit coins were also called *brummagen*, after Birmingham (supposedly their place of origin), as early as the seventeenth century. In modern times the word *brummagem* has been used figuratively, as when Lansbury used it to describe the British Government of March, 1932. Counterfeiting terms were getting into politics, as when *slush* (an American word introduced into the British Isles in the detective novels of Edgar Wallace in the Twenties) became *slush fund* (money to buy votes or influence).

III

But to get deeper into that connection would be *too short for Richard and too long for Dick*, to use the Yorkshire expression for *no bloody good*, so let us turn now to the onomastics of the standard British coins. The Dutch *duytken* (diminutive of *duyt*, *doyt*) gave us *doit* (a small sum) and the Middle English *doydekyn*, *doykyn* = *dotkin* (any small coin). Even rarer was *fuskin*. Better known was the *angel* (which bore on the reverse a ship with a cross in front of the mast and on the obverse St. Michael the Archangel and Lucifer). It was introduced by Edward IV to represent the old value of six shillings and eightpence when he raised the coin of that amount (the *noble*) to ten shillings. In the sixteenth century the *angel* was given to those who were touched for the King's Evil (*scrofula*) and Charles I continued the custom, though later Stuarts (and Pretenders) minted a smaller version, not legal currency, for the purpose. This gold coin (originally *angel-noble*) is now as obsolete as touching for the King's Evil itself. As the first *angel* bore an angel, so the first *crown* bore a crown. The word remains to signify the value of five shillings.

⁸ "Coining," in *London's Underworld* (1950), ed. Peter Quennell, based on Vol. IV of Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1862).

From the Old English *feorðing* (one-fourth) came *farthing*, a fourth of a penny (or of a hide, an acre, etc.). In time it came to be used to mean a very little, and in court cases where absolutely minimal damages were awarded a farthing might be given (which was worse than being *cut off without a shilling* in a will). Some stressed its value:

The miserable man maketh a penny of a farthing, and the liberal of a farthing sixpence.

— George Herbert in *Outlandish Proverbs* (1640).⁹

Take a farthing from a thousand pounds, it will be a thousand pounds no longer.

— Folk saying, eighteenth century.

Others stressed its insignificance: *farthing-faced* (mean, insignificant) and *farthing-taster* (Cockney word for the cheapest ice-cream *cornet* sold in London streets). Still many people mourned the passing of the farthing in our century.

The expression *it won't fadge* (it does not work/it will not serve) is apparently unrelated, but the slang name of a farthing was a *fadge*, according to both the third edition of Francis Grose's *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1796) and Duncombe's *Sinks of London* (1848). It also occurs in Kellow Chesney's *The Victorian Underworld* (1970). In Elizabethan times a *fadge* was a bundle of wood, in the seventeenth century a large flat loaf. Perhaps both sold for a farthing.

Of course many of our English words are not as Anglo-Saxon as *farthing* but derive from distant places: *currant* from Corinth, *gin* from Geneva, and (to mention only types of cloth as examples) *cambric*, *damask*, *duffel*, *muslin*, *worsted* (a British place this), etc. Rather rare is the word *oxford* for a crown piece (c. 1885 +), with its *half-oxford* (half-crown). That comes from the rhyming *Oxford scholar* = dollar, originating in Southwest England c. 1870 and still heard in New Zealand. Well-known is the beautiful word *florin* from the city of flowers, Florence (which also gave us a pretty girl's name after Miss Nightingale was born there and christened for her birthplace). The original florin bore the lily of Florence on it, being issued by Edward III in 1344 in imitation of the Italian coin first struck in gold in 1252. There was a half-florin (called a *leopard*) and a quarter-florin (called a *helm*) and the word florin was used not only for the English two-shilling piece but also for various foreign coins which more or less resembled it. In Victoria's reign they tried a *double florin* (four shillings, 1848), but it proved unpopular and was withdrawn, leaving the florin as the example of a coin named for a city (as the *bezant* came from Byzantium and the *pistole* from Pistoia).

⁹ The second edition was called *Jacula Prudentum* (1651).

Another Continental coin gave the British the *groat* (after the *gros*, or *grossus*), a fourpenny bit introduced (with farthings and halfpennies) by Edward I. Elizabeth I discontinued it but had a half-groat (twopence). In the reign of her father, Henry VIII, *harp groats* were made for Ireland.

Who can sing a merry note
As he that cannot change a groat ?

asked John Heywood in 1546 (and did not stay for an answer).

Like the turkey and the guinea pig, the guinea was named from a supposed origin, "the provenance of its gold" (equally erroneously), when Charles II instituted it in 1662. At first it was equal to the pound (20 shillings), but in 1717 it was fixed at 21 shillings. Now it has connotations of *class*: a *guinea-pigger* is a *toff* who is paid to enhance a board of directors. The guinea is still quoted in professional fees (such as those of Harley Street specialists) and fancy prices (such as those of Bond Street tailors), but foreigners are confused because there is no coin or note of that value and Britons tend to look on it as a dodge for getting an extra shilling with every pound (which *posh* people, presumably, can afford to pay). In World War II the BBC paid "evacuated personnel" a guinea extra a week for lodging outside London, hence *guinea pigs*. In America a *guinea* is tobacco with *frog-eyes* (spots) or an Italian (a derogatory word such as *dago* or *wop*, the latter from immigrants who landed *w. o. p.* = without papers), so that *guinea football* = anarchist's bomb.

The crown is also no longer minted, but half-crowns are (two shillings and sixpence) and we have the *half-crown word* (a rare or difficult word, as with the "two-dollar word" of American spelling-bees) and even the *half-crown battalion* (the Second Sixth Battalion would be entered in the Army records as 2/6). The *half-crown brigade*, however, has nothing to do with the Service: it means out-of-work actors who turn *toucher* and cadge half-crowns from their friends.

The halfpenny (also ha'penny, whence ha'p'orth = halfpennyworth) until recently was a useful coin and appeared in useful phrases such as *a ha'p'orth of liveliness* = music or (jocularly) a slow coach, *ha'p'orth of coppers* = *habeas corpus* in the area in which Bow bells are heard, *a ha'penny harder* = very slight improvement in the financial market, *muck and ha'penny afters* = an unpleasantly cheap meal, and *ha'penny hop* = cheap dance (also *half-crown ball*).

More noble than the common halfpenny was the *noble*, a gold coin first minted by Edward III. We have already referred to the *angel*. There was also a *George noble*, a *rose noble* or *ryal*, and a *thistle noble*. The *George noble* was not Hanoverian but was introduced by Henry VIII when his *angel* (raised to seven shillings and sixpence) left an opportunity to put out another coin worth six shillings and eightpence. This was the *George noble* because

it bore a figure of St. George and the dragon. It was not common in England to name coins for people as it is, for instance in South America: compare Costa Rica's *colón* (for Columbus), Panama's *balboa*, Guatemala's *quetzal* (a Mayan god), and Paraguay's *guaraní* (an Indian tribe). The *rose noble* of Edward IV (ten shillings) bore a rose, the *thistle noble* (half-merk of James VI, like the *thistle crown* and *thistle dollar*) that Scottish symbol.

Alphabetical order now brings us to where we might otherwise have begun, the penny. When English coinage really began, with the silver penny of Offa, "*Rex Merciorum*" (757–796), the word *pening* or *pending* (apparently of West Germanic origin) already existed. Offa's penny was the size of a silver *scat* at first and later weighed two and a half grains more, that is $22\frac{1}{2}$ grains or 240 to the Tower pound. When Offa captured the Cambridge mint of Aethelberht II (748–762), the Mercian coins began to be remarkable for their beauty of design. The symbol for a penny (*d.*) derived from the Latin *denarius* (from *decem* = ten, since that Roman coin was worth ten asses, the *as* being a smaller denomination). The word *penny* itself, of course, appears in many expressions, some of which survive in America even though our unit is the *cent*: *pennywise and pound-foolish*, *penny-pincher* (Americans also have T. A. Dorgan's *nickel-nurser*), *penny-ante*, *turn up like a bad penny*, even to *steal the pennies off a dead man's eyes* (enshrining an old folk custom). *Pennyweight* (diamonds, ice) and *penny* for *policeman* (copper = cop) are distinctly American, and rare, but distinctly British and fairly common are *penny black* (the first postage stamp), *penny packet* (a small amount of anything, even a small troop of soldiers), *penny stinker* (an evil-smelling cheap *Spanish guitar* = cigar), *spend a penny* (ex pay toilets), *the penny will drop in a minute* (from the same source, said of one who is slow in understanding or appreciating a joke), *a penny* (or *tuppence*) *more and up goes the donkey* (a catch phrase of the 1840s expressing derision, from the stock finish to a *busker* or street acrobat's act), *he hasn't made a penny since he fell off the organ* (also derisive, referring to a person as if he were an organ-grinder's monkey), *Peter's pence* (a collection for the Holy See taken up in English churches until the Reformation), *penny gaff* (a portable theatre set up at fairs, named for the admission price, just as American melodramas were once called *ten-twent-thirts*), and rhyming slang such as *penny a pound* (ground) and *penny a mile* (hat, which the Cockneys call *tile*). The proverb *in for a penny, in for a for a pound* is familiar in America (where *penny for your thoughts* and other expressions have emigrated) but even a Briton might be baffled by the old expression *in for pound* (committed for trial, where *pound* = prison, as in *dog pound*). In Egan's *Life in London* (1821) *pounded* = discovered guilty or confined as such. Robert Louis Stevenson's essay on "A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured" in *Memories and Portraits* and theatre collectors' interest in old prints have preserved another old

expression, as has the song of the Great Depression, *Pennies from Heaven*. Eric Partridge in *Usage and Abusage*, by the way, helps us to distinguish the collective (*pence*) from the distributive or separative plural (*pennies*): “Pennies are brown, pence are money.” The expression *pounds, shillings and pence* = money (sometimes *LSD*).

The basis of the British currency is the *pound sterling*, originally a pound of silver (20 shillings, 240 pence) or a pound of sterlings (the *steorling* = coin with a star, a Norman penny), for all Teutonic and Romance languages have a word (*marc* in Old English) for money estimated by the pound. (The *mark* was two-thirds of a pound sterling in England, less in Scotland.) The symbol of a pound is *L* (£ before the number and, occasionally, *l.* after it), for Latin *libra pondo* = a pound by weight (whence also the Italian *lira*). The *pound Scots* at the formation of the United Kingdom under James VI and I was equal to only a twelfth of the pound sterling, for a Scottish shilling was equal to an English penny. Today the word *pound* has spread not only to some British colonies and the *sterling area* in general but to Turkey and Egypt, etc. The word occurs in far fewer proverbs and catch phrases than *penny*, but we do find such entries in J. Ray’s *English Proverbs* (1670) as “He that will not stoop for a pin shall never be worth a pound” and lines of poetry such as these:

A chieftan to the Highlands bound
Cries “Boatman, do not tarry!
And I’ll give thee a silver pound
To row us o’er the ferry.”

— Thomas Campbell, *Lord Ullin’s Daughter*

Give crowns and pounds and guineas
But not your heart away.

— A. E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad*.

Pound it = to bet or to have sexual intercourse, *poundable* = inevitable, but neither of these is related to money. *Pound-not(e)ish* had a brief vogue as “upperclass” or “highfalutin,” and when I lived in Chelsea my jovial postman used to deliver bills or worthless circulars with the old London joke *here’s a five-pound note for you*, perhaps because he did not want a collector of English vocabulary and folklore to miss out on any. He was the one who corrected me by noting that ten *pound* is a sum and ten *pounds* a fistful of pound notes (not “bills”).

Some coins that once circulated in England have perished with the days when the pound was a pound of silver, or anything like it. The *sceat* (Old English *sceatta* = treasure) was a silver coin of about 20 grains minted by Peada, King of Mercia (*fl.* 656) and others and eventually replaced by copper. The Anglo-Saxons also had a *styca* piece (related to the German *Stück*).

The first English shilling bore a famous portrait of Henry VII (by Alexander of Brugsal) and appeared in 1503 or 1504, a silver coin worth 12 pence. The name was derived from the Old English *scilling*, the ultimate origin in the Teutonic languages obscure. Because the Henry VII coin was the first English one to bear a true portrait, it was called a *teston* (or *testoon*). The Italians had augmented *testa* (head) to produce *testone* when Galeazzo Maria Sforza minted (1468–1476) a silver coin at Milan with a portrait head of the duke on it, and the French had handed on the word to the English. By 1545 the word was used for a number of Continental silver coins and the Portuguese *testão* recalls this. The early coins of Henry VIII and his short-lived son Edward VI were also testons and, after they were debased to the point where the shilling was worth sixpence or less, often *testers* (though not with reference to the tester in a mint who proves the currency). The *double schilling* (or *shilling*) was the Dutch florin (*guilder*), and schillings were used all over North Germany, are still in use in Austria, etc. The best-known expressions involving the coin are *to cut off without a shilling* (disinherit) and *take the (Queen's/King's) shilling* (enlist in the Army, from the days when recruiting officers sealed the contract by giving the recruit a shilling).¹⁰ In George Farquhar's popular comedy of the eighteenth century, *The Recruiting Officer* (1706), in which Garrick made his very first appearance on any stage (at the age of 11 as an amateur), Captain Plume and Sergeant Kite are involved with two country bumpkins, Costar Pearmain and Thomas Appletree:

Plume. . . . Have either of you received any of the Queen's money?

Pear. Not a brass farthing, sir.

Kite. Sir, they have each of 'em received three-and-twenty shillings and sixpence, and 'tis now in their pockets.

Pear. Wauns if I have a penny in my pocket but a bent sixpence. I'll be contented to be 'listed, and shot into the bargain!

Apple. And I. Look ye here, sir.

Pear. Ay, here's my stock too: nothing but the new Queen's picture, that the serjeant gave me just now.

Kite. See there, a broad piece! Three-and-twenty shillings and sixpence; and the t'other has the fellow on't.

Plume. The case is plain, gentlemen; the goods are found upon you. Those pieces of gold are worth three-and-twenty and sixpence each.

[*Whispers* Serjeant KITE]

Pear. So it seems that *Carolus* is three-and-twenty shillings and sixpence in Latin.

Apple. 'Tis the same thing in Greek, for we are 'listed.

¹⁰ The trick of putting it at the bottom of a pot of ale so that the unwary recipient of a free drink would find himself dragooned into the Service led (they say) to the invention of the glass-bottomed beer-mugs we still see today.

So *Carolus* was not "Latin for Queen Anne" after all, and the country gulls were recruited not with a shilling but with a gold *broad piece* of King Charles. Many a poor man was obtained for less, if not actually shanghaied by Press Gangs for the Navy. Other literary references include George Chapman's *Make ducks and drakes with shillings* and John Philips's *The Splendid Shilling* (1705):

Happy the man who, void of care and strife,
In silken or in leathern purse retains
A splendid shilling. He nor hears with pain
New oysters cried, nor sighs for cheerful ale.

Samuel Butler in *Hudibras* compares lovers to the joint monarchs crammed onto one coin:

Still amorous, and fond, and billing,
Like Philip and Mary on a shilling.

Ordinarily there was but one monarch's head on a coin (and the convention was that it was a right or left profile alternately from one reign to another). The sovereign not only was entitled to have his or her profile on the coinage but, in the reign of Henry VIII, a gold coin worth a pound (240 grains, 20 shillings) was introduced, called the *sovereign* from the portrait it bore. In Victorian times it formed a common avuncular gift. It disappeared with the beginning of World War I, though occasionally sovereigns were struck for export thereafter (and had to compete with forgeries all around the globe). Today, when numismatists alone can hoard gold, sovereigns are much treasured and much overpriced.

Also gold was the Anglo-Saxon *third*, but today we miss more the threepence (or *thruppenny bit*) made obsolete by decimalization. It gave us such expressions as *smart as thruppence* (also *smart as a carrot* = all decked out) and the London slang for a "street arab" *three ha'port of Gordelpus* (three halfpence worth of "God help us") sometimes mistakenly *thruppence of Gordelpus*. A *threepenny masher* in the Nineties was, says Ware in *Passing English* (1909), a young man "of limited means and more or less superficial gentlemanly externals." The *threepenny bit* was not just the coin itself but also coitus standing up (*a knee-trembler*, an inexpensive connection in an alley where one could *do a perpendicular*). This unromantic and uncomfortable liaison is virtually unknown to Americans, and Cockney jokes have to be explained to them, such as the one where the *bobbie* (policeman since the days of Sir Robert Peel, founder of the Metropolitan *peelers*) sees a young lady standing against a wall with her skirt tucked into her collar, reading a newspaper:

Policeman: 'Ere, you can't stand there like that.
Prostitute (lowering her newspaper): Oh, is 'e gone ?

Even more vulgar is the Glasgow expression for the ubiquitous fish and chips: *thruppenny vomit*. The *threp*, *thrup*, *thrups*, etc., has now, portcullis design and all, gone for good, as surely as the last old coin we shall mention here, the *unite*, a British gold coin first issued by James I (1604) with the motto: *Faciam eos in gentem unam* (I will make them into one people).

The Fowlers regard slang as "the great corrupting matter" of language, but I think it adds life and color and I defy anyone to read through the vocabulary lists that Mencken has put together for various professions from soldier to waitress without being amused and instructed by the wit and wisdom of the folk: they are "what idiom was before language stiffened into literature" (Brander Matthews, 1893). In *Slang Today and Yesterday* and *Usage and Abusage* Eric Partridge gives, for instance, a "racecourse dialogue" between a bookmaker and his clerk that includes a number of interesting phrases: *finith to fere* (five to four), *exes to fere* (six to four), *deuces* (two to one), *bice* (two), *cow's calf* (for "half," ten shillings being half of a pound), *tossaroons* (crowns, from the old testons), etc. In *Mayhew's Characters*, selected by Peter Quennel from *London Labour and the London Poor* (first published, as we have said, in 1851) a strolling actor tells us of the carny lingo of the penny gaffs and mummers of a bygone age:

"The mummers have got a slang of their own, which parties connected with the profession generally use. It is called 'mummers' slang,' and I have been told that it's a compound of broken Italian and French. Some of the Romance is also mixed up with it. This, for instance, is the slang for 'Give me a glass of beer,' — 'Your nabs sparkle my nabs,' 'a drop of beware' . . ."

Americans may be surprised to learn that *his nabs* and *her nabs* are from this source.

"Now, the way we count money is nearly all of it Italian; from one farthing up to a shilling is this: —

"Patina, nadsa, oni soldi, duey soldi, tray soldi, quatro soldi, chinqui soldi, say soldi, seter soldi, otter soldi, novra soldi, deshra soldi, lettra soldi, and a biouk. A half-crown is a metsa carroon; a 'carroon' is a crown; 'metsa punta' is a half-sovereign; a 'punta' is a pound. Even with these few words, by mixing them up with a few English ones, we can talk as fast as if we was using our own language."

So Italian ice-sellers and pantomime men, strolling players and street *buskers*, and others, developed their own private language of money and counting, partly for the same reason that antique dealers in London still use a letter code to encipher their prices¹¹ and partly as a means of distinguishing who are *with it* from those who are not.

¹¹ Codes are based on ten-letter combinations such as BE MINDFULL, ROMANTIQUE, I'M SHERATON, or ANTIQUE with the dealer's initials added.

I have collected some 60 or 70 words and phrases, some fairly common (such as *quid* and *tanner*) and some more obscure (such as *teviss* and *joey*), from the annals of history (*Harrington farthings*), the costermongers, the gypsies, the Cockneys, rhyming slang and back slang, *St. Giles' Greek* and *peddlars' French* and *thieves' Latin*, cant (which has given Standard English such words as *bilk* and *filch*, *tout* and *moll*, *queer* and *rum*), the *flash lingo* of the Victorian underworld (which in the period in which English was acquiring words like *acrobat*, *phase*, *bacillus*, *referendum*, *moratorium*, and Thomas Henry Huxley's *agnostic*, not to mention words we generally think of as very modern, such as *ecology*, was creating a whole new vocabulary of its own), the British equivalent of the German thieves' argot *Rotwelsch*, the *lingua franca* of the slums of Mayhew and Dickens, the speech of the common people in general. Some is as ancient and obscure as the Romany gypsies (thought to come from Egypt, of course, but really out of India) brought to England in the early sixteenth century. *Volker Romeny*? Can you speak cant? You must know some of its words, even if you are not a Romany *rye* (gentleman): *pal* (from the Turkish gypsy for "brother"), *shiv* (for knife), *pen* and *stir* for "prison" (from *staripen*, *stariben* – the Welsh gypsies use *star* = jail), maybe even *tosh* (penis, oddly enough from *tov* = wash). Best known of all, I suppose, is *cove* (a bloke, a fellow, a guy from *Guy Fawkes*, a chap from the street *chapman*), more likely from the Romany than the Scots (*cofe*). Can you speak the slang of the costers (who used to sell large ribbed apples called *costards* in the London streets)? Do you know the rollicking wit of the Cockneys who can make a *Solomon David* out of *solemn affidavit*, and say *silas* for "stocking" (because Silas Hocking's novels were popular for a generation a century ago) and *Duke of York* for either "talk" or "walk"? They will nickname a man *Jumper* who is named Cross, call a poker a *kennedy* (someone was murdered with one by an Irishman of that *moniker* in the nineteenth century) and tinned meat *Fanny Adams* (after the victim of a once-famous trunk murder). When they start on *tea for two* and a *bloater* = automobile (motor) it can be fun but *absobloodylutely* confusing too. For every word one puzzles out (*maffick* as a verb must date from the night of the famous *relief*, May 17, 1900, of Mafeking) there may be several that will forever remain a mystery, even with good books at hand such as Julian Franklyn's *The Cockney* and William Matthews' *Cockney Past and Present*. Sometimes one sees a new word or expression being born. More often one finds that slang is far older than one suspected, that Chaucer called dice *bones*, that *rot-gut* was around in 1597, that Steele called a girl a *chicken* and (in America) *outa sight* is nineteenth-century, to be found in Stephen Crane's *Maggie*, *A Girl of the Streets*. Certainly slang has been growing and prospering in the British Isles since before the Roman invasion. Look what the British have done with terms related

to money (derived from the Latin goddess *Juno Moneta*). The Romans gave them *mint*, *value* (*valuta*), *numismatic* (*nummus*), *salary* (from wages paid in salt), etc., but they added many standard and not-so-standard words of their own – including slang. “Cut these words and they would bleed,” wrote Emerson; “they are vascular and alive; they walk and run.” Charles V, Holy Roman emperor, Lomonosov recorded, said that “one ought to speak Spanish to the Deity, French to one’s friends, German to one’s enemies, and Italian to the fair sex,” and it might not be a bad idea to speak slang in connection with money, to have fun, to be in fashion, inventively, ingeniously.

Americans may know *ace*, *fin*, *sawbuck*, *C note*, *grand*, *snatch*, *buck*, *smacker*, *simoleon*, *iron man*, *greenback* (in Canadian *toadskin*), and so on. Here are some English examples:

alderman (half-crown), from its “plumpness,” c. 1830. See “Ducange Anglicanus,” *The Vulgar Tongue* (1857), including Brandon’s “Glossary of Cant.”

bob (shilling), c. 1810, recorded by Vaux in his *Flash Dictionary* (1812) but still of obscure origin. Partridge suggests it comes from *bobstick* (a shillingsworth, 1789), “but then what is the origin of *bobstick*?” Expressions include the amusing *bob a nob* (a shilling a head). The plural has no *s*: *five bob*, *ten bob*.

black farthing (temp. James III of Scotland), recalling when silver coinage gave way to copper. The Scots have given us many words (including some surprises like *lilt* and *outcome*) and Carlyle alone contributed many (such as today’s popular *environment*) but Scottish names for coins, etc., are as reserved as their spending of them.

bull (five shillings) seems to be an abbreviation of *bull’s-eye*.

cartwheel (George III penny) derives from its unusual size.

copper (penny), as Americans call five cents a *nickel*.

cob (Irish dollar). Though the United States dollar was not created until July 6, 1785, the word was used before that for the German *Thaler* and the Spanish *pieces of eight* (whence *two bits*, *four bits*). The Irish used it to mean “big,” as in *cob-swan* (the male swan) and *cob* (a great man), and the coin was large.

couter (one pound) comes not from *counter* but from the Romany *kotor* (a guinea) and is much older than Snowden’s *Magistrate’s Assistant* (1846) which the OED quotes. The gypsies learned English (even had two names: *nav gajikanes* among foreigners and *nav romanes* among themselves) and taught the English some of their words.

deaner (shilling) appears also as *denar*, *dener*, and *deener* after the 1830s and has been variously traced to *denier* (French) and *dinarly* (*Lingua franca*). Uncommon now in England, it survives among racing enthusiasts and Australians in general.

diddling (swindling) may go back as far as Old English *dyderian* but has been widespread since James Kenny made the main character of his play *Raising the Wind* (1803) Jeremy Diddler. Poe wrote an essay on diddling as “an exact science,” *diddling* coming out of *diddler*, as *burglaring* out of *burglar*.

downer (sixpence) is related to the Romany *tawno* = little one. See *tanner*.

duce (twopence) is listed in “B. E.,” *Dictionary of the Canting Crew* (1968) and is sometimes spelled *deuce* (as with the American slang for the two-dollar bill). A *duce hog* is not a shilling, however, but two shillings.

finny (a banknote) usually means £ 5, a *double finny* then is £ 10. *Ready finny* (ready money) is Regency but still used in racing circles. The word may be from the German *fünf* (five), perhaps through the Yiddish of London's East End which (despite the anti-Semitism enshrined in expressions like *to jew down*) has been a valued source of new words.

fi'pence (fivepence) is not to be confused with *fippenny*, which Vaux (1812) defines as a clasp knife. We also find *fip*, *fippenny bit*, *fipsworth*, and in early Pennsylvania the English settler used *fip* for the Spanish half-*real*.

flatch (halfpenny) seems to come from the backward *flah* and is confusing, for it can be half of almost anything, from a penny to a crown (in counterfeiters' lingo of c. 1870 it is "half-crown," never "halfpenny").

flimsey (banknote) started out about 1810 as *flymsey* (from the thin paper) and by mid-century *flimsies* were paper money in general.

fiver (five pounds) and *tenner* (ten pounds) come from the unimaginative Oxford slang that made *breakfast* = *brekker* and *Prince of Wales* = *Pragger-Wagger*. Very common.

five shillings (a tavern) is a joke based on five shillings = one crown. *The Crown*, then, becomes *Five Shillings* (or *Five Bob*), *Rose and Crown* = *Rosy Bob*, *Three Crowns* = *Fifteen Bob*, in a league where *Bag o' Nails* is really *Bacchanals*, *Elephant and Castle* is the former *Infanta of Castille*, etc.

flushme (five shillings) is in Chesney's *The Victorian Underworld* "Glossary of Colloquial and Cant Words," without explanation, but nowhere else I know.

gen (shilling) may be from the French *argent* (silver). Costermongers who liked to spell words backwards were stymied when they came to *shilling* and were forced to *generalize*. Ware (1909) has *Can you generalize?* = *Can you lend me a shilling?* but calls the coin *general*, not *gen*. Generally, *gen* now means "information" (ex R. A. F.).

grey (less frequently, *gray*; a coin with two identical faces) was used in the nineteenth century to mean a halfpenny and in the twentieth to mean a penny, though derived from *grey-back* (from the days when a penny was silver), but it also has long meant any *two-tailed* penny for the *two-up* gambling game. (In Australia gambling dens are sometimes called *two-up schools* to this day.) Ware (1909) under *gray-back* says that it has meant money in general, but I have never seen or heard this usage.

gun-money (the all-brass currency of James II) was redeemable in silver should the Pretender's campaign regain him the throne. Once virtually valueless, like Confederate money it now can command big prices from collectors.

Harrington farthings, struck under contract with a man named Harrington, were the first English copper coins.

hog (shilling) was the slang for *shilling* in the late seventeenth century and later occasionally for *sixpence*. Partridge guesses it was named for a hog on a small silver coin but cannot say which. In America dollars were once called *hogs*, so there may be some other connection, such as the tendency of people to *hog* (hoard) money.

joey (fourpence), sometimes *joe*, was the fourpenny piece of the mid-nineteenth century. J. C. Hotten says in *The Slang Dictionary* (1859) that it "originated with London cabmen" and Ernest Weekley in *Words and Names* (1932) writes: "The obsolete fourpenny piece is believed to have been called a *joey* after Joseph Hume (+ 1855), the economist, who advocated its introduction. . . ." Hume (1777-1855) was the champion of "retrenchment," and a radical politician. If the coin is not named for him it might derive from the Portuguese and Brazilian gold *Johannes* (in Colonial America a *jo*) or even the fact that in Australia the kangaroo keeps a *joey* (baby) in its pocket. For some obscure reason, a *half-joe* is eight dollars (Partridge).

kennuck (penny) is a word in *kennick* (the *flash-patter* of a *padding-ken* or low lodging house in Victorian England). The origin is obscure.

liberation pennies were issued by Jersey at the end of World War II.

lill (pocket book, banknote) after about 1810 was established (along with *reader*) by the gypsies, in whose language *lil* = paper, book (as in George Borrow's *Romano Lavo-Lil*, a Romany word-book). By the end of the century tramps used *lill* to mean a banknote, usually a *fiveer*.

Lima coinage was purportedly made from gold bullion brought back by Admiral Anson from his circumnavigation of the globe (1744).

long-tailed was a slang adjective used to describe large banknotes.

madza saltee (halfpenny) is the way an *omee* (man, from Italian *uomo*) would speak in the Parlyaree (mummers' slang) we mentioned above. *Madza caroon* (half-crown) and *madza prona* (half a sovereign) use the Italian *mezzo*, variously spelled in transcribing Parlyaree (which is not really a written language at all) but always pronounced *medzer*. *Medzies* = money in general, *nantee medzies* = no money, etc. Occasionally still heard among the sort of actors who preserve the old traditions: never quote *Macbeth*, never put a hat on a bed, never whistle in the dressingroom, etc.

mag (halfpenny) was a term used in *magflying* (a game of pitch and toss) c. 1781 (G. Parker), supposedly derived from *make*. Sometimes spelled *meg*, which confuses it with an old word for *guinea*, and sometimes connected (erroneously) with that wild virago Long Meg of Westminster whose *Life and Pranks* (1582) was popular with the Elizabethans, though *mag* (old wife) is at least as old as the fourteenth century (*cf. mag's tales*).

nick (pound) is used especially in racing circles, though the plural (*nicker*) is more widely known (also *half-nicker*). In the eighteenth century a *nicker* was a rowdy who broke windows by flinging pennies at them:

His scatter'd Pence the flying Nicker flings

— John Gay, *Trivia*.

On the nick = stealing, *out of all nick* = beyond counting (Shakespeare in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*), *good nick* = in good condition (not *nicked*, damaged, and worth money).

ninepence over the wall is an Army term for nine days' confinement to camp and there are similar expressions for the length of jail terms. (In America *boffo* = a year, *deuce* = two, *five-specker* or *V* = five, *double sawbuck* = 20, *threw the book at him* = gave him a long sentence, *threw the key away* = a very long sentence, *put him on ice* = gave him a life sentence in the *ice-box*, etc. *Swi* = two years in jail (British and Australian, from *zwei*).

Petition crown was a coin that bore on its edge a request to Charles II that its designer be restored as royal engraver. Thomas Simon (1623–1665) was chief graver of the mint during the *interregnum*, made dies for Cromwell's (uncirculated) coinages of 1656 and 1658 and Cromwell's Dunbar medal (1650), and made the great seals of 1648, 1651, 1661. This is one sample of the nicknames that have been given to various British issues.

portcullis currency was struck for trade (East India Company) in the last years (1600–1601) of Elizabeth I. The device was still on the threepenny bit of Elizabeth II.

quid (pound) is one of the commonest terms listed here. Originally it meant a guinea (Thomas Shadwell, 1688) but by the nineteenth century it meant a pound or a sovereign (Dickens, 1857). The plural is without an *s*: six quid a week for his *screw* (salary). William Barnes, the Dorset poet, in his *Speech-craft of the English Tongue* (advocating *folkwain* for *omnibus*), William Morris, and others, have called for less Latinism in English, but this common word (which dictionaries say is "Origin obsc.") almost certainly comes from *quid* (as in the Latin *quid pro quo*) and carries the suggestion of *wherewithal*.

rag (a shilling and sixpence — and this may be a convenient place to note that such a sum is written 1/6) meant a farthing to “B. E.” in the seventeenth century and the larger sum (though still “something of little value,” whence *rag*) to the Victorians. Oddly enough, it is used of coins, not paper money, generally, though occasionally (after 1810) for banknotes.

saltee (penny), as we have seen above, is the Italian *soldi* in Parlyaree.

say (sixpence) is merely *six* in Parlyaree.

schmear (money used for a bribe or received as such) is from the Yiddish and suggests *buttering up* someone. It is one of the interesting group of *sch-* words (*schnook*, *schlump*, *schmendrick*, *schlemiel*, the more vulgar *schmuck*, etc.) which the interested reader may find discussed in Leo Rosten’s *The Joys of Yiddish*. Many have behind them a delightfully wry humor. “Sleep faster,” goes a Yiddish proverb, “we need the pillows.”

scot (as in *scot free*) is not a Scottish coin (as some assert) but from the Old English *sceot*, meaning a payment, contribution, tax, or fine.

shilling is used in Canada (says Leechman) for the “circular hammer-mark on wood — the sign manual of a poor carpenter.” But surely it is British in origin. Why *shilling* in Canada, if not from British immigrants? I have heard *shilling shocker* for sensational reading matter (the more modern, higher-priced *penny dreadful* of the last century) in Ontario, but from expatriate Englishmen of the sort that, in Toronto, are “more British than the British.” When *s.* is used to signify *shilling* it actually stands for *solidus* (a coin of Constantine I).

shine (money) was used especially of guineas and other bright coins and (as a verb) to mean to raise money (sometimes to *flash* money).

shin-plaster (banknote) sounds American but reached Britain after the American Civil War.

short-cross penny of William I and the *long-cross penny* of Henry III got their names from the designs on the reverse, as did the famous *Britannia penny* and other coins with similar names.

simon (sixpence) is a seventeenth-century word of obscure origin (*simony*?) replaced in slang by *tanner* about 1811. In the late nineteenth century there was a joke based on a Biblical quotation:

Q.: When was St. Peter a banker?

A.: When he lodged with one Simon a tanner.

sixpennyworth (six months’ sentence) Partridge quotes as c. 1945 and refers us to Richard Herd’s article in *The Evening News* (London), November 12, 1957, Cf. *ninepence over the wall*, above.

smart money in America is related to gamblers, but “B. E.” (1698) defined it as “Given by the King when a man in land or sea service has a leg shot or cut off, or is disabled.”

sparrows (beer money) given to dustmen, “Perhaps ex the colour of these birds and these men” (Partridge).

sprat (sixpence) c. 1839 from its small size (the small sea fish *Clupea Sprattus*), used (says the *Oxford Universal Dictionary*) “In phrases denoting the venturing of a small expenditure in the hope of a large gain 1856.”

sycee (uncoined silver) from the Chinese *si sz’* (Cantonese *sai sz’*) which originally meant “fine silk” and by 1711 came to mean, among those in the eastern trade, silver bars, etc., paid for such material by English merchants. Perhaps such a word cannot be called slang but rather was one of those words which passed from specialist use into our dictionaries. Everyone knows *cash* (originally spelled *cass*) from the Tamil *kāsu* = a coin or amount of money but used to describe the copper-and-lead Chinese *le* and *tsein* coins provided with a square hole so that they might be strung into ropes of 1,000 (*tael* or *liang*). Foreign words for money have been used by various English speakers in a slang way, as *ducat* is used in American slang, in India, etc.

syebuck (sixpence) Partridge misread as *fyebuck* because of the long *s* in G. Parker's *View of Society* (1781). Farmer & Henley's *Slang and its Analogues* (1890–1904) has the same error.

tanner (sixpence) variously explained as from Romany (*tawno* = little one), Latin (*tenere* = hold), even English (from the color of copper) and used in expressions such as *tannercab* (a sixpenny cab, 1908) and *tannergram* (a sixpenny telegram, the minimum charge after 1896).

teviss (shilling) is a term used by costermongers and tramps which Partridge derives in this complicated fashion: "Perhaps *shilling* > *shil* > 'backed' to *lihs* > *lihess* > *lehiss* > *teviss*." *Ruof* = four is easy to see, but to an explanation like this a tramp might say simple *ack!* (Romany *ac!* = stuff!).

thicker (pound) is related to a *thick 'un* = crown (or sovereign). *Smash a thick 'un* = change a sovereign. *Thicker nicker* = pound notes.

three crowns coinage describes that of Edward IV, Richard III, and Henry VII.

three-leggers are the coins of the Isle of Man bearing its triskelis symbol.

thrummer (threepenny piece) c. 1859 is now obsolete except among grafters (says Partridge, who directs us to that useful compendium of low lingo P. Allingham's *Cheappack*, 1934). *Thrumms* is late seventeenth century ("B. E." 1698), *thrums* is found in the Third Edition of Grose, and the *English Dialect Dictionary* (which may be consulted for some interesting words we omit here) defines *thrum* as a commission of 3*d.* per stone (14 lbs.) on flax.

tray soddy mits (threepence-halfpenny) is Parlyaree where *soddy* = *soldi* (penny) and *mits* = *mezzo* (half). I have heard it rendered at Calendonian Market (Bermondsey) as *three bloody bits* by Londoners who know no Parlyaree at all.

tuppence (twopence) was Standard English until the last century but is now colloquial. *Tuppence coloured* can mean *fancy*, *tarted up*, in the decorating trade. *Tuppence-ha'penny* is a common adjective meaning *inferior*, *insignificant*. *Tuppence* is also used (like the American *two-bit*) as a denigrating adjective. *Tuppence on the can* was a Victorian expression for a drunken condition somewhat this side of *three sheets to the wind* and *blotto*. It hints of inflation, for taverns in the eighteenth century used to advertise: "drunk for a penny, dead drunk for tuppence."

yennep (penny) contains an anaptyctic *e*, as *pint* becomes *tenip*, a *drunk* a *kennurd*, etc., in *kacab genals* (back slang), a cryptic but widespread language used (like *Pig Latin* and such) more for fun than mystery. Probably the commonest word of back slang is *yob* = boy, sometimes *yobbo*.

yen(n)ork (crown) is back slang a trifle disguised.

In the preceding list I have omitted words such as *greenback* (dollar, pound note) which are clearly American in origin and come more from foreign *movies* (cinema) and *whodunits* than from the inventiveness of *Blighty*, *The Smoke* (London) and *The Provinces* (the rest of the British Isles). I have omitted foreign terms (such as *leggy*, from *lagi*, and *bak-sheesh*) less common now than in the days of *Raj* or even World War II. I have not included all the phrases and single words related to money (such as *push the boat out* = to be generous or *strapped*, which in London means "hard up for money" but in Glasgow means "obtained on *tick* = credit") and have not undertaken to explain such British peculiarities as Maundy Money or the Hire-Purchase Plan (*Never-never*). Some expres-

sions (to sell honey for a halfpenny = think little of someone) are unknown to most Englishmen, while others are so well-known as to require little or no comment: *he hasn't got two pennies to rub together*, *cash in your chips*, *cash up*, *cash a dog* (American *bum check*, or a *rubber check* because it bounces), *money to burn* or *burning a hole in his pocket*, *money growing on trees* or *up the spout*, *in the money* or *out of the money*, *money talks* or *money makes the mare go*, *money for jam* or *easy money* or *tight money* or *penny for the guy* or *penny-farthing* (bicycle), or other terms which, unlike *lancepresado* (the chap who comes in with but twopence in his pocket) for instance, are familiar. I have resisted the temptation to tell theatrical anecdotes such as that of the time when James Stetson called *The Gondoliers* (which was doing poor business) *The Gone Dollars* (and made a hit of it) or to investigate theatrical slang very limited in use. I have not dealt much with ephemeral expressions equivalent to the French *St. Collect's Day* = pay day. I have not gone deeply into proverbial materials behind fairly common words: *skinflint*, for example, is explained by this quotation:

For a farthing she'd skin a flint and spoil a knife
Worth sixpence skinning it.

— Edward Taylor, *Lob*.

What I have tried to do is to explain some words that are more or less frequently met with and to suggest not only the problems that such word study involves but also the very real fun in examining the products of the common people who call cheese *Massey-Harris* (because that Canadian company makes an agricultural *binder*, and cheese is costive), who still say *nix*, *deberr*! because Russian ships lay in the Medway in 1810, and who preserve ancient customs in their modern speech (*the shoe is on the mast* = be generous) and ancient languages in their slang (from Hindi to *God bless the Duke of Argyle* – a shrug of the shoulders). Today some of this old slang and cant is disappearing or dead – I have heard a *pop star* refer to a *dynamite disc* of his as a *money-spinner*, unaware that *money-spinner* used to mean the female pudenda (also *money-box*) – but much of it still flourishes among *smousers* (Jewish tradesmen) in the East End and Cockneys, *rorty dasher* (fine) costers and the fast-disappearing gypsies. *It's a guinea to a gooseberry* that the old slang will change, but some of it is worth saving and much of it is worth considering, though not going *doolally tap* about.¹² Some, but not all, that I have discussed here is to be found in Partridge's monumental *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (fifth edition, 1961) and the many volumes listed in Lester V. Berrey and Melvin van den Berk's bibliography of *The Literature of Slang*

¹² Deolali was a hospital in Bombay and *tap* = fever (Hindi). The expression (or simply *doolaly*) means *bonkers* (mad).

(1939); John Farmer's seven volumes of *Slang and its Analogues*, and *Musa Pedestris* (1896); and the many other works on slang, cant, and argot from those by Gerold Edilbach (c. 1420), Martin Luther, Francis Grose, Pierce Egan, John Camden Hotten, etc., up to the present day.

With this history it seems only reasonable to assume that Britons in the future from "The Little Old Lady of Threadneedle Street" to the barrow-boy in *Banker Chapel Ho*¹³ will continue to manufacture *talky-talk* and slang, some ephemeral and some passing into received speech. Shakespeare spoke of the fool *glad to take eggs for his money*. In the seventeenth century *giving three slips for a tester* = play a trick on someone (as giving three counterfeit halfpennies for sixpence) was immortalized – if the word is not too strong – in a ballad:

How a lass gave her love
Three slips for a tester
And married another
Three weeks before Easter.

(To have married in Lent was to pull another *fast deal*, we should note.) In the eighteenth century *silver-turkers* trafficked in forged banknotes. In the nineteenth century the Second Battalion of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment (the 76th Foot) was called the *Seven and Sixpennies*. In the twentieth century someone invented the *fourpenny one* = cuff on the ear and *eighteenpence* = common sense. It is only common sense to expect that the process will continue as sober citizens and those on *Africa speaks*, *stagger juice*, *king kong*, *plonk*, *sheepwash*, and the modern equivalent of *four-thick* (beer) as well, both record obscure facts – Viator's *Oxford Guide* (1849) helps us to understand that *four-and-nine* = hat came from a price in that period – and make simple new expressions (*tenpence to the shilling* = mentally weak, *lacking one's marbles* or *awa' i' the heid*), note that a florin is a *two-ender*, that someone is as *yellow as a guinea* (or *not worth a plugged penny*), that a pudding looks like a *three-* (or even *four-*) *penny shot*, that a shilling is a *twelver*, that some small coin is as elusive as a *threepenny dodger* (a tiny silver piece of yore), etc.

In fact, we live in a time in which many coins of Britain and many of the old names and expressions that went with them, are disappearing from use. *Decimalisation* (as the British spell it) has struck. What can

¹³ *The little old lady* is the Bank of England (in Threadneedle Street in "The City") and has been since the time of James Gillray (1757–1815), the cartoonist. Herbert R. Mayes in *Saturday Review* (October 9, 1971, p. 8) quotes a bank attendant: "A couple of centuries ago a newspaper cartoon depicted the bank as a little old female miser squatting on top of a money bag, and the Old Lady phrase caught on and has been used ever since." *Banker Chapel Ho* is harder: it is a Whitechapel (East End) joke based on the Italian *bianca cappella* = white chapel. A barrow is called a *Whitechapel brougham* and the district, with St. Giles (cf. *St. Giles Greek* = thieves' cant), has always been rich in coster slang.

one call the new penny besides *new penny*? The new coins are *in*, the old ones are *out*, and yet (as Paul Jennings noted) the new ones “have no existence – and therefore no *names* – of their own.” The Sunday supplements have begun to solicit the ideas of celebrities, the good old *man in the street* has begun to contribute whatever the new-pence equivalent of his *two-cents’ worth* might be, and suddenly we see that word-watchers and onomasticians of the future are going to require (if indeed any of these suggestions catch on) explanations like these:

new halfpenny: *screwdriver* (used mainly, cartoonist John Glashan suggests, to undo electrical screws) or *mite* or *wee* (if the new penny is a *pee*), or *minibit* or *nipper* or . . .

new penny: *nupe* (new tuppence will be a *tupe* then) a *waffle* (from the portcullis on its back) or even a *flusher* (from the two chains attached to the portcullis), etc.

new tuppence: *feathers* (from the Prince of Wales’ three feathers on it) or *prinny* or *charlie* or *pow* (P. of W.) or even “a *keaton* or *keat*, perhaps a Vic Feather (feather duster – Buster Keaton)” says Mr. Jennings, *boy scout* (three feathers again), etc.

new fivepence: *tophat* (large crown) says Barbara Cartland the “romantic novelist,” *ponth* (Hindi *panch* = five) or *sank* (French *cing* = five) or *banger* or *bagge* (Sir Hugh Casson, architect), *slap* (*slap and tickle*, from *cupronickle*, *prick* (from the thistle design) or *nolly* (from part of the Latin warning of the thistle: “Don’t touch me”), etc.

new tenpence: *lion* or *leo* or *MGM* or (more British) *longleat* (after the stately home at which the Marquis of Bath exhibits lions similar to the one on the coin) or *Auntie Flo* (a reference to the old florin) or *dog* or *beastie* or *tenner*, *tanner*, *tawner*, *tooner*, *Toonerville trolley*, or *golly* or *gee*, etc.

new fifty pence: *half C* or *drunk* (from *half-seas over*) or *arrow* (because King Harold was shot in the eye with an arrow at Hastings and Harold Wilson was *PM* when this coin was introduced) or *violet* (Jennings likes this one and explains that the seated figure of Britannia on the coin “appears to sit on a broken-down motor-car offering violets or other flowers for sale to passing drivers”) or *dollar* or *giggler* (Britannia, one recent observer nastily remarked, was sinking “giggling into the sea” of late) or *Boadicea’s mistake* (Stirling Moss, the racing driver), etc.

new pound: anybody’s guess.

Perhaps the best thing for you to do is to look at the new coins and name them yourself – or keep your ears open the next time you are in Britain and see what the Island Race is doing to give each of them not only a local habitation but a name. The new names will probably be better than *Abergavenny* (penny) and *zack* (sixpence) and the whole process promises to be fascinating and no *zaakje* (Dutch, small affair). If past performance is any indication, the onomastic challenge will be met and masterfully muddled through.

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