

A TOUCHEOUS SUBJECT (Originally published April 1964)

As we have grown older and more querulous, our ear has become more and more sensitized to some of the lapses in the English language spoken in our area. Among the untutored, the garbled grammar and colloquial phraseology has a certain amount of charm and appeal; among the so-called educated, the blunders in speech are less pleasing and often annoying.

We have squirmed uncomfortably on hearing an attractive patient—with behind her a B.A. from the University of Georgia and two years of teaching children in our local elementary schools—say, "Now let me ast you this question."

We have been embarrassed for the college-trained business leader who wants "to puhceed ahead, irregardless of the outcome." We have cringed to hear a city mayor "clarify and substantuate" his position. We have not sympathized with the Junior Leaguer who was almost "drownded" by a sudden rain; or with the dowager who was afraid to venture out at night because she might be "attackted"; or the doctor who had "a simular case, symptomwise." We have not let the architect drawing his plans for an "assess (access) door" shake our composure as much as the television announcer who, all in the same sentence, told a winning coach he should be "proud of hissself" and of the way "the boys handled theirselves."

These and many other examples like them have little to do with colorful regional speech and reflect only the sad state of basic education and the deficiencies in the teaching of grammar and fundamental English, spawned by more than three decades of the superficial and permissive methods of modern, mass education. Here in the final trickling convolutions of the eastern hill area, now popularly known as Appalachia, it is still possible to pick up an occasional word or two of the sixteenth century, Spenserian speech of the Anglo-Saxon forebears of the country folk and mill people. By now the remnants of this speech have been hopelessly scrambled through generations of illiteracy and the influence of the imitative Negro dialect, and, in more recent years, by the increasing sloppiness and disregard for English grammar as it is taught in our schools and heard daily on radio and television.

There is no need to be critical of any but the supposedly educated who tolerate our pathetic modern education and set such a poor example. At least among the uneducated and uneducable, there is no pretension to learning, and the grammatical hodgepodge of their speech and mispronunciations retains color and the flavor of honesty in communication. If you would spend a few minutes in fascination, sit quietly in the lobby

or in one of the waiting areas at the Medical Center and open your ears. It was some shrimps yestiddy at the store which was on sale that kindly upset her stummick and give her this nausirated feeling. When she had taken a look at them shrimps she knowed right off they must of bin caught lass year, but she went ahead and aten them anyways. She hattent no more'n set herself down after supper, when she felt likely she was fixin' to faint, and this quivelling pain grabpt aholt of her down around her ovals, and she was taken with a drawin' spell that liked to bent her double. She called to her ol man and ast him to fetch her some Alky Seltzer outen the neighbor's house, but he said he dittent have no pants on and besides it was too airish out, so she sont her youngun, Thureesa, over to the druk store to git some bile salts. She must of drink an awfully lot of them salts, and when she seen they wuttent heppin her none, she come right over to the Merncy Room. By that time, it was this stabbin' pain up under her breasties cuttin off her windpipe, and it seemed like ary a thing she taken give her no relief. She set there in mizry for the longest afore the intern doctor give her this yer penicillin shot. But hit aint helped her none neither, and she done spent most the night jes' avomickin' her entruls out. This morning she wuz all down in the back and they was some pressure down around her birth canal, and then her bowels commenced to runnin' off and her stomach gotten touchous. When she taken with an inward fever and the dumb chills, she finely ast her neighbor, Mizriz Rigsby, who tol' her she come to you wunst or twict before and that you was a good doctor that never cut on nobody; so she come straight on to your office. By now she was suffrin' with real body trouble and was touchous all over.

Say wha', doctor?