

for which is perhaps that it proceeds from dialects but little known, as for instance Romany, or from Celtic and Anglo-Saxon words no longer used as language-words and known only to a few scholars.

¶ *Cant* possesses but few original terms coined in a direct manner by those who employ the vocabulary, for it needs greater imaginative powers than these light-fingered professors are generally credited with to invent terms that shall remain and form part of a language. An illustration of this may be found in the French argot—taken in the narrower sense of malefactors' language and leaving out altogether the Parisian slang—which in spite of all the efforts of those interested in the matter has remained very nearly what it was in the seventeenth century.

The components have been elongated, then curtailed, then their syllables have been interverted, and finally they have reappeared under their original form.

Taking as a starting-point that slang and cant are of an essentially conventional and consequently metaphoric and figurative nature, it may safely be asserted that the origin of slang and cant terms must certainly be sought for in those old dialect words which bear a resemblance in form ; not however in words which bear an approximately identical meaning, but rather in such as allow of the supposed offsprings having a figurative connection of sense.

The reader will probably best understand what is meant if he will, for the sake of argument, suppose the modern English language to have become a dead language known only to scholars. Then let him take the slang word "top-lights," meaning eyes. He is seeking the origin of *top-lights*. If he were to find in the old language a word having some resemblance in form and bearing the identical meaning of eyes he would have to reject it. But when he finds the *same* word signifying *the upper lanterns of a ship*, he may adopt it without hesitation, because the metaphor forms a connection link and furnishes a safe clue.

So far we have spoken rather as if slang were a kind of outlaw or Bedouin with every man's hand against it, but of late years many judicious and intelligent writers have recognised that there is a vast number of words which, while current, are still on probation,