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DOCTOR COX; A BLANSCUE.*
WRITTEN IN
EXEMPLIFICATION OF THE SOMERSETSHIRE DIALECT
BY JAMES JENNING, *Esq.*

Omnes una matet

Et caleanda semel via lethi.— Horat.

The catastrophe described in the following sketch, occurred near *Highbridge*, in Somersetshire, about the year 1779. — Mr. or *Doctor Cox*, as surgeons are usually called in the west, was the only medical resident at Huntspill, and in actual practice for many miles around that village. His father-in-law, *Dr. Jeffery*, was an old man, and had retired from practice; and, in this instance, I do not know that he was called in to attempt the resuscitation of his son-in-law. Indeed, such was the then general ignorance, even among medical men, of the

* Unexpected accident.

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proper means of treating *drowned persons*, that there is no reason to suppose that any then known, if adopted, would have been successful. But that, with our present knowledge, the life of Cox, a young and healthy man, might have been preserved, there is every reason to believe.*

The conduct of Mr. Robert Evans, the friend and associate of Cox, can only be accounted for by one of those unfortunate infatuations to which the minds of some are sometimes liable. Had an immediate alarm been given when we children first discovered that Cox was missing, he might, probably, have been saved. The real cause of his death was, a too great abstraction of heat from the body; as the water was fresh and still, and of considerable depth; and, under the surface, much beneath the usual temperature of the human body. This fact ought to be a lesson to those who bathe in still and deep fresh water; and it ought, besides, to warn them to continue only a short time in such a cold medium.

If, in the style of this sketch, I have departed from what is usually esteemed modern refinement, and attempted to relate, in a simple way, facts, to me at any rate, interesting, after the manner of some of our old writers, and if I have, at the same time, exemplified a dialect of considerable importance in our language, my objects are accomplished. The genuine delineation of natural feeling is infinitely more valuable than all the blandishments of art.

The BRUE war bright, and deep and clear; ¹
 And Lammas dâ and harras² near;
 The zun upon the waters drode³
 Girt sheets of light as on a rode;
 From zultry heät⁴ the cattle hirn'd⁵
 To shade or water as to firnd:⁶
 Men, too, in yarly⁷ âtemoon⁸
 Doft'd quick ther cloaths and dashd in zoon
 To thic⁹ deep river, whaur the trout,

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In all ther prankin, plâd¹⁰ about;
And yels¹¹ wi' zilver skins war zid,¹²
While gudgeons droo¹³ the wâter slid,
Wi' carp zumtimes and wither¹⁴ fish
Avoordin¹⁵ many a dainty dish.
Whaur elvers¹⁶ too in spring time plâd,
And pailvuls mid o' them be had.
The wâter cold --- the zunshine bright,
To zwimmers than¹⁷ what high delight!
'Tis long agwon whun¹⁸ youth and I
Wish'd creepin Time would rise and vly---
A,¹⁹ half a hundred years an moor
Zunz²⁰ I a trod theäze²¹ earthly vloor!
I zed, the face o' Brue war bright;
Time smil'd too in thic zummer light.
Wi' Hope bezide en²² promising
A wordle²³ o' fancies wild o' whing.²⁴
I mine²⁵ too than one lowering cloud
That zim'd²⁶ to wrop us like a shroud;
The death het²⁷ wor o' Doctor Cox ---
To thenk o't now the storry shocks!
Vor âll the country vur and near
Shod than vor'n²⁸ many a horty tear.

The *Doctor* like a duck could zwim;
No fear o' drownin daver'd²⁹ him!

* Various efforts to restore the suspended animation of *Cox*, such as shaking him, rolling him on a cask, attempts to get out the water which it was then presumed had got into the stomach or the lungs, or both, in the drowning; strewing salt over the body, and many other equally ineffectual and improper methods to restore the circulation were, I believe, pursued. Instead of which, had the body been laid in a natural position, and the

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lost heat gradually administered, by the application of warm frictions, a warm bed, &c., how easily in all probability, would animation have been restored!

¹ The reader must not suppose, from this description of the *river Brue*, that it is generally a clear stream, or that it is always a rapid one. I have elsewhere called it "lazy Brue." It is sometimes, at and above the floodgates at *Highbridge*, when they are not closed by the tide, or other cause, a rapid stream; but through the moors, generally, its course is slow. In floods, its motion is necessarily much accelerated. In the summertime, and at the particular period to which allusion in the text is made, it was exactly as above described. Of course, the state of the river was that in which the floodgates were closed.

² Harvest. It is scarcely necessary to observe, that the preceding word *dâ* is day.

³ Threw.

⁴ This word *heat* is marked with a diæresis to show that, in Somersetshire, it is a sort of disyllable.

⁵ Ran.

⁶ Friend.

⁷ Early.

⁸ Afternoon.

⁹ That.

¹⁰ Played.

¹¹ Eels.

¹² Seen: this word is sometimes a long syllable, as *zeed*.

¹³ Through.

¹⁴ Other.

¹⁵ Affording.

¹⁶ Young eels are called *elvers* in Somersetshire. *Walton*, in his *Angler*, says, "Young eels, in the Severn, are called *yelvers*." In what part of the country through with the Severn passes they are called *yelvers* we are not told in *Walton's* book; as eels are called, in Somersetshire, *yels*, analogy seems to require *yelvers* for their young; but I never heard them so called. The *elvers* used to be, and I dare say still are, obtained from the salt-water side of the bridge.

17 Then.

18 When.

19 Yes.

20 Since.

21 This.

22 Him

23 World.

24 Wing.

25 Remember.

26 Seemed.

27 It.

28 For him.

29 To daver, in a neuter sense, is to droop, to fade; the tutties be âll a daver`d—the flowers are all faded. I am not aware that *daver* is ever used in the active sense in which it is here employed; but it is nevertheless in strict accordance with the genius of the dialect.

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The pectur now I zim I zee!

I wish I could het`s likeniss gee!³⁰

His *Son*, my brother *John*, *myzel*,

Or *Evans*, mid³¹ the storry tell;

But thâ³² be gwon and I, o` âll

O`m, left to zâ³³ what did bevâll.

Zo, nif³⁴ zo be you like, why I

To tell the storry now ool try.

Thic *Evans* had a coward core

And fear`d to venter vrom the shore;

While to an fro, an vur an near,

And now an tan³⁵ did *Cox* appear

In dalliance with the wâters bland,

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Or zwimmin wi' a maester hand.
We youngsters dree,³⁶ the youngest I,
To zee the zwimmers âll stood by
Upon the green bonk³⁷ o' the Brue
Jist³⁸ whaur a stook³⁹ let water droo:⁴⁰
A quiet time of joyousness
Zim'd vor a space thic dâ to bless!
A dog, too, faithful to his maester
War there, and mang'd⁴¹ wi' the disaster ---
Vigo, ah well I mine his name!
A Newvoun-lond and very tame!
But Evans only war to blame:
He âllès⁴² paddled near the shore
Wi' timid hon⁴³ an coward core;
While *Doctor Cox* div'd, zwim'd at ease
Like fishes in the zummer seas;
Or as the skaiters on the ice
In winin⁴⁴ circles wild and nice.
Yet in a moment he war gwon,
The wonderment of ivry one:
That is, we *dree* and Evans, âll
That zeed what Blanscue⁴⁵ did bevâll. ---
Athout⁴⁶ one sign, or naise, or cry,
Or shriek, or splash, or groan, or sigh!
Could zitch a zwimmer ever die
In wâter? — Yet we gaz'd in vain
Upon thic bright and wâter plain:
All smooth and calm — no ripple gave
One token of the zwitnmer's grave!
We hir'd⁴⁷ en⁴⁸ not, we zeed en not! —
The glassy wâter zim'd a blot?
While Evans, he of coward core,

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Still paddled as he did bevore!
At length our fears our silence broke, —
Young as we war, and children âll,
We wish'd to goo an zum one câll;
But Evans carelissly thus spoke ---
"Oh, *Cox* is up the river gone,
Vor sartain ool be back anon; ---
He tâlk'd o' cyder, zed he'd g'up⁴⁹
To Stole's⁵⁰ an drenk a horty cup!"
Conjecture anty⁵¹ as the wine!⁵²
And zoon did he het's faleshood vine.⁵³
John Cox took up his father's cloaths ---
Poor fellow! he beginn'd to cry!
Than, Evans vrom the wâter rose;
"A hunderd vawk'll come bimeby,"⁵⁴
A⁵⁵ zed; whun, short way vrom the shore.
We zeed, what zeed we not avore,
The *head* of Doctor *Cox* appear ---
Het floated in the wâter clear!
Bolt upright war he, and his hair.
That pruv'd⁵⁶ he sartainly war there,
Zwimm'd on the wâter! --- Evans than,
The stupid'st of a stupid man,
Call'd *Vigo* --- pointed to that head ---
In *Vigo* dash'd --- *Cox was not dead!*
But seiz'd the dog's lag --- helt en vast!
One struggle, an het war the last!
Ah! well do I remember it ---
That struggle I sholl ne'er forgit!
Vigo was frightened and withdrew;
The body zink'd⁵⁷ at once vrom view.

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Did *Evans*, gallid⁵⁸ *Evans* then,
Câll out, at once, vor father's men?
(Thâ war at work vor'n⁵⁹ very near
A mendin the old Highbridge pier,)
A did'n câll, but 'mus'd⁶⁰ our fear ---
"A hundred vawk ool zoon be here!"
A zed. --- We gid⁶¹ the hue and cry!
And zoon a booät⁶² wi' men did vly!
But twar âll auver! *Cox* war voun⁶³
Not at the bottom lyin down,
But up aneen,⁶⁴ as jist avore
We zeed en floatin nigh the shore.

30 Give.

31 Might.

32 They.

33 Say.

34 If.

35 Now and then.

36 Three.

37 Bank.

38 Just.

39 A sort of stile, beneath which water is discharged.

40 Through.

41 Mixed.

42 Always.

43 Hand.

44 Winding.

45 Unexpected accident.

46 Without.

47 Heard: the i here is long, as in hire.

48 Him.

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49 Go up. Several other similar verbs undergo contraction in Somersetshire, namely to *g'auver*, to go over; to *g'under*, to go under; to *g'out*, to go out, --- this is probably the origin of *gout*, a drain; to *g'in*, to go in; to *g'auf*, to go off; and *g'on*, to go on.

50 Mr. Stole resided near *Newbridge*, about a mile from the spot where the accident occurred; he was somewhat famous for his cyder.

51 Empty.

52 Wind

53 Find

54 By and by.

55 He.

56 Proved.

57 Sank.

58 Frightened.

59 For him.

60 Amused.

61 Gave.

62 Bost.

63 Found.

64 On end, upright.

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But death 'ad done his wust⁶⁵ ---not âll

Thâ did could life's last spork recâll.

 Zo Doctor Cox went out o' life

A vine⁶⁶, a, and as hansom mon,

As zun hath iver shin'd upon;

A left a family --- *a wife*, ---

 Two *sons*--- one *dâter*,

As beautiful as lovely Mâ, —

Of whom a-mâ-bi I mid zâ

 Zumthin hereâter: —

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What thâ veel'd⁶⁷ now I shall not tell---

My hort athin⁶⁸ me 'gins to zwell!

Reflection here mid try in vain,

Wither⁶⁹ particulars to gain,

Evans zim'd âll like one possest;

Imaginâtion! Tell the rest!

L'ENVOY

To âll that shall theeâze⁷⁰ storry read

The *Truth* must for it chiefly plead.

I gee⁷¹ not here a tale o' ort,⁷²

Nor snip-snap wit, nor lidden⁷³ smort.

But ôten⁷⁴ ôten by thic river

Have I a pass'd; yet niver, niver,

Athout⁷⁵ a thought o' *Doctor Cox*---

His dog--- his death---his floatin locks!

The mooäst⁷⁶ whun Brue war deep an clear,

And Lammas dâ and harras pear; ---

Whun zummer vleng'd⁷⁷ his light abroad---

The zun in âll his glory rawd;⁷⁸

How beautivul mid be the dâ

A zumthin âlles zim'd to zâ,

"*War whing*"⁷⁹--- *The wâter's deep an clear,*

But death mid be a lurkin near!"

65 Worst.

66 Fine.

67 Felt.

68 Within.

69 Other.

70 This.

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71 Give. This verb *gee*, with *g* hard, often includes the objective, or rather I should say, the dative pronoun: thus *I'll gee zixpence vor't* means I'll give you sixpence for it. This arises from the similar sounds in *gee* and *ye*, for *you*, so that (without much obscurity) the cacophonous association of *gee ye* is avoided.

72 Art.

73 Song.

74 Often.

75 Without.

76 Most.

77 Flung.

78 Rode.

79 Take care; beware.