

The first clipping I have come from a student who thought it was from the Akron [Ohio?] Beacon Journal "about 1960." The United Press story, datelined London, reports the tale from the Manchester Guardian and attributes it to a "bricklayer in the Barbados." My second clipping is probably from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. It is datelined Saigon, South Viet Nam, June 7, and carries the legend "The Chicago Daily News-Post-Dispatch Special Dispatch, Copyright, 1966." Here we have a Vietnamese worker writing the note. Both are phrased in somewhat broken English and are nearly identical in content and phrasing; for instance, each concludes "I respectfully request (or 'ask for') sick leave." Surely some other folklorists must have clipped this from other papers, but I haven't met any others yet.

Thoughts of a dry brain in that awkward season between trout fishing and skiing.

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QUERY

I am writing to ask your assistance with a problem that has arisen in connection with the annotation of one of the stories I am editing for two volumes of short fiction and miscellaneous essays in the new Iowa-California edition of the writings of Mark Twain.

In Mark Twain's "A True Story", (first published in Atlantic Monthly, November, 1874) there is an expression which may well be a folk saying, but which I have been unable to locate. The narrator of the story is a former slave, whose tale is based on the experiences of one Aunty Cord, a servant at Quarry Farm, where the Clemenses often spent the summer. At one point, explaining that she was by no means a run-of-the-mill person, she exclaims: "I wa'nt born in de mash to be fool' by trash! I's one of de old Blue Hen's Chicken's, I is." That statement then becomes a sort of refrain, which occurs whenever she is called upon to assert her authority over others.

The "Blue Hen's Chickens" allusion provides no problem. But I am wondering if the first exclamation is an actual folk saying. Clemens, of course, may have made it up, or it may have been original with the actual Aunty Cord. What makes me think that it was or is a folk saying is that the author first wrote "I ain't no houn' dog mash to be trod on by common trash!" and then sometime later went through his manuscript and in each instance changed it to "I wa'nt born in de mash...."

Taylor and Whiting, Dictionary of American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases, 1820-80 (Bleknep Press, 1958), p.230, quotes the phrase from Mark Twain's story and suggests that "mash" is "marsh", citing Krapp, Eng. Lang. in Am., 1925, II, 222-24 for the "mash" spelling. But the "houn' dog mash" does not seem related to "marsh". I would appreciate information relating to this problem.

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