

THE WORD "HOOSIER."

BY JACOB PIATT DUNN.

I PRESUME that most of the readers of the *Quarterly* have some interest in the question of the origin of the word "Hoosier"; and I have been having some experiences, in connection with it, that illustrate, in a small way, the difficulty of exhausting the sources of history. After a prolonged study of the question, in 1907, I published the results of my investigations in one of the pamphlets of the Indiana Historical Society. One of the theories of the origin of the word was that it was a family name, and I took the ground that I had eliminated this theory by examination of the directories of a number of Southern cities, and by inquiries of Southern congressmen, and others, without finding any trace of such a name. Imagine my surprise on stumbling on the entry, "Hoosier, Wm., lab., r. 603 W. 11th," in the Indianapolis directory of 1911.

I called at the address and found that William had moved; but learned that he was in the employ of the city street-cleaning department, and was stationed on the next block to my place of business. He was entered on the city rolls, however, as Wm. Hoozier, and the officials pronounced the name Ho-zher—long "o." I then hunted up William, and found him a very intelligent colored man. He said his name was Hoozer; and that it came from the owner of his father, in slavery times, who was Adam Hoozer, of Yadkin county, North Carolina. This was interesting, because I had in 1907 reached the conclusion that "Hoosier" was a corruption of "hoozer," which is a dialect word of Cumberland, England; and here was an actual instance of exactly that corruption. William informed me that the family name "Hoozer" was understood to be a corruption of "Houser."

In the publication of 1907 I stated that the earliest use of the word in print that had been found up to that time, was its appearance in Finley's poem, "The Hoosier's Nest," which was issued as the "Carriers' New Year's Address" of the Indianapolis

Journal on January 1, 1833. Soon after my article appeared, I received a letter from Judge Timothy Howard, of South Bend, who was then preparing a history of St. Joseph county, in which he informed me that he had found an earlier use of the word in "The Northwestern Pioneer and St. Joseph's Intelligencer" of April 4, 1832. This newspaper was published at South Bend, and the article was as follows:

"A Real Hoosier.—A sturgeon, who, no doubt, left Lake Michigan on a trip of pleasure, with a view of spending a few days in the pure waters of the St. Joseph, had his joyous anticipations unexpectedly marred by running foul of a fisherman's spear near this place—being brought on terra firma, and cast into a balance, he was found to weigh 83 pounds."

This publication accords with my conclusion, in 1907, that the word had been applied to residents of Indiana for some time before it appeared in print, and that it was originally a Southern slang or dialect word, signifying a rude or uncouth rustic. The publishers of The Northwestern Pioneer and St. Joseph's Intelligencer, at that time, were John D. and Jos. H. Defrees, who were Tennesseans, and no doubt familiar with the use of the word in the South. The sturgeon, with its covering of plates, is a rough-looking customer as compared with common freshwater fishes; and the obvious inference of the use of the word "Hoosier" in this connection is that, while it was being applied to Indiana people, the "real Hoosier" was a rough-looking individual, like the sturgeon.

A little later, while working on my history of Indianapolis, I ran across a still earlier use in print, in the "Carriers' Address" of the Indiana Democrat for 1832, which appeared in the issue of that paper for January 3, 1832. It was customary at that time to include in these addresses references to current and local politics; and in connection with the conflicting demands from the north and south ends of the State, on the State legislature, for the disposition of the public lands, this one says:

"Your 'Ways and Means,' however great,
May find employment in our State,
While roads and ditches, rivers, lakes,
Invite improvement;—and it takes
The wisest heads and soundest hearts
To harmonize discordant parts.
Those purchasers of Canal lands—
Whose cash we've got—ask from your hands
A full compliance with all contracts
Instead of 'nullifying' compacts;
While Southern folks, remote and sordid,
Stand forth to keep the Treas'ry guarded,
Protesting in most touching tones,
'Gainst taxes, troubles, debts and loans,
In favor much of large donations,
Ask for our 'hoosiers' good plantations,
Urging each scheme of graduation
As justice to the common nation."

This publication, connecting "hoosier" with "good plantations," shows that the "country" idea in the Southern use of the word was understood; while the inclusion of the word in quotation marks indicates that, while it was then in use here in a jocular way, it was liable to give offense if used seriously. That stage quickly passed away after the publication of "The Hoosier's Nest," when the name was adopted all through the State as the popular title for its residents.

Inasmuch as future discoveries of very early uses of the word in print will probably be accidental, I would suggest that, if any be made, they be communicated to the *Quarterly*, in order that they may be recorded in permanent and available shape. Possibly some future discovery may throw more light on this interesting local puzzle.