

THE PROBLEM OF SPELLING REFORM.

IN the year 1867, Professor W. D. Whitney contributed to the New York "Nation" a series of articles on the subject of English spelling. At the outset he took the pains to describe the feeling then existing in regard to the desirability of reform, and there is no question that he described it accurately. According to his statement public sentiment was more unanimous and more bitter in its hostility to any change in orthography than it had been for a long period before. Movements which had once made some headway had either been abandoned or were on the point of being abandoned. The favorers of even the slightest reform were not only insignificant as regards numbers, they were even more insignificant as regards influence. If any feeling existed besides that of unquestioning acquiescence in what had come to be established, it was of a reactionary nature, for there was a growing disposition in this country to re-introduce any absurdity still found in the spelling used in Great Britain, which, by accident or design, or a lucky attack of common sense, had dropped out of the spelling used in America. The outlook was certainly gloomy enough to every one who felt that the present condition of English orthography was not merely a barrier to the spread of our tongue, but both a disgrace and an intellectual injury to the men who speak it.

Little more than fifteen years have gone by, and the change which has already taken place is remarkable. Whatever else it shows, it proves that there is no insuperable obstacle to the success of the movement, if its advocates are not only willing to labor, but are also willing to wait. It has already attained to a certain degree of popular favor. It is no longer ridiculed; it begins to be feared. The minds of most men, moreover, are now in a state in regard to it such as they have never been in before,—in a state in which they are prepared to examine fairly and dispassionately the arguments for or against change. This is certainly a great advance. There are some, accordingly, who think that public sentiment is already nearly ripe for a wide-reaching and radical reform. Anxious as I should be to find myself a false prophet, I see no such clear evidence of the speedy triumph of reason over prejudice and prescription. As most of the hostility to any change has been and still is due to pure ignorance of the condition in which our orthography is, so it is to be feared

that some of the favor with which a reform of it is regarded is also due to ignorance of what reform really means. In fact, from the very beginning, there have been in the present movement two parties holding widely different views. They may unite against a common foe; but a triumph there would be certain to be followed by a division among the conquerors. In this respect spelling reform is no different from any other reform. But while it is nothing to its discredit that this should be the case, it may be very much to its disadvantage if the fact is not recognized from the outset.

Moreover, it ought to be premised, that as no reform ever yet proved an unmixed blessing, neither will a reform of the spelling prove such, if actually accomplished. Especially will this be true of it at its introduction. A change on any wide scale in English orthography will involve for the time being grave disadvantages. Do the best we can, there must be a period of chaos. The conflict between the old that is going out and the new which is coming in, can not fail to produce more or less of confusion. Such a state of things has about it, on a small scale, much that is annoying, and, perhaps, some things even harmful. One peculiar difficulty, invariably attendant upon changes in the established spelling, deserves especial mention. This is the fact that any alteration of the usual form of a word, no matter how slight, is sure at first to attract the attention to the symbol, and distract it from the meaning which the symbol was intended to convey. These disadvantages and these disturbances last, indeed, only for a time; but they are very real while they do last. Those of us who believe that the permanent benefits accruing to the users of our tongue from a radical reform outweigh immensely the temporary inconveniences and annoyances to which they will be subject, can well afford to bear with the hesitation of those who like the end in view, but dislike the toil and trouble that must be gone through to reach it. The reasons of such for a reluctance to unsettle the existing condition of things are widely different from the pretentious objections urged against change by men who show by every word they utter, that it is a subject about which they have no knowledge and upon which they have spent no thought. The existence of a class of persons who look upon the present state of our

orthography as an evil, but an evil that can not be got rid of without costing more than the benefit received in return, must always be taken into consideration. When we add to them the large number of those who are opposed to change here, because they are opposed to change everywhere, we get some glimpse of the labor that will have to be done before the public mind has been educated up to the point of desiring to have a theoretical reform put into actual practice.

It would, therefore, be no hard task to show that a long time must elapse before any new system of orthography, however perfect, could hope for general adoption. For the purposes of this discussion, however, let it be assumed that this point has been reached; that a reform of some kind is generally looked upon not only as desirable, but as practicable. At once arises the question what shall be its nature? How far shall it be carried? On this very subject, as it has been intimated, there exist two parties; indeed, they have existed from a period long before the present movement was contemplated. They may be characterized by a slight difference in wording. One of them favors reform *in* English orthography, the other favors reform *of* English orthography. In one sense the second party would be included in the first, just as in the contest which led to the American civil war, those who sought the abolition of slavery could be reckoned among those who were opposed to its extension. Still the differences between the two are marked, and from certain points of view are fundamental. As to the one or other of these have belonged all those concerned in previous efforts for reform, and now do belong all those interested in the present effort, an exact account of the position each party occupies will show the different forces at work in this field, and the relation they bear to one another.

Reform *in* English orthography does not imply any sweeping change whatever. The spelling is to be left essentially what it is now. A number of simplifications only are to be adopted. One of the most important of these would naturally be the dropping of useless letters, particularly in those cases where the useless letter is misleading as to the derivation, as, for instance, the *h* in *rhyme*, the *c* in *scent*, and the *g* in *foreign* and *sovereign*. Another would be the reduction to uniformity of ending of words belonging to the same class. An illustration of this, familiar to all, would be the rejection of one of the two terminations *our* and *or*. A more marked change still would be a modification of spelling where the pronunciation required it.

Thus, the passive participle in *ed* would be written with *t*, when it was so sounded, as *mixt* and *fixt* for *mixed* and *fixed*. This already prevails to a certain degree; and the effort made here would simply be to extend a principle, which is now applied to some words, to every one of the class to which they belong.

All the changes which the advocates of reform *in* English orthography propose are of this nature. It is evident at a glance that alterations such as these are far from revolutionary. So little, indeed, are they of that character, that, if carried out completely, they would not materially affect the external appearance of the spelling. This is both the claim and the boast of those who seek for improvement in our orthography, but no thorough reconstruction of it. They pride themselves upon the fact that the changes which they wish to bring about are not radical and sweeping. They are in favor of what they call a judicious reform,—reform which, because it is judicious, is therefore practicable. Certainly it might seem at first view that a movement of this kind would need only to attract the attention of men in order to succeed. A believer in sweeping changes might find fault with it for falling far short of what it claimed to do; but what serious objection could be made by an advocate of the existing system against alterations, slight in themselves, and having no other effect, scarcely, than that of producing uniformity where there is now only arbitrary diversity? It would surely seem hard for a being, who believes that he has intellect enough to be lost or saved, to pretend that he sees any reason why the plural of words ending in *o* should in some cases be spelled with simple *s*, in other cases with *es*. Yet, as a matter of fact, against such changes as these the bitterest hostility has been shown in the past. Who is ignorant of the strife in regard to words ending in *or* or *our*, and the absurd arguments brought forward to sustain incorrect statements? Or take as even a more signal illustration the controversy about the terminations *er* or *re*, in which the assertion was often made by some, and believed by most, that in words like *theater*, *meter*, and *center* the spelling, with the ending *er* instead of *re*, was an unauthorized innovation of Webster's. The truth is, if my own special reading represents fairly the general practice, that in the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century, while both ways of writing these words existed side by side, the termination *er* is far more common than that in *re*. Let any one consult the original editions of Spenser, Ben Jonson, and Shak-

sperer, for the spelling of *theater*, at a time when the theater was in its highest glory, and it is safe to say that where the word is found ending in *re* once, it will be found three times, at the very least, ending in *er*. Particular facts may perhaps carry more weight than general assertions. The first complete edition of Shakspeare's plays was published in 1623. In that work *sepulcher* occurs thirteen times; it is spelled eleven times with *er*. *Scepter* occurs thirty-seven times; it is not once spelled with *re*, but always with *er*. *Center* occurs twelve times, and in nine instances out of the twelve it ends in *er*. It is needless to multiply further examples.

All these attempts, however, at so-called judicious reform have met, as has been said, with neglect as marked or with attacks as bitter as could have followed the most revolutionary suggestions. In part this result was a deserved one. A piecemeal restoration of anything, by one who does not intend to restore the whole in conformity, will always leave not only much to be desired, but introduce a great deal to be deprecated; and of this last the opponents of even the slightest change will be sure to make the most. It may be added, indeed, that much of the discredit which has attached to movements in favor of spelling reform in the past has been in many instances due to the imperfect knowledge of those who have been concerned in them. They saw that there was an evil, but they did not see what the evil was. They did not propose their half-way measures as preparations for something better; they looked upon them as final in themselves. It will be instructive to glance at some of these efforts, designed merely to improve, but not to reconstruct. It need hardly be said that reform of this partial kind could never be pressed conscientiously as reform, until after uniformity of spelling had been established; and, consequently, changes in orthography as distinguished from change of orthography do not go back to an early period, at least on any extensive scale. Nearly all of them took place in the latter half of the eighteenth century or the first half of the nineteenth, more especially in the former. Johnson's method of spelling was then felt, more than it was later, as a tyranny; for it was so new that all had not become used to it, and none had learned to love it, at least with the gushing affection of our time. Many there were who still remembered the former state of comparative freedom; a few who sought to set up rival thrones of their own. The crotchets, moreover, in which individual writers have indulged, have been numberless; but, as in the vast majority of cases the changes proposed by them have

been based upon no scientific principles, still less have been the product of any thoroughly worked-out theory; they have served little other purpose than to arrest momentarily the attention of the curious, and have had absolutely no influence whatever upon the orthography generally received. It is not necessary to remind readers familiar with the writings of the historian Mitford, of Archdeacon Hare, and of Walter Savage Landor, of the strange spellings they sometimes employed. One favorite object of hatred with all these partial reformers was the *s* of *island*; and, certainly, if it be just to single out one thing for abuse where there is so much contemptible, this would be a fair case; for it is one of the worst fruits of that alliance—too common with us—between writers who knew too much and printers who knew too little. The *s* of *island* was never pronounced. It did not belong to the word from which it came; it was never so written for several hundred years in English. But the blundering etymology of the sixteenth century inserted an *s*, and the printing-offices of the seventeenth century established *s* and perpetuated it. It is now so firmly fixed in the affections of most of us that the thought of its rejection from the word brings grief to many a happy household and burdens the columns of the newspapers with many an indignant protest.

Most of these attempts at reform have, in fact, not only been partial, but they have been merely in the direction of a mechanical uniformity which had not the slightest reason in the nature of things upon which to base itself. One illustration of this effort to bring about change which was not improvement can be found in the alterations proposed at the end of the last century by Joseph Ritson. To scholars, Ritson is well known as the fiercest of antiquaries, who loved accuracy with the same passion that other men love persons, and who hated a mistake, whether arising from ignorance or inadvertence, as a saint might hate a deliberate lie. He is equally well known for his devotion to a vegetable diet, and for the exhibition, at least in criticism, of a bloodthirstiness of disposition which the most savage of carnivorous animals might have contemplated with envy. The alterations he proposed and carried out in his published works tended in certain ways toward formal regularity; but they also tended to make the divergence between the spelling and the pronunciation still wider. For instance, the so-called regular verb in English usually adds *ed* to form the preterite. Ritson made the general rule universal, and appended the termination, also, to words ending in *e*; so that the past tense, for example,

of *love*, *oblige*, and *surprise*, would appear as *loveed*, *obligeed*, and *surpriseed*. As no body pronounces the one *e* which already exists in these preterites, the insertion of another unnecessary letter could have only the effect of adding an extra weight to the burden which these unfortunate words were carrying, as it was. Other changes proposed by Ritson were not so bad as this, but they were all valueless. He himself, however, was too thoroughly honest a man to pretend that he had arrived at any knowledge of the principles which underlie the reconstruction of our orthography, and appeared at last to lose all confidence in his own alterations. Under his influence his nephew had also been affected with the fever of reform, and spelled many words in a way different from that commonly followed. Ritson, in a letter written in 1795, informed his kinsman that he—the latter—was entirely ignorant of the principles both of orthography and pronunciation, and rather wished to be singular than studied to be right. "For my part," he added, "I am as little fitted for a master as you are for a scholar."

Such changes as these of Ritson provoked amusement rather than opposition. The knowledge of them, indeed, hardly came to the ears of those devoted but never very well informed idolaters of the existing orthography, who feel that the future of the English language and literature depends upon its present spelling, and that the preservation of that spelling in its purity, or rather in its impurity, rests mainly upon them. They did not attack Ritson's views, because they never heard of them. These changes, again, were too unscientific in their nature to be worthy of serious consideration by one who had the least comprehension of the difficulties under which our orthography labors. Ritson himself lived long enough not only to doubt the value of his own efforts, but to see that his efforts had been attended by positive pecuniary disadvantage to himself. In a letter to Sir Walter Scott, written in 1803, he tells that author that his publishers, the Longmans, thought that the orthography made use of in his life of King Arthur had been unfavorable to its sale. Yet this was a work addressed to a class of persons who might be supposed peculiarly free from prejudices of this sort. A fact of such a kind speaks stronger than volumes of dissertations, as to the opposition which reform of spelling must overcome before it can be by many even fairly considered.

But of these partial reforms it is the one proposed by Webster that is most familiar to Americans, and, perhaps, to all English-speaking readers; for the storm which it raised was violent enough at one time to be felt in all

lands where our tongue was employed. Nor has it so completely subsided that occasional mutterings of it are not even yet heard. The Websterian orthography, it is to be remarked at this point, is found only in its primitive, unadulterated purity in the edition of 1828. All dictionaries bearing other dates than that must be neglected by him who seeks to penetrate to the very well-head of this movement; for the author himself, or his revisers for him, bent before the orthographic gale, and silently struck out in the late editions every method of spelling which the popular palate could not be brought to endure, or inserted everything which it craved. No more than those who preceded him did Webster go to work upon correct principles, even when looked at from the point of view of a partial reform. One main defect pervading his plan was that it was an effort to alter the orthography, partly according to analogy and partly according to derivation. He could not well do both; and, moreover, he was often not consistent in the one, and very often not correct in the other. As far back as 1806 Webster had published an octavo dictionary of the English language. From that time for the next twenty years his attention was mainly directed to the compilation of such a work on a large scale. He soon found it necessary, he tells us, to discard the etymological investigations of his predecessors as being insufficient and untrustworthy, which they most certainly were; but, by way of remedying this defect, he devoted years to getting up a series of derivations which were more insufficient and untrustworthy still. In the process of doing this he made a study of some twenty languages, and formed a synopsis of the principal words in these, arranged in classes under their primary elements or letters. The results of this study were embodied in his dictionary of 1828, and the orthography was occasionally made to conform to it. Webster took a serene satisfaction in his new spellings; but it was upon his etymology that he prided himself. In his view it furnished a revelation of the hidden mysteries of language, and a solution of the problem of its origin. With his eyes intently fixed upon the tower of Babel, he probably never felt so happy as when he fancied he had come upon the trace of some English word found in the tongues made use of in the courts of Nimrod or Chedorlaomer. Nothing, indeed, could be absurder than the theory upon which he went, even had his assumed facts been trustworthy. The remote derivation of a word has little influence either upon the present spelling or meaning; and the attempt to make it do full service in either capacity shows a total misconception of the

principles which regulate the development of both. The science of comparative philology was then, indeed, in its infancy, and Webster cannot be held blameworthy for not anticipating discoveries subsequently made; but that man can never be regarded as a safe guide, in any department of investigation, who contents himself with an imperfect theory and forces his facts to accommodate themselves to it. Especially is he an unsafe guide who, in the matter of derivation, leaves the domain of the historical and certain for the plausible and possible. Webster had just enough of that half-learning which enables a man, when he arrives at correct conclusions, to give wrong reasons for them; and it was a natural consequence that there should be a mixture of truth and error in his statements. One noted instance may be cited. In the edition of 1828 *bridegroom* appears as *bridegoom*, and the existing form is censured as a gross corruption which ought no longer to remain as a reproach to philology. It may be asked, Why? Because the second syllable is derived directly from the Anglo-Saxon *guma*, which means a "man," and the letter *r* has etymologically no business there whatever. So far as regards the derivation, the answer is well enough; equally true it is that, if the pronunciation is to be considered, there is a good deal of business for the letter *r*. But Webster went on to add that the corruption sprang from confounding the *groom* of the compound *bridegroom* with the simple word *groom*; so that *bridegroom*, as usually written, instead of being a bride's man, really means a bride's hostler,—a position to which the humblest of suitors could hardly be expected to look forward with longing eyes, at any rate as a permanent situation. For the original of *groom*, accordingly, he abandoned Europe and ventured into Asia, and there found a Persian word *germa*, meaning "hostler." This he captured and impressed into service, and made it do duty as the ancestor of *groom*; though when and under what circumstances it took its journey of several thousand miles to reach the English he did not think it worth while to tell us. There is scarcely any reasonable doubt that the *groom* of our simple word and of the compound is precisely the same, an *r* having been inserted in it, as in *vagrant*, *hoarse*, and several other words.

Strange to say, this weak and absurd etymologizing is even to this day spoken of with respect by many of Webster's critics, who have no feeling but horror for the conduct of the man that could seriously propose to spell *center* with *er* instead of *re*. It is a hard thing to say of a work which has taken up the greater part of the life-time of an earnest

student, that it is of little value; but there is not the slightest doubt that nearly all of Webster's supposed philological discoveries were the merest rubbish, and all inferences based upon them, in regard to the proper method of spelling, were utterly unworthy of respect. The derivation, indeed, had at last to follow the fate which had already overtaken a great deal of the new orthography. Its retention was a little too much for the last revisers of the dictionary, who in the edition of 1864 swept away at one fell swoop, into the limbo of forgettable and forgotten things, the fruits of twenty years of etymological study, and put in their place derivations which fairly represented the latest and best results of modern scholarship. Those conclusions, which in the eyes of the author had given him the key to unlock the hidden secrets of language, are no longer allowed to appear on the pages of the very work which perpetuates his name.

The changes of another sort, based upon analogy, which Webster introduced with the idea of making the spelling of certain classes of words uniform, are liable to little positive objection, at least by those who advocate merely a partial reform. A few of them, in spite of violent opposition, have in this country fully held their own. The consequence is, that in case of a certain number of words we have two methods of spelling in common use,—a state of things which, it seems to me, every one who has the reform of our orthography at heart must contemplate with unqualified satisfaction. Not that Webster's proposed changes, even had they been generally adopted, would have gone to the real root of the evil. Far from it. At best they merely touch the surface, and then in only a few places. But one effect they have produced. They have in some measure prevented us, and do still prevent us, from falling into the dead level of an unreasoning uniformity. By bringing before us two methods of spelling, they keep open the question of the legitimacy of each, and expose to every unprejudiced investigator the utter shallowness of the argument that opposes change. Slight as these alterations were, however, they met with the bitterest hostility on their introduction. The love of little things is deeply implanted in the human mind. It is, therefore, natural, perhaps, that the minor changes in spelling which Webster proposed should have met with an attack far more violent than that which was directed against his tremendous etymological speculations; and on the publication of Worcester's dictionary, which adhered to the generally received orthography, a wordy war arose which lasted

for years. Combatants from every quarter leaped at once into the arena. They were easily equipped for the contest, for virulence was the main thing required. Intellect was not essential to the discussion, and knowledge would have been a death-blow to it. The war of the dictionaries, as it was called, is therefore of interest to us at this point of time, not for any principle involved in it, but mainly as an illustration of how earnestly and even furiously men can be got to fight for a cause they do not understand. There is no question, indeed, but Webster laid himself open to attack. Perfect consistency is not to be looked for in this world; but the man who sets out to make only a partial reform of English orthography cannot help being inconsistent, and inadvertence will add failures of its own to the contradictions involved in the very incompleteness of his scheme. In both respects the lexicographer did not carry out the principles he had avowed. There were whole classes of words which he hesitated to change; and the reformer, no less than the woman who hesitates, is lost. Of these half-measures, whether due to oversight or to doubt, one illustration will suffice. No man who seeks to make orthography etymologically uniform can have failed to notice the difference in spelling in words derived from the compounds of the Latin *cedo*. Why should *proceed* be written with *ceed* and *precede* with *cede*? Here was a glaring anomaly which, on the principles of analogy, demanded to be removed, if anything did. But Webster was unequal to the occasion. He spelled, for instance, in the edition of 1828, *exceed* with *ceed* and *accede* with *cede*, which every one does, to be sure, but which he personally had no business to do. In conformity with his avowed views he was bound to make uniform the orthography of all the words which come from the Latin *cedo*. As he failed to do this, the same sort of contumely fell upon him that awaits every reformer who shrinks from the logical results of his own principles. The fact of the matter is that Webster was so much under the sway of the devil of derivation that spelling by analogy occupied a very subordinate position in his mind. His work is only deserving of notice because it happened in some cases to be successful. Its chief value, as has already been implied, consists in the fact that it has kept alive a feeling of hostility to the present orthography of the English tongue; that it has saved many from paying a silly and slavish deference to the opinions of a not very well-informed lexicographer of the eighteenth century; and that by these means it has given to some a hope, to others a fear, to all a warning, that, however long

Philistia may cling to her idols, they will be broken at last.

These slight attempts at change have met with unreasoning opposition in the past. Still the world does move. Many will now be found who, while utterly disapproving any project of radical reform, have yet got on to a point at which they are willing to admit that we are not so absolutely perfect that we cannot be improved. Some of those who naturally belong to the party of opposition to all change now go so far as to express themselves in favor of certain modifications and alterations. It is, of course, understood that these must be judicious—for that adjective always plays a conspicuous part when men are talking about measures which they do not thoroughly comprehend. It need hardly be said that none of these so-called judicious reforms, which consist merely in simplifying the spelling of certain words or certain classes of words, could ever be satisfactory, as a final result, to any one who had a clear conception of the nature of the problem to be solved, and, as a consequence, had in view a real and not pretended reformation of English orthography. True, he would sympathize with a movement of this kind, so far as it went. In fact, he would go farther. Nearly all the advocates of reform of orthography would unite in saying that it must be preceded by reform in orthography; that, imperfect and unsatisfactory as is the latter, it is a step necessary to be taken in order to arrive at the former. It is only thus that the tyranny of the existing system can be broken down, with all the absurd notions that have flourished under its shade,—notions of its sacredness, of its historical interest, of its etymological value, of its close connection with the literature of our tongue. But any movement that stopped short with changing the spelling of certain classes of words would be little improvement on the chaos in which we are at present; so little, indeed, that if it is not to be a stepping-stone to something better and complete, it would hardly be worth the time and trouble it would cost to bring it about. For this partial reform, this judicious alteration is not in any proper sense of the word a reform at all. At this point of the discussion it becomes a matter of first importance to bring out plainly and sharply the exact character of the evil which afflicts English orthography; for, often as it has been stated, it is evidently not yet comprehended by large numbers of even educated men. When once the nature of the disease is understood, it may not be easy to find the remedy that will cure it; but it

does become at once very manifest that certain nostrums which find favor with many will not cure it.

The fundamental evil does not lie in the existence of useless letters, which in so many cases are, in addition to their uselessness, the records of fictitious history or perverted etymology. This is something that needs especially to be insisted upon, because it is against these "interesting encumbrances and anomalies," as the London "Times" calls them, that efforts at reform are naturally at first directed; and what is only a side issue, though an important one, becomes to the minds of many the main issue. This fundamental evil, as it is generally stated, lies in the fact that our language, as at present spelled, has a multitude of signs for the same sound, and a multitude of sounds for the same sign. But an abstract statement of this kind means little or nothing to the mass of men; a few examples may make it mean a great deal. Let us take, for instance, the vowel-sound which is seen in the words *met*, *sweat*, *any*, *said*, *says*, and *jeopard*. Here is one sound, that of short *e*, which is represented in these various words by six different signs, by *e*, by *ea*, by *a*, by *ai*, by *ay*, by *eo*. Take again the vowel-sound heard in *rude*, *move*, *rood*, *routine*, *rheum*, *drew*, *shoe*, *rued*, and *bruise*. Here the same sound is represented by nine signs: by *u*, by *o*, by *oo*, by *ou*, by *eu*, by *ew*, by *oe*, by *ue*, and by *ui*. Take again the sound which we call "long *e*," which was originally with us represented by *i*, and which is still so represented in other languages. It is found in *meet*, *mete*, *meat*, *machine*, *grief*, *receive*, *key*, *people*, *agis*, and is thus denoted by the nine different signs of *ee*, of *e*, of *ea*, of *i*, of *ie*, of *ei*, of *ey*, of *eo*, of *æ*. This will do for one side of the shield; the other cannot be said to present a more attractive view. The sign *ou* has six different sounds, according to it is found in the words *sour*, *pour*, *would*, *tour*, *sought*, and *couple*; the sign *ea* has five different sounds as seen in *heat*, *sweat*, *great*, *heart*, and *heard*. Illustrations similar to these could be multiplied; but enough have been given to show the nature of the evil under which we suffer. These, moreover, are neither accidental nor extreme instances of the lawlessness which runs riot in the spelling of our tongue. What is true of these vowels, or of these combinations of vowels, is true of all the others, and of the sounds denoted by them; and as there is no word into which a vowel does not enter, it follows that there is no English word which cannot be justifiably spelt according to the analogy of the received orthography in a variety of ways.

Kind, for illustration, can be written *keind*, for in this way is written *height*; it can be written *kuind*, for so is *guile*; it can be written *keynd*, for so is *eye*; it can be written *kynd*, for so is *type*; it can be written *kuynd*, for so is *buy*; it can be written *kaind*, for so is *aisle*; it can be written *kiend*, for so is *relied*. The whole vowel-system is in a state of chaos; and if confusion existed to the same extent among the consonants, the acquisition of English orthography would be the work of a life-time. Fortunately, the latter have largely remained true to the office for which they were created, though even here there are anomalies enough to give plenty of employment to those who favor partial measures of reform. Thus *d* has sometimes the sound of *t*, *f* that of *v*, *g* that of *j*, and the sound of *k* or "c hard" is not only represented by these two letters, but by *ch* and by *q*. But the trouble with the consonants is not only slight in itself, comparatively speaking, but, in the majority of cases where it exists, it is not that they are pronounced improperly, but that they are not pronounced at all.

It is a necessary consequence of the arbitrary and varying sounds given to the vowels, or the combinations of vowels, that learning to spell has become with us a purely mechanical process. As an intellectual discipline it is as utterly valueless as mere memorizing, where the student does not understand what he is going over. Like that, it is also a positive intellectual injury. At the very outset of his education the child is introduced into a study in which one natural process, that of reasoning from analogy, is summarily suppressed. He finds at once, because the sound in one word is represented one way, that it does not follow, as it ought, that in the next word he comes to it will be represented the same way. On the contrary, he finds it denoted by an entirely different combination of letters, for no reason which he can possibly discover. Instead of spelling doing the proper and legitimate business of teaching him the knowledge and distinction of sounds, it takes the speediest and most effectual method of preventing his attainment of any such knowledge; for it not merely neglects to call his attention to it, it forces him to disregard it, to look upon it as an element not properly to be considered. He does not learn to forget, for he never has known that there is any particular value to any vowel, or to any combination of vowels; and when he grows up he is naturally ready to despise what he is unable to comprehend. In the case of the consonants he is somewhat better off; and this is what saves our orthography from total anarchy, and makes it possi-

ble for any large number to learn it at all. An indirect but striking result of this lawlessness is that the English race, as a race, has no knowledge whatever of sounds; that one whole important domain of knowledge, which ought to have come to them through their spelling, almost without their being aware of it, is lost to them entirely. Evidences of this wide-spread and profound ignorance exist on every side, though they naturally find their most conspicuous public manifestation in the writings of those who argue in favor of the present orthography. Two or three years ago, a series of articles appeared in a Western periodical, attacking the movement in favor of a reform, and in it occur these sentences: "We are asked," says the author, "to spell *are* without the *e*, because that letter is not pronounced. Very well; then drop the *a*, for that is not pronounced either." In the same spirit the writer goes on to say that fanatical advocates of change should denote the words *see* and *sea* simply by *c*—"spelling only the letter sounded." Here is a person producing a series of articles on orthography who is so utterly unacquainted with the primary elementary facts of spelling as to fancy that the sound of *r* and *c* by themselves is the same as the name we give to those letters; who does not know that the name cannot be pronounced unless a vowel precedes the *r* and follows the *c*. Yet it is safe to say that nine out of every ten readers of these articles did not notice the absurdity of the statement which declares that *a* is not pronounced in *are*, or that *sea* and *see* could be properly spelled by simple *c*. It will be hard for many to comprehend it, even after their attention is called to it. This unnecessary ignorance reacts upon the feelings with which the idea of reform is regarded. The educated class have so largely with us come to look upon the alphabet as a mere mechanical contrivance, they have so entirely lost sight of the object for which it exists, that they are, in many cases, almost disposed to resent the proposition that they should employ it for the purposes for which it was created. It would be thinking too meanly of human nature, however, to infer that men could delight in this condition of things if they once came fully to appreciate it. But to that point very few of them ever arrive; and ignorance of the real evil disposes them to look with distrust upon any attempts to remedy it. Inaccurate assertions, based upon the loosest thinking, are constantly uttered. One writer gravely informs us that it is an insuperable objection to change of our orthography, that it would make necessary another formative period in the history of our language;

and, for fear that the full force of this terrible indictment should be overlooked, he prints it in italics. What possible conception can exist in the mind of such an objector as to what constitutes a formative period in the history of speech? Does spelling reform introduce new words or give new meanings to old ones? Does it destroy existing inflections or add any to their number? Does it vary in the slightest the order of words in the sentence or cause the least modification of the least important rule of syntax? It might just as reasonably be said that the putting on of a new suit of clothes makes necessary a new formative period in the history of a man's life. Yet the current objections to spelling reform are largely made up of assertions of this kind, which are nothing more than the results of inaccurate knowledge or careless thinking. The ignorance of the whole subject is sometimes amusing, sometimes disheartening; it is always appalling.

Owing, therefore, to the confusion into which our orthography has fallen and the attitude of mind which the men of our race have assumed toward the subject, the problem of reforming it would, under the most favorable circumstances, be a hard one. But it is, with us, complicated by difficulties of another kind. To get a proper conception of these, it is necessary to fix our eyes on an ideally correct condition of things. This can be stated briefly but clearly. In order that a language shall be spelled properly, it is necessary that every letter or combination of letters should have a fixed and unalterable sound wherever appearing; and, in turn, that every sound should have its fixed and unalterable representation in a particular letter or combination of letters. The moment a word is seen, the reader must know how to pronounce it; the moment it falls upon his ear the hearer must know how to spell it. Of all the cultivated tongues of Christendom we stand at the farthest remove from this ideally correct state. After us, though at a long distance, follows the French. It is partly our fault, and partly our misfortune, that this should be the case. If it continues to be such, it is wholly our fault. In exhibiting our exact condition, it is necessary to bring into sharp contrast the number of sounds existing in the language and the means of representing them afforded by the English alphabet. It is a view that not only makes clear the desirability of reform, but also the long and sustained effort that will be needed before it can be carried into practical effect.

Let us give its full weight here to one objection to spelling reform which has, what most objections have not, a show of reason.

The number of sounds belonging to our speech is differently given by different orthoëpists of established reputation. If here there were important and radical variations, this might justly be considered fatal to any scheme of reform. But this variation is very far from being either important or radical. It is confined to the representation of two or three vowel-sounds. It may possibly be due to differences of analysis, according to which a particular sound is looked upon by one man as entirely distinct from some other sound, and, by another man, as a mere shade of it; but far more probably, in fact, pretty certainly, it arises from actual difference of pronunciation. In any spelling reform, authoritatively established, such disagreements must be, and would be settled by compromise, by general concurrence in what was to be regarded as the proper pronunciation. Outside of the vowel-sounds referred to, there is no essential disagreement between leading orthoëpists; and, in consequence, the number of sounds in our language is stated almost invariably as somewhat over forty. The precise number is of no importance in the following discussion; and, for the sake of convenience, I shall follow the analysis of them as laid down for his own usage by Professor Whitney, in his essay on the Elements of English Pronunciation, contained in the volume forming the second series of his "Oriental and Linguistic Studies." In this analysis there are twenty-four sounds given to the consonants, and nineteen to the vowels and diphthongs; consequently, forty-three in all.

Before going farther, however, it may be well to give a passing notice to one ghastly specter of an argument that haunts the imagination of many opposers of spelling reform. This is, that variation of sounds are almost numberless, and cause a marked difference of pronunciation in different districts of the same country. They are, moreover, often so delicate as to defy representation. You could not denote them, they tell us, if you would; and if you could, you would be encumbered, rather than aided, by the multiplicity of signs. Of all the hallucinations that disturb the mental vision of the advocates of the existing orthography, this is, perhaps, the most dismal, as well as the most unreal. The answer is a simple and easy one: These differences would go unrepresented. No alphabet that is intended to be a working one would ever set out to distinguish any but broadly marked and clearly defined sounds. The philologist can get up for his own use characters conveying delicate distinctions, even of intonation; the common man does not need them. For the latter, it is no more important that

shades of sounds should be denoted in his alphabet than it would be important for him to lug about an astronomical clock, with a compensation pendulum warranted to preserve uniformity of movement in all temperatures and in all climates. It is, in truth, with our pronunciation as it is with our time-pieces. None of our watches run precisely alike. Few, if any, can be called unqualifiedly correct; yet, by the aid of these imperfect and always disagreeing instruments, we manage to transact, with little friction and delay, the daily business of a life in which we have constantly to depend upon one another. So, in the matter of sounds, a phonetic alphabet would mark only those broad and clear distinctions which are apparent to the ear of ordinary men. Orthography based upon such an alphabet would assume, as the very foundation upon which to build itself, the existence of a standard pronunciation. It is that alone which the spelling would recognize. Provincial speakers, as a consequence, would have always before their eyes, in the form of the word itself, the proper pronunciation of it, by which they would be able to compare, and, if necessary, to correct their own.

The real difficulties in the way, however, are great enough without troubling our thoughts about these imaginary ones, which are merely the offspring of limited knowledge or of limited capacity, or, more usually, of the combination of limited knowledge with large incapacity. The very statement of the problem itself shows how hard a one it is to solve. Assuming for our purposes the precise correctness of the analysis above given, there are forty-three sounds to be represented; there are twenty-six letters to represent them. Or, taking out of consideration the diphthongs, which can easily be indicated by the combination of the two vowels that enter into them, and the vocalic *n* and *l*, which would need no separate symbols, we have thirty-eight simple sounds to be represented by twenty-six letters.

Unfortunately, even this does not fairly state the difficulties of the problem. In our alphabet, as it now exists, some of the signs are superfluous. One of these is *g*, which has invariably the sound of *k*, or "*c* hard." It did not belong to the original English alphabet, but in that its place was supplied by *c*. *X* is another useless letter. At the beginning of words it is pronounced as *z*; in the middle as *ks* or *gz*; at the end as *ks*. Again, either *c* or *k* is unnecessary; for the former has ordinarily either the sound of the latter or that of *s*. Consequently the original statement of the problem needs modification. For

our thirty-eight sounds we have really but twenty-three signs, eighteen belonging to the consonants and five to the vowels. Of the thirty-eight sounds, orthoëpists agree in giving twenty-four to the so-called consonants. It follows, therefore, that in our present alphabet six of these consonant sounds have no special signs for their representation. These six are the sounds represented by the *ch* of *church*; by the *ng* of *sing*; by the *sh* of *ship*; by the *s* of *pleasure*, by the surd and sonant sounds of *th*, found respectively in *thin*, *bath*, and in *then*, *bathe*. It is not to be understood that these sounds are invariably represented by these letters or combinations of letters; far from it. The *sh* of *ship* is also represented by *ti* in *nation*, by *ci* in *gracious*, by *xi* in *anxious*, by *ce* in *ocean*, by *sci* in *conscience*, and by *s* in *sure*; the *s* of *pleasure* is also represented by the *z* of *azure*, the *si* of *occasion*, the *zi* of *glazier*. So much for the consonants. For the remaining fourteen vowel-sounds there are five signs. Assuming in theory what might be found difficult in practice, that each sign could be made properly to do the double duty of denoting the long and short sounds of the same vowel, there will still be left, according to this analysis, four vowel-sounds for which special signs are lacking.

Here, then, in the condition of the alphabet, is the great problem, stated briefly, that meets us in any real reform of our spelling. There are other difficulties to be overcome; but all together are insignificant as compared with this one. It is far from being a new problem. It has engaged the attention of men from an early period. There were several projects for reforming the spelling on phonetic principles during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; but all of them were the work of scholars, acting independently, and with little means of bringing their schemes to the attention of the public. They excited, in consequence, little if any notice at the time, and need not be described here. Some mention, however, is due, at least from us, of an attempt at reform undertaken in the latter half of the eighteenth century by one of the greatest of Americans. This was Benjamin Franklin. His ever active mind, busying itself with all matters that concern the welfare of the human race, was not apt to let this subject pass unobserved. In the sixth volume of the collected edition of his writings will be found discussions on a vast variety of topics, such as the properties of linseed oil, experiments on the culture of grass in meadows, the defects of modern music, and the cause and cure of smoky chimneys. Conspicuous among them is the scheme of a

new alphabet and a reformed mode of spelling. Into his alphabet Franklin introduced six new characters. Two of these were for the vowels, one representing the sound heard in the words *ball*, *song*, *haul*, *law*, *bought*, and *broad*; the other the sound heard in the words *but*, *love*, *flood*, and *touch*. The other four were for the consonants, representing the *sh* of *ship*, the *ng* of *sing*, and the two sounds clumsily represented in modern English by the *th* of *thin* and *then*. But, while he added six, Franklin omitted six of the present alphabet, *c*, *q*, *w*, *x*, *y*, and *z*, their places being taken by others or by combinations of others. To his account of this alphabet—an account which ends abruptly and is apparently unfinished—are appended examples of the new orthography, and a reply to objections brought against it. So firm was Franklin's faith in his scheme of reform that he set about compiling a dictionary, and procured types to be cast, which he subsequently offered to Webster with a view to engage him in the prosecution of his design. The latter declined the gift, as he himself declares, because he deemed the introduction of new characters into the language neither practicable nor expedient. Franklin's scheme was produced in 1768; but duties, at once graver and more stirring, not only distracted his attention from the project, but deprived him of both leisure and opportunity to carry it out. But, though he never published anything more bearing directly on this subject, there is no doubt that to his dying day he continued to entertain the most profound contempt for the existing orthography of the English tongue. Nor did he hesitate to express what he felt. In 1786, four years before his death, he referred to the subject in a letter written to a lady with whom he was in correspondence. "You need not," he said, "be concerned in writing to me about your bad spelling; for in my opinion, as our alphabet now stands, the bad spelling, or what is called so, is generally the best, as conforming to the sounds of the letters and of the words." This is, to say the least, stating it rather strongly; much more strongly, perhaps, than the most radical of modern reformers would be inclined to state it, unless he, too, were writing to a lady whose orthography deviated decidedly from the orthodox pattern.

The most noteworthy attempt, however, at reforming orthography on pure phonetic principles, has taken place during the present century. More than thirty years ago, Mr. Isaac Pitman, and Mr. Alexander J. Ellis, two names well known to linguistic students, perfected the invention of a new alphabet, in which every sound would be represented by

one character, and by one only. It consisted of forty letters. Books were printed in it, and during 1848 a phonetic journal was begun, or rather succeeded a so-called phonotypic journal previously existing. For a time the scheme met with some degree of favor, and the movement extended even to this country; but as a popular reform it attained notoriety rather than success. The public mind was not in the least prepared for a change so bold and sweeping in its character. But it would be a mistake to suppose that the influence of the attempt then made ever died out. To this day the phonetic periodical begun in 1848 has continued to appear regularly. It is still conducted by Mr. Pitman; its weekly circulation is over twelve thousand, and is steadily increasing. The influence, directly and indirectly exerted by it, especially in England, in furthering the movement now in progress, is something that can not well be estimated, or, perhaps, it would be more proper to say, can not well be over-estimated. It ought to be added that the phonetic alphabet now used by Mr. Pitman differs in certain respects from that previously devised by him and Mr. Ellis. His present one consists of forty-one letters, or combinations of letters, twenty-four being given to the consonants and seventeen to the vowels and diphthongs.

The details of these attempts, so far as they have been given, have been introduced mainly to make clear the nature of a fallacy that underlies many of the arguments of the reformers themselves. It is no unfrequent assertion on the part of some of them that such and such a proposed change cannot be carried through; and the reason invariably given has been that it has been tried in previous efforts and has failed. This is a mistaken inference drawn from an incorrect statement. The English-speaking race has never had an opportunity as yet to pronounce decisively whether it would favor or oppose any special scheme of reform; unless it is meant to be asserted that because some particular person has proposed a change which has been let alone by the rest of the world, that, therefore, the rest of the world is opposed to it and would always be opposed to it. For it is not by scattered and independent efforts that even slight reforms are carried; and the reform of English orthography is a very great one. It is not in such ways that the feelings of men are tested or their understandings enlightened. No reform of any kind ought to succeed, or ought to be expected to succeed, until it has been fully canvassed and discussed, until all possible objections have been urged against it, and all reasons for it made clear to those most interested. Nothing

of this has ever been done in the case of our orthography, save on a most limited scale. Even when the minds of many are fully convinced, such is the power of actual possession, that it would require positive and prolonged effort to dislodge what the judgments of men really disapproved, but which has been linked to their feelings by the associations of a life-time. The failures of the past are not at all surprising, if indeed it is right to apply the word failures to projects which, so far from gaining coöperation, have not been successful enough even to attract attention. From nothing which has been attempted can we draw any just inferences as to what can be done. Because individual men, or small companies of men, making inroads upon a kingdom disconnectedly, or at wide intervals of time, are unable to make upon it any perceptible impression, it does not follow that the attack of a great and regularly organized army will not succeed in overthrowing it. Moreover, the conditions now are different from what they have ever been before. For the first time all linguistic scholars are unanimous in regard to the desirability of change. Hitherto they have been divided in opinion, or, perhaps, it would be truer to say that the vast majority have been opposed to any interference with what has come to be established. As this unanimity of scholars can no longer be questioned, it is not at all unnatural that we should now be assured by the friends of the existing orthography that it is, after all, a matter of no real consequence; that, in truth, for a man's opinion to be of value on the subject of spelling reform, it is a decided disqualification that he should know too much about language generally, or about the particular language that is undergoing investigation. Such persons, we are told, come to look upon speech as a subject of historical inquiry, of analysis, of comparison; and long devotion to these topics so deadens their natural feelings that they cease to think of it as an instrument of communication. This doctrine of the advantages resulting from the lack of knowledge is so consolatory in its nature to its originators that its soundness will seem suspicious to most from that very fact. A ridiculous deference will, without doubt, still continue to be paid by many to the opinions of those who know something about the subject; at least until those who do not have authoritatively laid down the precise amount of ignorance of language it is necessary for one to acquire in order to constitute him a proper judge of what ought to be done in this matter of spelling reform.

I have sought to make clear the immense difficulties in the way of any genuine reform

of our orthography; to point out that these consist not merely in the hold it has upon the prejudice and ignorance of men, but in the lawlessness which pervades the whole of our spelling, and in the imperfection of the alphabet which aims to represent it. Languages that are already written, almost as they are pronounced, find no great hardship in introducing the few further improvements that are needed to bring them into perfect conformity. But the task before us is something so toilsome and perplexing that we cannot afford to have any false conceptions of its exact nature, or to underrate the exertions necessary to accomplish it. Least of all can we afford to engage in schemes which would imperil if not sacrifice ultimate success for the sake of a possible but partial reform which would prove so imperfect that it would require at some future time to be done over again. The movement can make its way only by slow steps. It is far better that it should be so, as it most certainly will be so. The point most to be insisted upon is, that the slight reforms which are adopted now shall be in the line of a thorough-going scientific reform. It is mere prejudices that must first be overthrown; and these always give way reluctantly. But the education of the public mind is already going on with us under the lead of a portion of the press, which has adopted and is, in consequence, making familiar new modes of spelling certain words; and the influence of this sort of education increases not arithmetically, but geometrically. It is efforts such as these that must and will pave the way to that general coöperation which is essential to complete success. True, it is quite possible that such coöperation will never be attained until after the failure of many particular projects. On details of the movement, opinion among the advocates of change is now divided. It is inevitable that this should be so; though by some it seems to be regarded as a subject of special reproach, that in reference to a great and wide-spread evil there should be difference of views as to what would best effect its cure. So long as this difference of view exists, however, it may not be improper in any one to express his opinion upon certain questions which are now to some extent matters of discussion, provided he does not assume to represent the sentiments of any besides himself.

The very first point of divergence among advocates of thorough reform is in regard to the manner of denoting sounds. All agree that each should have its special sign. Shall this be done by a combination of the present letters, or by the introduction of new ones? In reference to this question two parties exist,

though it is to be added that they do not differ as to the desirability of new characters, but as to the practicability of their adoption. It must certainly be admitted that the introduction of new letters is something that, in the present state of public opinion, would not meet with wide acceptance. But the Roman alphabet is so utterly inadequate to the demand made upon it for the representation of English sounds that the creation of new characters seems to me a necessity of the situation. Nor would they be more difficult of acceptance than the clumsy combinations which would be required if we confined ourselves to the existing imperfect alphabet. Our language, in the course of its history, has taken to itself letters that it did not need; unfortunately, it has let go some that it did need. To restore these latter and to introduce others would be a task far harder now than at any previous period; but, from what will be said farther on, it will be seen to be a task harder in appearance than in reality.

Another point of controversy is the necessity of a uniform, and therefore, in a certain sense, of a fixed orthography corresponding to pronunciation. There is a party among the advocates of reform who do not believe in this. Their number is apparently very small; but at the head of them is a scholar so distinguished as Mr. Alexander J. Ellis. It is a curious illustration of how extremes meet, that these men, despising and even spitting upon the existing orthography, as they do, are as hostile to the slightest change in it as its most fanatical advocates. "Alter our present spelling in detail," says Mr. Ellis, "and you destroy its sole merit. I have an intense dislike to *honor*, *favor*, *humor* (without *u*), *emperour* (plus *u*), *furnisht*, *announc*, *rhymes* (minus *h*), and so on. I have 'given in' to *draft* for *draught*, but have not yet reached *laft* for *laughed*, and so on." Mr. Ellis believes only in an orthography that reflects the pronunciation of the speaker; and as the pronunciation would vary with the individual, so necessarily would the spelling. The existing method he would keep as a mechanical means of classifying words in a dictionary, and for that reason would have it fixed. "However much the language may hereafter vary," he says, in another place, "this crystallized form should remain. No change of any kind or from any cause should be permitted. Otherwise, to the enormous practical evil of an orthography which has no connection with sound, which helps no one to read and no one to spell, will be added the last stage of uncertainty."

According to his own theory it is obvious at a glance, that if Mr. Ellis's ideas could be carried into effect, the acquisition of the

standard spelling would still be a necessity for all of us in order to enjoy the advantage of the classification of it as found in the dictionary; and so long as we have to learn it, there is no reason why we should not use it for every purpose. But the conditions of modern life are utterly opposed to individuality of pronunciation or of its representation. Whatever may have been true of the past, a uniform orthography is a necessity of the present. Men now learn a large share of the language they use by the eye; and much of it which occurs in writing rarely enters into conversation. This is a state of things which renders reasoning inapplicable now which would have been true enough of a speech that was acquired wholly or almost wholly by the ear. The day has gone by when every man could be his own Webster or Worcester. The philologist who is in the habit of seeing the same word under different forms may not care for one that is fixed; to him who never reads at all, the subject would, of course, be a matter of indifference. But to the vast majority of men the word as spelled, and as spelled in a particular way, comes to have certain associations connected with it, by which it is made familiar and finally dear. It is in this fact that the strength of the present system lies; and any system which is to take its place must recognize and defer to a feeling which general habits of reading have made nearly universal. For it will increase, rather than decline, with the further spread of education. So marked is even now the influence of the training of the eye, as compared with that of the ear, that there is an effort consciously or unconsciously going on to modify the sound of the word as we have heard it, to the form of it which we have been accustomed to see. It is no unusual thing to hear persons painfully striving to pronounce the final *n* of *condemn*, *contemn*, and verbs like these, and making themselves very miserable when they fail, and others very miserable when they succeed. But the gap between the present spelling and pronunciation is with us too wide and impassable for the latter ever to close up. The most it can do is in the process of time to take up a few letters that are now silent, or substitute a few forms etymologically correct for the corruptions by which they have been supplanted.

It is for the reason just stated, if others were wanting, that a uniform orthography becomes a necessity. But this is something that seems to many a fatal objection to phonetic spelling. It is in reality one of the strongest arguments in its favor. Let me state fully and fairly the case of those who look upon this as a damaging admission. "You believe," they say, "in spelling accord-

ing to sound. Assuming that a standard pronunciation exists, that pronunciation is constantly changing: it is to that fact mainly that we owe the present divergence between it and its representation. Your orthography cannot be uniform, because your pronunciation is not uniform; it cannot remain fixed, because pronunciation does not remain fixed." This is an ancient and plausible objection, and, before the history of language was as well understood as it is now, appeared to some an insurmountable one. Uniform phonetic spelling, it has already been pointed out, assumes the existence of a standard classical pronunciation to be determined, if need be, by investigation, but, at any rate, to be determined. But phonetic spelling, when once established, will have the most marked influence upon fixity of form. Paradoxical as it may seem, it is nevertheless true, that radical reform of English orthography is a conservative movement. A phonetic spelling, once generally adopted, will as certainly check change in utterance as an established literature checks changes in inflections or in syntactical constructions. Pronunciation with us has been and is constantly varying, because there has not existed, nor does there exist, anywhere, a rule of right to which it feels called upon to conform. We are all at the mercy of this lawlessness. The life of every one of us is in this respect a series of surprises, as day by day we meet with some fresh illustration of that perpetual conflict which in our tongue is waged between the form of a word and its sound. No small share of our time is spent in the consultation of dictionaries for the purpose of ascertaining some authorized pronunciation; no insignificant part of our conversation is taken up with the discussion of this ever-present topic. But a phonetic spelling, once established, would teach its own pronunciation without help from any other quarter. Its existence would be the greatest barrier that could be erected against change of sound. The degradation of the fundamental vowel-tone of the voice, the *a* as heard in *father*, has been and is still going on rapidly; a fixed sign for the sound would at once arrest the process in all words in which it is now taking place. Variation in pronunciation there cannot fail to be while our language is a living one, just as there is variation in grammar and vocabulary; but, as with the latter that variation is reduced to the lowest possible limits when once a standard literature is created, so will it be with the former when once a standard phonetic spelling is established. Change of sound which then occurs will not as now be lawless,

subject to the freaks of fashion and the caprices of a fickle taste carrying into effect the fancies of a particular class. It will be too firmly fixed to be affected by agencies so slight as these. All the mighty influence wielded by education imposing its laws upon the child, and a printed literature appealing constantly to the eye of the adult, will be unceasingly at work to hold pronunciation steady to its place. Whatever movement it undergoes will be in accordance with a general tendency, in which all members of the English-speaking race will share. As changes in grammar are now made only at long intervals of time, and are adopted slowly and sometimes imperceptibly, and without inconvenience to the users of speech, so it will be in the changes of sound which will take place when a phonetic spelling is employed by all. The influence of an agency so imperfect and so little referred to as the pronouncing dictionary has been conspicuously manifest during the past hundred years in arresting alteration in the utterance of words. How infinitely more conservative would be a method of representation which men do not consult occasionally and in particular instances, but every time they open a book and during every moment they read!

There is one further consideration connected with the practical adoption of any such reform. To me it seems utterly hopeless to expect that any large body of grown-up men, who have once learned a particular method of spelling, however wretched, will give it up and adopt another, however perfect. Individuals, in some cases from choice, in more cases from necessity, will doubtless do it; but never the great mass of the users of speech. Life is too short to go through that fiery trial a second time. A reformed orthography may be taught to a rising generation; it will never be widely received by one that has risen. It is not the man who has come, but the coming man, who will carry this work forward to a successful completion. Not that phonetic spelling, even with new characters, is difficult to acquire or to use. On the contrary, it is quite the reverse. The gravest objection that can be made against it by those who examine it is that they do not like the look of it. But, to employ in writing an unaccustomed spelling, even in the case of a single word, requires attention; and that in the hurry of life, and still more in the hurricane of business, the ordinary man has not the time to give. The most we can ask from such persons is sympathy with, or simple acquiescence in a reform in which they are not expected to take a part. To secure that will be of itself a great

achievement. In science, a revolution in nomenclature, such, for instance, as has taken place in chemistry, can be carried through with comparative ease. The class of persons affected by it is not large, and, moreover, they are persons who can be reasoned with,—persons with whom custom and prejudice weigh little, and to whom the inherent advantages of a proposed reform will outweigh the temporary inconveniences that necessarily belong to all change. But it is not so in language. A vast number must be consulted, each one of whom feels himself thoroughly acquainted with the subject, and the less he knows the more confident he is apt to be on that point. Add to this that with our race, especially the English portion of it, there seems to be a real affection for an anomaly, provided it has come down from a remote period; and the more uncouth and inconvenient and unreasonable the anomaly is, the fonder they are of it, and the closer they cling to it. Therefore, it is only little that has been done, when a select circle of scholars has been convinced of the desirability, and even the practicability of a proposed change. It must be made evident to the great body of educated men everywhere; it must have the favor of at least a majority of these before it can be put into successful operation. No royal academy, as in Spain, can, with us, issue recommendations which shall have the force of commands. No minister of state can, with us, as in Germany, prohibit the use of text-books that are not printed in the reformed spelling. But it is that last method alone that points out the only way in which success can be secured in such a tongue as ours. When authority enough of the whole body of educated men can be collected to consent to the introduction of a reformed orthography in our schools, its triumph will practically have been achieved; but it will not be till then. As it was to the spelling-book that we owe the establishment and perpetuation of the tyranny which the type-setters imposed upon us, so it is to the spelling-book that we must look for our deliverance. Where, indeed, the custom arose of teaching orthography, as it is now taught, it is hard to tell. Our Anglo-Saxon forefathers apparently knew nothing of it. With them a spelling-book was a book of stories or of homilies; and in the stormy times that then existed and followed, it was as much as a man could do to read and write; to write uniformly would have seemed as useless as to paint the lily or to add perfume to the violet. We know the peaceful friar who, far back in the tumult of the fifteenth century, compiled for school-boys the first important Latin-English dictionary. But tale of tradition or record of history

has failed to hand down the name of him who conceived the idea, and perpetrated the deed of preparing the first of modern spelling-books. Hardly can it be deemed a matter of regret; for little regard can be felt for the villain of a schoolmaster who leagued himself with the printing-office to fasten upon the children the yoke which indifference and ignorance had bound about the neck of the father; who employed the authority of education to turn a swindle and a fraud into an object of reverence. The deed may have been a necessary one; but even if so, it was a necessity to be deplored and not to be welcomed.

But the slightest consideration will show that it is only through the enginery of education that a reconstruction of our orthography can ever take place. It is, therefore, of first importance that any system which is to be accepted by all should be the work of the representatives of all. When once a standard phonetic spelling is agreed upon, and accepted by those who favor reform, its adoption in schools is the only further practical measure that will be essential to its success. Here are no prejudices to be overcome. Here, where the old characters themselves are new, new characters can be introduced without difficulty. Here alone can be accomplished, without the slightest trouble, that reform of the alphabet which must precede any real reform of the spelling. In this way, too, the active opposition will be disarmed of that large body of men who have no hostility to change which does not put them personally to additional annoyance or labor. Nor does it seem probable that the most inveterate admirer of the present anarchy could long hold out against the system of law and order which would then take its place. He might love the former for himself; yet he, in time, would hesitate to impose its burden upon those who are to come after him. If, because our fathers have eaten sour grapes, our teeth have been set on edge, there is no need of our insisting that that particular sensation shall be felt by all the generations to come. To children gifted

by nature, not necessarily with force of intellect, but with force of memory, learning to spell is, with our present orthography, mainly a tedious task, but not inevitably a difficult and sometimes not a particularly disagreeable one. To others, inferior only in the power of memorizing, it is something far different. It may be doubted, indeed, if in the mansions dolorous, which, while passing through life, we for a longer or shorter time inhabit, there is any sadder chamber for some than that which requires of us, before leaving its portals behind, a mastery of the separate parts of that clumsy and cast-iron frame-work in which we have inclosed the visible representation of our speech. The sorrows of childhood, keen as they are at the time, leave little impress upon the mind, and are soon effaced from the memory by profounder though not necessarily more painful sorrows. Arrived at the journey's end, we forget the toil and trouble of the journey itself. Nay, we do more than this. We insist that all who come after us shall suffer as we have suffered; shall turn over the same pages already wet with our tears; shall tread the same paths which our worn and blistered feet have trodden before. So far as we do this from ignorance, or from inability to see any better way, we are entitled to all that lenient judgment to which those are fairly entitled who know not what they do. But, to make an idol of the abomination of our present system of spelling, to cherish it and adore it as something precious in itself, and, therefore, to be perpetuated for all time, is a mark of irrationality which it will be hard to find surpassed amid the countless methods in which superstition has manifested itself. We speak feelingly of the degradation of those who bow down to gods made of stocks and stones; we send missionaries to turn them from the error of their ways; but I have yet to learn that, considering the difference of circumstances, there is among the most savage tribes any fetichism more senseless and more stupid than that which, with educated men among us, treats as worthy of respect or reverence the present orthography of the English tongue.

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