

Your wife's fair eyes. Ah no—the Past lies dead—
And time goes on, and Nature has her will.

“Hush—hush; forgive me. I *must* weep or die!
Still, dear, I bless you! Through these blinding tears,
I greet you bravely, beyond doubts and fears.
For all the happiness of coming years,
I greet the *man*; but oh, my *boy*, good-bye!”

ENGLISH SPELLING AND SPELLING REFORM: I.

It requires no very close observation of the signs of the times, to be aware that reform of English orthography is rapidly coming to the front, as one of the most important of the minor questions of the day. It is perfectly correct to assert that only a few years ago, the subject scarcely excited any particular interest outside of a very limited circle of scholars. Suggestions of change, of whatever nature, were rarely even referred to, save as illustrations of the harmless lunacy of crack-brained theorists. If they were spoken of seriously, it was nearly always for the purpose of protesting against the audacity and impiety of that fanaticism which, for the sake of an ideal perfection in unimportant details, would be willing to unsettle the very foundations of the language, and impair, if not entirely destroy, a sacred legacy from the past, bound up forever whether for good or evil, with the literature of the race.

All this is now altered. Within the past five years, the discussion of the question has assumed an entirely different character. The demand for reform is no longer confined to a few scattered scholars without influence, and usually without even so much as notoriety. On the contrary it has extended in some cases to whole classes. Philological societies appoint committees to examine and report what is best to be done. School boards petition government to establish a commission to investigate the whole subject. Nor is participation in the controversy that has sprung up limited to those alone who have a direct interest in the educational aspects of the question. Either on one side or the other, men of letters of every grade and scholars in every department are entering for a tilt in the orthographical tournament that is now going on. All this, to be sure, is strictly far more true of Eng-

land than of this country; but to a certain extent it is true of this.

What has brought about this sudden change it is not so easy to determine. Doubtless there has been for a long time a wide dissatisfaction with the existing state of things, although it has found little audible expression. To this dissatisfaction a powerful impulse has been given by the study of our speech in its earlier forms, a study which has made its most rapid progress during the few years just past. The principal objections which prejudice opposes to change have their force almost wholly destroyed, when the facts of language are brought directly home to the attention. Shrines upon which ignorance conferred sanctity, and to which stupidity bowed with unquestioning adoration have been utterly and instantaneously demolished by the remorseless iconoclasm of Early English scholarship. Moreover, the character of the advocates of reform is something that of itself makes an impression. To the opinions expressed by them, their abilities and attainments may not be sufficient to command assent; but they are sufficient to impose respect. There is an uneasy consciousness in the minds of those most opposed to change that it is no longer quite safe to indulge in that contemptuous treatment of the subject which a short time ago was the only argument. A reform which numbers among its advocates every living linguistic scholar of any eminence whatever, which in addition includes every one who has made the scientific study of English a specialty, may be inexpedient, may be impracticable, may be even harmful; but it cannot well be demolished by brief editorials, nor superciliously thrust aside with an air of jaunty superiority. If the question is to be argued at all, it must now be argued on its merits.

In such a discussion it will be found that the favorers of change, whether unreasonable in their expectations or not, know precisely what they are talking about; and this is a charge that can rarely be brought against their opponents.

All this certainly marks a decided advance. But it would be a most dangerous error to suppose that after all, a very great deal, comparatively speaking, has been gained; it would be a fatal one to fancy, as some seem inclined to do, that the goal is now well-nigh at hand, that we are on the eve of entering an orthographical paradise from which the devil of bad spelling will be forever shut out. It is at this point, indeed, that extravagant anticipations are more than perilous; they are ruinous. High-wrought and unreasonable expectation of speedy success is sure to be followed by as unreasonable a despondency which is of itself sufficient to paralyze the efficiency of that patient steady endeavor by which reform of any kind is accomplished, if accomplished at all. It becomes, therefore, a matter of the first importance to acquire at the outset a clear conception of the conditions of the whole problem, and of the means and agencies necessary to its solution. That we are moving is cause for congratulation; but for us at the present time, the pertinent inquiry is, how far have we got on.

There are three phases through which orthographic reform must pass before it has any fair prospect of success; or, perhaps, it would be better to say there are three distinct periods in the progress of the movement which aims to bring about the adoption of any far-reaching change. The first period will have been finished when general unanimity of opinion shall have been secured among linguistic scholars—among those who in reference to this subject may be called experts—that such a reform would be desirable if practicable. This is essentially the initiatory step. The point to be gained in the second period is the establishment of the conviction in the minds of the great body of intelligent men who have no special knowledge of language that such a reform is desirable. But when both these results shall have been reached, conceding that it is possible for them to be reached; when the need of some reform is admitted by all, the question then arises what shall be its nature and extent. It is easy to see that these are all essentially distinct stages in the progress of the movement. But

while they are and must be successive as regards the end to be accomplished, they are far from being necessarily so as regards those striving to bring it about. In all movements of this kind, some men will have considered and worked out whole schemes of reform before there is the slightest prospect of the adoption of any reform whatever; nay more, before any human beings besides themselves have ever heard that the subject was a matter of discussion. It is not only natural that this should be so; it is eminently desirable. If the third question ever becomes a practical one, it will present difficulties of its own sufficient to task to the utmost for their removal the intellectual resources of scores of scholars who have had it under consideration for long periods of time, and looked at it from every point of view.

It is plain that the first stage in the movement has passed. The first point has been gained. There is among scholars no real difference of opinion as to the desirability of reform, though they may vary widely in their views as to its prospects of success, and still more widely as to what shall be its character. But on the question of its desirability, the representatives of linguistic schools furthest apart are fully agreed. In particular, every one of the leaders in the study of our early speech has not merely given in his adhesion to the movement, he has expressed himself as ardently in favor of it. One deservedly popular writer, who has done much in the past to awaken interest in our language, has, indeed, placed himself in opposition. We refer to Archbishop Trench. But he would be the last to claim for himself that he was entitled to speak on this subject with the authority of those whose views are antagonistic to his own; and, moreover, it is to be remembered that his opinions were uttered several years ago, long before the discussion had assumed its present character. Yet as he sees clearly what others see dimly, as he states the common objections to change far more forcibly than is done by the vast majority of the defenders of the present orthography,—most of whom are, in fact, so full of zeal that no room has been left for knowledge,—there will be frequent occasion to refer to his statements in the course of our discussion.

All this is encouraging, and justly encouraging. But while so much as this has clearly been secured, there is no reason why we should shut our eyes to the fact that up to this time it is only the easiest

portion of the way that has been traversed. The second stage upon which the reform is entering is the difficult one; and the difficulty cannot now be really appreciated, because the movement, though constantly gaining headway, has not yet become important enough or formidable enough to awaken the full measure of hostility which it is destined to encounter. A long and painful road must be traveled before the end of the journey is reached. The same story must be told over and over again, the same familiar arguments must be repeated, to use Shakspeare's words, with "damnable iteration." The same stupid objections must be constantly met, and their stupidity exposed. In this point of view the position taken by Max Müller at the beginning of his own most convincing article on the necessity of reform seems hardly the true one, and fortunately indeed is not borne out by the character of the article itself. "The whole matter," says he, "is no longer a matter of argument; and the older I grow the more I feel convinced that nothing vexes people so much and hardens them in their unbelief and in their dogged resistance to reforms as undeniable facts and unanswerable arguments." This is unquestionably true. But no real reform was ever carried through save by reasoning,—reasoning which, while it finally won over the many, only hardened the hearts of the hostile few. He who expects that indifference and ignorance and prejudice will be overcome by the agitation of a day, or will be laid aside at the dictum of a few scholars, no matter what their position or ability, shows by that very belief that he has no real conception of the mighty agencies that are needed, and wisely needed, to change anything long established by custom and sanctioned by authority.

The battle has, accordingly, only just begun; still it is a great step in advance that we are to have a battle at all. Moreover, on one point there is a general agreement. No one who has studied the subject at all seriously doubts that the present spelling of the language is utterly lawless and unsystematic. The fact is not denied by any, whether friendly or hostile to reform; there are those to whom it seems apparently one of the chief glories of the English tongue. They appear to look upon these uncouth forms as having been bestowed by some divine agency, and naturally view any attempt to improve their conditions as a direct flying in the face of Providence. We cannot expect this feeling to pass away until

a proper understanding has been gained of the causes which brought about the existing state of things. The very first question, therefore, that unavoidably comes up, is in reference to the circumstances to which English orthography owes its present lawless and unsystematic character. For a comprehension of these, it will be necessary to make beforehand one or two general statements.

All spelling is originally, in intention at least if not in perfect realization, phonetic; that is to say, it aims to represent invariably the same sound by the same letter, or by the same combination of letters. This idea lies at the root of the alphabet; otherwise, indeed, the alphabet would have had no reason for its existence. To picture to the eye the sound which had fallen upon the ear, so that it should never be mistaken for anything else, was the problem that presented itself to the man or men who first devised that greatest of human inventions. To represent a particular sound by one character in one place, and by another in another place, would have seemed to them not merely as absurd, but as fatal, as would seem, for instance, to a painter now to have the figure of a horse stand for a horse in one picture, and in another for a different animal. This comparison must of course not be carried too far; the symbol being in one case a real one, in the other so far as we know, an arbitrary one. It is perfectly proper, however, to draw from what has been said two conclusions. So far as the original invention of the alphabet failed to secure the individual representation of every sound then used, the invention was itself incomplete and imperfect. So far, again, as the characters of the alphabet have been diverted from their original design of representing sounds, it is not an application of the invention, but a perversion of it to inferior purposes, and to purposes for which it is not well adapted.

If we go back to the earliest form of English, commonly called Anglo-Saxon, it will be found that orthography has remained essentially true to its legitimate object of conveying to the eye the sound heard by the ear. The variations of spelling, which form so marked a character of this and the following periods, are due almost entirely to the endeavor to represent, often rudely enough without doubt, the variations of the pronunciation. To this cardinal principle our language may be said to have adhered with more or less of fidelity throughout the first centuries of its existence as a written

tongue. There can hardly be a doubt that with the steady growth of a national literature, dialectic diversity, both in spelling and pronunciation, would in process of time have disappeared from the speech of the cultivated classes. A consistent orthography would have been established in which the Teutonic accentuation, the Teutonic sounds of letters, and the Teutonic representation of sounds would have prevailed throughout. But at an early period the language was subjected to influences of an entirely different nature. A new and disturbing element was added by the introduction into Great Britain of the Norman-French. This tongue exhibited almost as much variation in spelling as the Anglo-Saxon. But it was not to this fact that the confusion that sprang up was due. The Norman-French introduced, or at least made common, new letters; it gave to old letters new sounds; it had different combinations to represent the same sound. The union between it and the Anglo-Saxon, so far as it took place, was, from the phonetic point of view, an ill-assorted one. But even all the uncertainty and disorder which arose in consequence might have been in the long run met and overcome, had not an agency more powerful than any yet known suddenly appeared on the scene. This was the invention of printing. The importance of its influence in this respect cannot well be overestimated. Any confusion which might before have existed in spelling became from this time worse confounded. Upon the introduction of printing, indeed, English orthography entered into that realm of Chaos and old Night in which it has ever since been floundering; it then began to put on the shape it at present bears, "if shape it may be called which shape has none."

For the specially bad influence which this art exerted upon the spelling of our tongues, it is not easy to account. Still the fact is evident, however obscure may be the causes. Of several reasons given, one is that nearly all our early printers came from the Continent. As foreigners they had little or no knowledge of the proper spelling of our tongue, and in the general license that then prevailed, they could venture to disregard where they did not care to understand. The statement is also frequently made, that as the mechanical expedients for spacing were then extremely defective, letters were frequently inserted into, and dropped from, words as the necessities of the line required. But this is something

hard to prove; and as the spelling of the poetry, where such devices were usually unnecessary, was just as lawless as that of the prose, the assertion is more than doubtful. It is almost certain, indeed, that not much weight can be attached to either of these explanations. Far more importance must be ascribed to the essentially different conditions under which the arts of writing and of printing were carried on; to the fact that when the latter with us displaced the former, it had to face at once the difficulty that there was ever among educated men wide diversity of pronunciation; and that largely owing to the long continuance of foreign and domestic wars, no established literary standard had grown up anywhere to which all felt obliged to conform. With the problems presented by the existence of disorder and confusion, which in many cases had their origin as far back as the coming together of two conflicting phonetic systems, the early printers were called upon to deal; and for the solution of them they were wholly unfitted, not so much by the accident of birth, as by the very nature of things.

The copyists of manuscripts, compared with the type-setters who succeeded them, were men of education. Some degree of cultivation was essential to a work which demanded, as the first condition of its successful accomplishment, a clear conception of the author's meaning. In accordance with the practice universally prevailing, they would give to the word the spelling which to them represented the pronunciation; as educated men, this would be done in the majority of cases with a reasonable degree of accuracy. Still that they were a long way from reaching any high ideal of excellence, we know from incontestable evidence. The corruption of the text, caused by the willfulness or carelessness of copyists, was one of the few things that seem to have vexed the genial soul of the first great singer of our literature. Chaucer, in addressing his scribe, complains of the great trouble in revising his works to which he is put by the negligence of the latter, and fervently prays that he may have a scalded head, if he does not hereafter adhere to the original writing more closely. And toward the end of his "Troylus and Cryseyde," there is, as Mr. Ellis remarks, something almost pathetic in his address to his "litel boke":

"And, for ther is so grete dyversite
In Englissh, and in writynge of our tonge,
So preye I God, that non myswrite the,
Ne the mys-metere, for default of tonge!"

It is not likely that either imprecation or imploration had much effect upon the scribes of that day, who were probably as perverse a generation as the scribes of old. But there is this to be said in their favor,—they never lost sight of the cardinal principle that the proper office of orthography was to represent orthoëpy; and so long as this was kept in view, the attainment of a reasonably complete correspondence between spelling and pronunciation, while it might be delayed, was sure to follow at last.

All this was checked and finally reversed after the introduction of printing. As has been intimated already, far higher requirements were needed in the work of the copyist than in the mere mechanical labor of the type-setter. The former had to understand his author to represent correctly what he said. But there is no such necessity in the case of the compositor. Whatever intellect he may have he will not be called upon to use it to any great extent in his special line of activity. His duty is done if he faithfully follows copy; and he can perform his work well in a language of which he does not comprehend a word. His labor is, and must always be, mostly mechanical; and the very fact that he is not responsible for results will always have a tendency to make him careless in details. The blunders in spelling, and in greater matters still, made in modern printing-offices where the most scrupulous care is exerted to attain correctness, are familiar to all. These evils would be immensely increased at a period when no such extensive precautions against error were taken in any case, and when in some cases it would seem as if no precautions were taken at all. The effects of the carelessness and indifference that frequently prevailed would not be, and were not, confined to the work in which they were immediately manifested. The orthography of printed matter necessarily reacts upon the orthography of the men who are familiar with it. These, when they come to write, will be apt to repeat the errors they have learned from the books they read, and, with that peculiar ability in blundering shown by all careless spellers, will contribute numberless variations of their own. These, in turn, will be followed more or less by the type-setter, and thus new forms will be constantly added to the prevailing disorder. In this manner a complete circle is formed in which author and printer corrupt each other, and both together corrupt the public

Such was, in great measure, the situation of things in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But necessarily it was a situation that could not continue. To a printing-office, uniformity of spelling, if not absolutely essential, is, to say the least, highly desirable; and toward uniformity the printing-offices steadily bent their aim, since nobody and nothing else would. The movement in this direction was powerfully helped forward by the feeling which began to show itself after the revival of classical learning, that the office, or at least one office, of orthography was to represent derivation. Belief in this involved in its very nature the idea of fixedness of spelling; and it gave the sanction of a quasi-scholarship to the demand for an unvarying standard which came from a mechanic art. The disposition to establish uniformity wherever practicable is one that will probably always manifest itself wherever the development of a language reaches such a point that the words, the vehicle of the thought, become objects of consideration, independent of the thoughts they convey. Just as there is a tendency toward fixed grammatical forms, toward fixed syntactical combinations in any speech that has reached a high degree of cultivation, so there will be a tendency toward fixed spelling, which will of itself have a restraining influence on pronunciation, if there is between them any real relation. Changes will, of course, take place, but they will take place slowly. This is true whether the art of printing is known or not; but owing to that invention, it has in modern tongues assumed an importance which it never before held. In any discussion of reform, the desire for a fixed standard, and perhaps it is right to say the absolute necessity of its existence, with certain limitations, is something that can neither be overlooked nor treated as of slight consequence. In the case of our own language, the movement toward uniformity, under the pressing needs of the printing-office, made rapid progress during the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth. But unfortunately for us, the establishment of the orthography went out of the hands of educated men, who might, perhaps, in time have established it upon stable principles; it came into the hands of men who knew nothing about it, and cared still less. In their selections from the variations of spelling that then existed, which in most cases doubtless represented actual differences of pronunciation, it was the merest

accident or the blindest caprice that dictated the choice of the form to be regarded as the standard. As a result, we have uniformity indeed, or at least an approach to it sufficient for all practical purposes. But it must not be forgotten that this uniformity is the work of printers and not of scholars; that, as might be expected in consequence, it is a mere mechanical uniformity, and in no sense of the word a scientific one; that in effecting it, propriety was disregarded, etymology perverted, and every principle of orthoëpy defied; and that men of culture blindly followed in the wake of a movement which they had not the power, and probably not the knowledge, to direct. To the orthography thus manufactured Johnson's Dictionary, which came out in 1755, gave authority, gave currency, gave in fact universality. But it could not give consistency nor reason, for in it they were not to be found.

In the meantime, while the written speech was tending toward petrification so far as regards the forms of its words, and assuming more and more in this respect the character of a dead language, the spoken tongue remained full of vigor and life, and as a necessary consequence was constantly undergoing modification. While the spelling stood still, changes in pronunciation were numerous and rapid. Whether they were for the better or the worse is not pertinent to this inquiry. But the necessary consequence has been to widen steadily the gulf that long ago began to disclose itself as existing between the spoken and the written word. The result we can see for ourselves. Every English speaker uses, to a large extent, two languages; one when he reads and writes, another when he talks. Out of this constantly increasing divergence between orthography and orthoëpy has sprung the modern pronouncing dictionary, in which a great number of words have two spellings—one the standard form found in books, and following immediately upon it, in brackets, the form as it sounds to the ear. The pronouncing dictionary is called by Archbishop Trench "the absurdest of all books." But on what ground it can be spoken of as absurd by an advocate of the present orthography it is hard to understand. It is simply a necessity of the situation. It is, to be sure, a rude and clumsy substitute for phonetic spelling, but it is not for him who protests against such spelling to denounce the aids to correct speaking, imperfect as they may be, which are ren-

dered absolutely essential by the general prevalence of the opinions he accepts.

Unfortunately this is not the worst. Out of this divergence between orthography and orthoëpy, the phonetic sense of the English-speaking race early became, and has since continued, impaired; if indeed it be not too much to say that it has been well-nigh destroyed. No particular value having ever been attached to a character, there is nothing to determine what its exact value is when it appears in a word to which we are not accustomed. The power of appreciating distinctions has, in consequence, been sensibly reduced. Take by way of illustration the two sounds clumsily represented in modern English by *th*. The ordinary man recognizes in practice the difference between the *th* of "thin," and the *th* of "then," because he has painfully learned the pronunciation of every word in which this combination is found; but in nine cases out of ten, it will never have occurred to him that there actually exists a difference in the pronunciation, and it will require a positive effort to appreciate it even after his attention has been called to it. If in so marked a divergence the perception has been weakened, what must be the condition of things when there is an attempt to discriminate delicate shades of sounds such as are denoted by the vowels? The phonetic sense has, in fact, become so weakened that it is no longer able to respond to any unexpected demand made upon it. For a highly educated man it is difficult—for an uneducated man it is practically impossible—to guess at the form best suited to represent the sound. Hence a number of persons who set out to spell a word which none of them have ever seen, are likely to spell it in as many different ways. It is, perhaps, nothing strange that this phonetic inability, born of centuries of phonetic disuse, is now urged as a principal reason for not reforming orthography at all. We are pointed to the wild work which men make when they attempt to write as they pronounce; we have held up before us the undeniable fact of their wide divergence in spelling, not only from one another but from themselves, even though there may be no appreciable difference in pronunciation. Yet this inability to represent accurately to the eye the sound conveyed to the ear is mainly the result of the long-continued existence of the present anarchy. It is a maxim of law that no one shall be allowed to take advantage of his own wrong; yet the evil

effects caused by the lawlessness of the present system, or rather want of system, is one of the strongest arguments advanced for fastening its abominations upon us forever.

It has been pointed out that the orthography in the movement toward fixedness of form was never once subjected to the operation of intelligent principle. What the printing-offices wanted was uniformity; to secure it they stood ready to sacrifice anything and everything else; or perhaps it would be better to say they did not care for anything else. The peculiar spelling finally adopted in the case of an individual word as the standard, frequently owed its form to the merest chance, to caprice, or to carelessness. Illustration in this point of view is more convincing than any statement, however strong; and it may be well accordingly to describe with some detail, as a specimen of the rest, one of the numerous methods by which anarchy has been introduced into our present orthography.

The distinguishing trait of the ancient spelling was that it made an effort to represent the ancient pronunciation, and that to attain that end it had no hesitation about sacrificing uniformity. Language at that early period was learned almost entirely by ear, and doubtless the very few men who at that time could read at all were in the habit of using many words they had never seen but only heard. Consequently, when writers attempted to represent the spoken sound, they differed widely in the orthography because there was often a wide difference in the orthoëpy. This fact will explain many of the variations in the spelling of ancient printed books, if it be conceded that the spelling is the author's and not the printer's. One illustration will suffice. There is a common pronunciation of the word "catch," unauthorized, and even by many of our dictionaries unrecognized, which makes it rhyme with "fetch." Now this word must have been pronounced the same way in the sixteenth century, for occasionally it can be found with the spelling "ketch." This form is, indeed, common in the writings of Gascoigne, a popular poet of that period, and is met with in the "Faerie Queene" of Spenser. This varying orthography, caused by varying pronunciation, has left peculiar traces of itself in our tongue, and has contributed to swell the number of anomalous formations, which seem so dear to many because they are anomalous. The result has been that when two methods of writing the same word

were in common use, we have in modern English not unfrequently retained the spelling of the one form and the pronunciation of the other.

Perhaps no better example can be given of this than in the very terms by which we designate the language itself and the country of its birth. The authorized spelling of these is *English* and *England*; their authorized pronunciation, as given in the dictionaries, is *ing-lish* and *ing-gland*. How did this divergence come about? To the historical student of our tongue, the answer is by no means a difficult one. In the early speech there were two ways of writing the words, corresponding precisely, without doubt, to the two ways of pronouncing them. In an extract already given from Chaucer we have had the form "Englissh," but the forms "Inglis," "English," "Inglysch," "Ingländ," and numerous others very similar, are common in our early literature, especially in that written in the northern dialect. Out of scores of illustrations that might be given, the following are all that will be needed:

"This ilk bok is translate
In to *Inglis* tong to rede
For the love of *Inglis* lede,
Inglis lede of *Ingländ*."
CURSOR MUNDI, lines 232-235.

"This ordynance thaim thoct the best,
For at that tyme was pes and rest
Betwix Scotland and *Ingländ* bath."
BARBOUR'S BRUCE, lines 79-81.

"Bot Jhesu Christ, that syttis in trone,
Safe *Inglysche* men bothe ferre and nerre."
THOMAS OF ERSELDOUNE, lines 13, 14.

Here was a genuine difference in the sound conveyed to the ear, which naturally found expression in a difference of orthography. Modern English gets rid of any difficulty there may be in the choice by selecting one form to denote the spelling and the other to denote the pronunciation.

Full as striking an example is the past participle of the verb to "be," which is written "been" and pronounced *bēn*, in accordance with a spelling which at one time was very common. It ought to be added that the statement is perhaps true of this country only; at least Hawthorne declared that the pronunciation of this word was his test for deciding upon the nationality of the English-speaking scamp who applied to him for aid while he was American consul at Liverpool.

But perhaps the most suggestive illustration of all is the word "colonel." The

pronunciation of this is so far removed from the spelling, that it was spoken of by Walker in his dictionary, as one of "those gross irregularities which must be given up as incorrigible." Yet in the light of the statements that have been made and the facts which have been given there is no difficulty whatever in accounting for this divergence. It may be well to say, however, before speaking of the origin of the form, that there was a time when it was unquestionably pronounced often as a word of three syllables, and pretty certainly as it is now written. Two instances which have been frequently cited will be sufficient to prove this point. Milton's sonnet on the assault intended against the city of London begins with the following line:

"Captain, or *col-o-nel*, or knight in arms."

Again in Butler's "Hudibras" we have this couplet:

"Then did sir knight abandon dwelling,
And out he rode a-colonelling."

In both of these cases it is absolutely essential to the meter that the *o*, which is now elided, shall be pronounced as a separate syllable; and there is no reason to believe, as will be seen from what follows, that the *l* when written was then sounded as if it were *r*.

The derivation of this word has been much disputed, but there is now a pretty general agreement among the best etymologists that it came into the French language in the sixteenth century from the Italian *colonello*, which itself came from *colona*, and this again had for its original the Latin *columna*. Whether the English borrowed the term from the French or directly from the Italian may be a question. But in both English and French there was at the time of its introduction a permutation of *l* and *r*, so that in each of these tongues it appears in the two forms of *colonel* and *coronel*. In accordance with the principles pervading the orthoëpy of our speech, the sound of the second *o* was frequently dropped in the

case of the latter, and with it at that period frequently disappeared also the letter itself. Thus in the correspondence with the home government of the Earl of Leicester, who, in 1585-6 commanded the English and Dutch forces in the Netherlands against the Spaniards, the word is spelled by him "coronell" or "cornel." In Spanish, indeed, the word was at that time generally, perhaps invariably, *coronel*, and such has remained its orthography to the present day. Nor is it improbable that to that language the speech of the then greatest military nation of Europe, with which England came constantly into contact, often into collision, may be mainly due the early adoption and widespread use of the particular pronunciation that has now become universal. At any rate the two forms "colonel" and "coronel" lasted side by side down to the middle of the seventeenth century. But as the tendency toward a fixed and unvarying orthography became more and more decided, one of them had to disappear. Again the same blundering compromise was made. The pronunciation of the one form had become general and was necessarily retained; but along with it was retained the spelling of the other.

This is a brief account of but one of the many ways in which, by the operation of indifference or ignorance, English orthography has been perverted from its legitimate office. Stories of the same general nature could be told of scores of words. The history of our spelling is in no small number of instances the history of blunders which, originating in illiteracy almost scandalous, have now become thoroughly sanctioned by custom and consecrated by time. And yet there are people who honestly believe there is something peculiarly sacred about the present orthography of the English tongue, who look upon this creation of type-setters as the crowning mercy to our race of an all-wise Providence, and actually shudder when a new spelling is employed, as if the fountains of the great deep were breaking up and the civilization of the world were threatened with a second deluge of barbarism.

remembrance of Gordon himself, this last sentiment was certainly lively enough to make it a great relief to hear at last a rumor that the excellent fellow was about to be married. The rumor reached him at Athens;

it was vague and indirect, and it omitted the name of his betrothed. But Bernard made the most of it, and took comfort in the thought that Gordon had recovered his spirits and his appetite for matrimony.

(To be continued.)

ENGLISH SPELLING AND SPELLING REFORM: II.

IN 1755 appeared the first edition of the English Dictionary of Samuel Johnson. Judged by the modern standard of requirement, it is not a work that is entitled to the highest praise in any point of view, and in some points of view deserves no praise at all. But compared with anything that had previously existed, it was possessed of merits so transcendent that the date of its publication may be almost said to constitute an epoch in the history of the lexicons of our tongue. And in nothing is the influence it exerted so conspicuously manifest as in the matter of English orthography. This was practically fixed by Johnson's dictionary, and as he left it, such it has, with unimportant exceptions, remained. Yet, without denying the value of the work, there is little hazard in asserting that, as regards the spelling of our language, it has been productive of far more evil than good. Johnson's incapacity to comprehend the principles that underlie this particular branch of his subject was strikingly seen in the very declarations with which he set out. He ridiculed the men who endeavored to accommodate orthography to pronunciation, asserting that such an attempt was to measure by a shadow—to take that for a model or standard which is changing while they apply it. He failed, apparently, to perceive the consequences of the position he had assumed. For, if pronunciation is changing constantly, while spelling remains fixed, it then becomes simply a question of time when the spelling and pronunciation shall have diverged so far from one another that they bear no relation to each other at all. Carrying out this principle to its remotest results, we shall in time be making use of a set of symbols not, indeed, so elegant in appearance, but as arbitrary in sound, as Arabic numerals, which have the same form in every tongue, but are sounded differently in all; or, stating it briefly, we shall write one language and speak another. To this point, in fact, in the case of some words we have already come.

But the injury that Johnson did the orthography of our tongue can hardly be ascribed to his teachings; it sprang rather from the slavish deference which soon began to be paid to the particular spelling he had adopted, and for this it is hardly fair to hold him directly responsible. It has already been pointed out that previous to his time there had been a steady movement toward a fixed standard; and although with a large number of words the spelling was still unsettled and discordant, yet in a rough way it may be said that there existed pretty general uniformity. But about this orthography there was no sanctity. Men did not fall down before it and worship it, and any change that was proposed stood a fair chance of adoption, if it were recommended by convenience or countenanced by the analogies of the language. It may be altogether too much to assume that, under the conditions then existing, the orthography would, in course of time, have righted itself; but certainly the temper of the public would have been such that any rational scheme of reform would have been welcomed with satisfaction, and accepted or rejected upon its merits. Johnson's dictionary, however, almost instantly petrified the forms of the words included in it. The universal adoption of the spelling employed by him arrested even the few processes toward simplification that were then going on. But, worse than all, it begot a devotion to his orthography, alongside of which all other forms of devotion known to human observation and experience are faint and transitory. There has, indeed, been manifested toward it, and still continues to be manifested toward it, not simply a love which passeth all understanding, but what, in many men's eyes, is affection of a far higher type—that love which is entirely devoid of understanding. Under the influence of this feeling all attempts at reform have been defeated, not necessarily because the changes they proposed were inadequate or absurd, but because it was

regarded as a sort of sacrilege to propose any change at all. The strangest result of the feeling is the fancy that springs up in the minds of many with large anxieties for the language, but with limited knowledge of what it is, that, in insisting that certain words shall continue to be spelled in certain ways, they are somehow contributing to the preservation of the purity of the English tongue.

Wherein lies the chief strength of the present orthography? It is certainly not, even to the most partial eye, a thing of beauty; why, then, should we be so anxious to make it a joy forever? Reasons are constantly given for this prejudice in its favor, based sometimes upon history which sometimes has been misapplied or etymology which has been perverted, or, most usually, upon mistaken conceptions of the functions of both. But the real ground of the aversion to change is mainly due to association. We like the present orthography because we are used to it. In that one sentence the chief argument for it is stated. The influence of this feeling is not only mighty in itself, but the whole tremendous enginery of education is constantly at work to sustain and strengthen it. The spelling of English according to the existing standard, requires not the slightest exercise of the judgment, involves not in the least the application of phonetic principles, or, indeed, of general principles of any kind,—is, in short, nothing but an arbitrary exertion of memory in its very lowest forms of activity; yet it has come to be one of the most essential and distinctive requirements in the training of a cultivated man. It assumes in our school life a factitious importance which, though it may be warranted and even rendered necessary by the state of the public mind, has nothing either in reason or in the nature of things to recommend it. To such extreme lengths is it carried that at an early age every child is forced to go through the process of learning the spelling of a number of words which he has never heard of before, and which, unless he is exceptionally unfortunate, he is never likely to hear of again. But the effect wrought by this constant pressure upon opinions and beliefs is something that can not well be overestimated. It leads to the wildest fancies, it begets the absurdest notions, it erects a barrier not alone against reform but against any consideration of the question of reform, upon which reason wastes its strength in vain. Illustrations of the state of mind pro-

duced by it can be found everywhere and in countless numbers; one will suffice for the present purpose. In 1873 a controversy was going on in England as to the proper way of spelling words ending in *or* or in *our*. In the course of it, a correspondent sent to the periodical entitled "Notes and Queries," a communication which contained the following expression of his sentiments—for it would obviously be an abuse of language to call it an expression of thought:

"I think that 'honour' has a more noble and 'favour' a more obliging look than 'honor' and 'favor.' 'Honor' seems to me just to do his duty and nothing more; 'favor' to qualify his kind deed with an air of coldness. 'Odor,' again, may be a fit term for a chemical distillation; but a whole May garden comes before me in the word 'odour.'"

Now it is easy enough and just enough to call such remarks as these twaddle. But for all that, the writer of them is not merely an individual, he is the representative of a class, and of a class by no means unimportant. The feelings to which he gives expression crop out constantly in books, in periodicals, in newspapers, though it is true they are rarely clothed in the sentimental garb that they here assume. This fact is but one of many illustrations of the tremendous inertia due to ignorance and prejudice that must be overcome before any reform whatever can be discussed from the point of view of reason. Argument upon those who feel thus is indeed thrown away. Nothing but the logic of accomplished results will ever make such persons recognize the principle that the spoken word has rights to which the written is subservient. But there is a large body of educated men, who scornfully repel the charge that their opposition to orthographic reform is based at all upon sentiment; who would, in truth, be the first to ridicule such expressions as those just quoted. They pride themselves upon the fact that their conclusions have been reached by processes purely logical. Yet it will be no hard matter to show that their belief on this subject rests on a number of fallacies which, when critically examined will be found to have their origin in most cases in feeling, and not in reflection; and when not in feeling pure and simple, in a hasty assent to incorrect statements which they have never taken the pains to consider with care. Without being aware of it their convictions are due to sentiment, and not to reason. To an investigation of the most common and most important of these falla-

cies the remainder of this article will be devoted.

Of all these fallacious arguments, that based on etymology has perhaps the strongest hold upon the educated class. It is constantly brought forward as if it were sufficient of itself to settle the question. Words, we are told, have a descent of their own; and the ties which bind them to the past are not to be ruthlessly severed. Letters which are never heard in the spoken speech and, indeed, cannot be pronounced by any conceivable position of the vocal organs, are not to be dropped from the written speech, because they seem to remind us, or at any rate some of us, of forms in the languages from which they originally came. It sends a peculiar thrill of rapture, we are assured, through the heart of the student to find, for illustration, in *deign*, *feign*, *reign* and *impugn* a letter *g*, which he can never possibly use. Silent as it is to the ear, it is nevertheless eloquent with all the tender associations connected with *dignor*, *fungo*, *regno* and *impugno*. That persons with little education—and, on the other hand, those with the highest linguistic training—should not share in these feelings, is not at all to the purpose. They are not really the ones to be consulted. Between these two classes lies a vast body of educated men whose wishes in this matter must be considered paramount. That the argument in their behalf may not be charged with misrepresentation, it is desirable to quote the following words of Archbishop Trench, who has most ably stated this view of the question:

“It is urged, indeed, as an answer to this, that the scholar does not need these indications to help him to the pedigree of words with which he deals, that the ignorant is not helped by them; that the one knows without, and that the other does not know with, them, so that in either case they are profitable for nothing. Let it be freely granted that this, in both these cases, is true; but between these two extremes there is a multitude of persons, neither accomplished scholars, on the one side, nor yet wholly without the knowledge of all languages save their own, on the other; and I cannot doubt that it is of great value that these should have all helps enabling them to recognize the words which they are using, whence they came, to what words in the languages they are nearly related, and what is their properest and strictest meaning.”

The proper answer to any such argument is, of course, that the only legitimate office of spelling is to represent pronunciation; that it was for that purpose alone that the alphabet, the greatest of human inventions, was originally designed; and that to turn

aside orthography from this, its proper function, is not a praiseworthy application of it, but an actual perversion. But, equally, of course, such an answer as this would utterly fail to satisfy him who makes use of the argument. In his mind the derivation of the word, its connection with a remote ancestry, is a weighty, if not the most weighty, consideration. It becomes, therefore, a matter of importance to subject this fallacy to a strict examination. Nor need it be denied that the advocates of etymological orthography, so far as that can be said to exist at all, have a certain support for their views in the character of that part of our speech taken not indirectly, but directly, from the Latin. In such cases the spelling generally represents with great accuracy the derivation. Thus, *portion* is the very root of *portio*, seen in the genitive *portionis*. There is accordingly an air of plausibility about the reasoning which is directed against changing the forms of such words, and it is perhaps not wonderful that to those who fix their attention solely, or even chiefly, upon this class, the argument against any change should seem unanswerable. They forget that not only are such words as these comparatively few in number and little used, save in special styles of composition, but that they are the ones which in any reformed orthography, would require the least alteration. Moreover, the alteration which they would undergo would follow certain precise and invariable rules, and the rules once being known, the application of them would always be a matter of little trouble.

But the moment we come to words derived from the Anglo-Saxon the argument turns out a conspicuous failure. The same remark is true, though perhaps to a less extent, of words taken from the Latin through the medium of the Norman-French; and these are the two classes that make up the warp and woof of our speech. In the case of both, it is perfectly safe to say that the present spelling, in a large number of instances, not only offers no such clue to the derivation as would a phonetic spelling; it is itself often absolutely misleading. In point of fact, the advocates of the fallacy of etymology are necessarily driven into the wildest inconsistencies in order to sustain it. They affirm in regard to one class of words what they are compelled to deny in regard to another. How true this is, a glance at a few examples will make strikingly manifest.

To begin with the Anglo-Saxon element, let us assume an extreme case, that a serious effort is put forth to drop the silent *k* of the word *knave*. Nobody ever pronounces it now,—there is not the slightest probability that anybody will ever pronounce it in the future. Yet it requires no violent effort of the imagination to picture both the sorrowful and the indignant protests that such a proposal would call forth, if there existed any chance of its adoption. Countless would be the references to the story of the word. We should be told over and over again how it represents the Anglo-Saxon *cnafa*, a boy, and how the *k* still connects it for us directly with the German *knabe*. It might be thought by some a sufficient answer to this that as we have to a certain extent disregarded the derivation by substituting for *c* a letter *k*, which properly did not belong to the Anglo-Saxon alphabet, no great harm would result if we dropped it altogether; and that this particular letter the Germans have the best reason in the world for retaining, from the fact that they sound it. But as this to the believer in etymological orthography would be unsatisfactory, let us carry his argument one step further. An initial *h*, followed by *l*, *n* and *r*, began many words in the earliest English from which it is now dropped. Thus, for example, *lot* was originally *hlot*, *loud* was *hlud*, *nut* was *hnut*, *roof* was *hróf*. If it be an outrage to drop the *k* of *knave*, what are we to think of that earlier outrage, which has dropped the *h* from such words as these? If etymology is so important in the one case, what right have we to persist in the use of a spelling which disregards it in the other? Or is there, in this respect, a privilege granted to our fathers which is denied to us? In all these instances, the letters referred to have that charm, so dear to many hearts, of perfect uselessness as regards pronunciation; but they are equally essential to derivation. The only defense of the present inconsistency lies in the fact that to the one way of spelling we are accustomed, and to the other we are not accustomed. But this, necessarily, takes the subject at once outside of the domain of reason, and places it within that of sentiment.

But the inconsistency of the advocates of etymological spelling appears full as conspicuously in the case of words taken from the Latin through the medium of the Norman-French. No better illustration, to start with, can be found than in *honor* or *honour*, a word about which an orthograph-

ical battle, not particularly creditable to the human intellect, has raged for more than a hundred years. From the time of Johnson the importance of writing it with a *u* has been strongly insisted upon; and the impropriety, and even depravity, of writing it without that letter has exercised the minds, and disturbed the hearts of a large number of worthy members of society. The remote Latin original is *honor*. What is the objection to spelling it in that way? The answer is not that this form would represent with no more exactness the pronunciation; it is that by this method the immediate derivation would be hid. The French word from which it came is, we are told, *honneur*, and that contains a *u*—not to speak of one or two other letters which it has never been found convenient to take into consideration. The only proper course therefore is to write it *honour*, for otherwise we should all of us forget about the French *honneur*, and think only of the Latin *honor*; and to escape from such a calamity measures too energetic can hardly be taken.

Unfortunately it was not from *honneur* that the English *honour* was derived, as indeed the difference in orthography might at once suggest. The Latin *honor* came into Old French with a large number of spellings. Burguy, in his glossary of that tongue during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, gives fifteen different ways in which this word was written, preference being given by him to the ancient form *honor*. Curiously enough among these fifteen ways, *honour* is not found; the nearest approach to it is *hounour*. But such an orthography must have been common in the fourteenth century, at which period the word was adopted into English, for then it usually, in fact almost invariably, appears as *honour*. That form doubtless represented the pronunciation then prevalent; for in those days of darkness it was the intention and aim to spell phonetically. So it continued to be written for a hundred and fifty years. But after the revival of classical learning, a change took place in the thoughts and feelings of men on almost every conceivable subject; and among other things their opinions on the proper office of spelling underwent more or less modification. The sixteenth century had its orthographical etymologists as well as the nineteenth. In both periods there is little difference as to the character or amount of knowledge displayed by the upholders of this doctrine; but as they looked at the

matter from entirely different points of view, they were naturally led to follow entirely different lines of action. In the sixteenth century the tendency made itself strongly manifest to disregard the immediate original in the case of words, coming from the Old French, and go directly back to the form found in the Latin. Two methods of spelling the same term were in consequence to be found side by side. The inevitable result of such a state of things was to add a new element of disorder to the existing chaos, when one form came to be arbitrarily selected as the standard; when, for illustration, men were taught to write in one case *actor* and *torpor*, after the Latin, in another case *governour* and *labour*, after the Old French. So in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the word which had been written *honour* came frequently and perhaps generally to be written without the *u*. Thus in the Shakspeare folio of 1623, where it occurs several hundred times, it appears in the great majority of instances as *honor*, but occasionally likewise as *honour*. The modern advocates of etymological orthography may claim that the argument in this case really makes for their own side; and that it is our duty to rectify the errors of our fathers. But they cannot stop at this point. What is to be done with that large body of words whose immediate origin has been disguised by the perverse learning of the ancient advocates of etymological orthography? Take the two familiar illustrations of *debt* and *doubt*. In these nobody, unless some "racker of orthography," as Shakspeare expresses it, ever attempted to pronounce the *b*. In the Old French from which the words were taken, they appear generally as *dete*, *dette*, and *dote*, *doute*. At any rate it was from *dette* and *doute* that they came into our tongue; for these are the forms in which they are found in the writings of Chaucer and his successors. But in the sixteenth century men had learned that the remote Latin primitives of those words were *debitum* and *dubitare*, and consequently a *b* was inserted. There it has since continued to remain. The silent letter, indeed, in these two instances is eloquently eulogized by Archbishop Trench, although its addition has had precisely the same effect as the dropping of the *u* in *honor*, the obscuring of the immediate French original. Even he who rejoices in its uselessness as regards pronunciation might justly bewail the way in which the present spelling darkens derivation.

Yet in this matter so much are we under the control of sentiment and not of reason, that life would be made miserable for many of us were the *b* of *debt* and *doubt* to be dropped.

In fact, the spelling of our language is in too many cases a melancholy result of ignorant effort to make the orthography fulfill the illegitimate function of denoting derivation, instead of its legitimate one of representing pronunciation. For this, that middle class so highly lauded by Archbishop Trench as "neither accomplished scholars, on the one side, nor yet wholly without the knowledge of all languages save their own, on the other," are mainly responsible. Etymology is a science requiring for its mastery years of special study: it involves in many instances drudgery of the driest sort; yet there is no one subject of human investigation upon which men who have dabbled a little in language pronounce opinions more positively; and the positiveness is usually in pretty exact proportion to the ignorance. It is to their zeal without knowledge that we owe the introduction of most of those monstrous forms, which, as the poet says of Vice,

"We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

The half-learning which so vigorously fights reform of English orthography now has been equally active in the past in foisting upon the language barbarous spelling founded upon absurd derivation.

In this point of view the story that can be told of two common words is suggestive. These are *whole* and *hot*. In the case of the former, nobody from the first moment of recorded time ever pronounced the *w*, and there is not the slightest probability that anybody ever will. Worse, even, than this, it is a letter that not only does not aid the spelling, but actually hides the derivation. The Anglo-Saxon original was *hal*, from which we still have the adjective *hale*. For a long period this word, which now begins with *w*, was spelled *hole* or *hol*. But in the sixteenth century the application of crazy etymology to orthography began. Such words as *who* and *whoop* have always had a *w* belonging to them, though no longer pronounced, and by a false analogy with these the letter was sometimes also prefixed to *hot*, which had for its primitive the form *hât*. For an illustration of the latter fact, out of scores of instances which might be quoted, take the following from the second book of the "Faery Queene":

"He soone approached, panting, breathlesse, *whot*."
Canto IV., 37.

"From their *whot* work they did themselves with-
draw."

Canto VII., 37.

"Upon a mightie fornace, burning *whott*."

Canto IX., 29.

Excluding minor variations, *whole* during the sixteenth century was sometimes spelled *whole* and sometimes *hole*; *hot* was sometimes spelled *hot* and sometimes *whot*. As luck would have it,—for it was throughout a mere matter of chance,—the intruding letter triumphed in the one case and was defeated in the other; and accordingly we write *hot* without the *w*, and *whole* with it. In the instance of the latter, a return to a form at once phonetically and etymologically correct would be quite impossible in the present state of public sentiment; but to suppose that in retaining this absurd blunder of our fathers we are governed by reason and not by feeling is a delusion which the history of the word at once dissipates.

Nor must it be imagined that processes like those which have given a *w* to *whole*, an *s* to *island*, an *h* to *rhyme*, a *g* to *sovereign* and *foreign*, a *gh* to *delight*, are no longer in operation, though it must be granted that their power of producing harm is constantly growing weaker. Still the men who get their etymology by inspiration are like the poor, in that we have them always with us. One illustration will suffice. A conflict between a true and a false spelling is now silently going on in the case of the word *controller*, more usually written *comptroller*. This latter orthography is in utter defiance of the derivation, the original meaning of the term and its present pronunciation. Its history makes this at once clear. *Controller* is in Norman-French *countre-rouler*, in law Latin *contra-rotulator*; and these again were taken from the Latin *contra*, against, and the diminutive *rotulus*, *rotula*, a little wheel, which, in the middle ages, acquired the meaning of "roll." The controller, in consequence, was the one who kept the counter-roll or register, by which the entries on some other roll were tested. How naturally the possession of such an office would be apt to give him holding it "control" over certain others, in the modern sense of the word, it needs but a glance to see plainly. But as early as the sixteenth century, some member of that class, "neither accomplished scholars, on the one side, nor

yet wholly without the knowledge of all languages save their own, on the other," got the notion into their heads that the word came from the French *compter*, to count, the original of which was the Latin *computare*. From this absurd derivation sprang the absurder spelling *comptroller*, and the two forms have existed side by side to the present time; but the latter, in spite of its defiance of etymology and pronunciation, is coming to be the one generally preferred.

Such a line of argument as the above is the merest commonplace to scholars; and many of them are disposed in consequence to resent any discussion at all of this fallacy of derivation. As well, say they, might astronomers waste time and labor in undermining the foundations upon which the Ptolemaic system was built. It can certainly be conceded that those who think most of etymology in matters of orthography are the ones who know least of it. Yet no careful observer of the controversy on the question of spelling reform can fail to see that this fallacy is the one which has the strongest and deepest hold upon the feelings of the educated class. It is constantly advanced by men, who, though not at all proficient in linguistic studies, have attained deservedly high distinction in literature; and the authority which they have legitimately won in other fields is naturally, even if irrationally, extended to subjects about which their opinions are worth absolutely nothing. The wide acceptance of such a view accordingly raises a barrier which must be utterly broken down before there can be a reasonable prospect of the adoption of any reform whatever. The strength of it, moreover, is largely re-inforced by the prevalence of another generally received fallacy, connected indirectly with this question, that a knowledge of the derivation of words is a desirable, if not an essential, requisite to their proper use, and that in consequence the spelling should be made to conform to the etymology for that particular reason. The existence of great authors in every literature, who had either no knowledge or incorrect knowledge of the sources of the speech which they wielded at will, is an argument against this absurd assumption which may be, and ordinarily is, ignored, but can never be squarely met. It is not from their originals nor from their past meanings that men learn the value of the terms they employ; it is from actual experience or observation or from the

present usage of the best speakers and writers. Is the meaning of "nausea" any plainer after we have learned that it is a Greek word which comes from *naus*, a "ship," and in consequence strictly denotes sea-sickness? One hour's experience of the feeling will give any person a keener appreciation and a preciser knowledge of the signification than a whole year's study of the derivation. Will "stirrup" be employed with greater clearness after one has learned that in the earliest English it was *stige-râp*, and that it consequently meant originally the "rope" by which one "sties" or mounts the horse? The information thus gained has an independent value of its own; it may likewise be of interest; it may satisfy an intelligent curiosity; it may show that the first stirrups were probably made of ropes; but it implies a mistaken and confused conception of the benefit to be gained by etymological study to fancy that one result of it will be to enable a man to use the language he speaks with more marked precision and expressiveness. It is only in exceptional cases, when a word is beginning to wander away from its primitive sense, that a knowledge of the derivation imparts accuracy. But even here there is a difficulty existing in the fact that this transition of meaning is either a natural development which ought not to be held in check, or it is a general perversion which the etymological training of the few is in most instances utterly unable to arrest. How powerless the latter influence is can be seen clearly in the change now going on before our eyes in the use of the term "avocation." It is at present, in this country at least, frequently employed to denote its exact opposite "vocation"; for, as the derivation at once makes plain, a man's avocations have little or nothing to do with his regular calling; they are the things, whether duties or pleasures, which take him away or divert him from his calling. But while there is an obligation resting upon every one to fight against such perversions while they are taking place, there is no need of lamenting their existence after they have once become established. The history of language is the history of blunders, which one age perpetrates ignorantly, and the following age clings to loyally. No one can ever discuss intelligently the phenomena of speech as manifested in the use of words until he has learned the primary principle that a tongue never grows debased or corrupt till the men who employ it have them-

selves become debased and corrupt; that the former will be very certain fitly to represent the elevation of thoughts and feeling of the latter; and that if the latter will take care of themselves, the former may be safely left to take care of itself.

Closely allied to this fallacy of derivation is what may be called the fallacy of history. So closely allied is it, indeed, that when the one is spoken of, it is the other that is usually meant. The opponent of change in the existing orthography is apt condescendingly to assure the advocates of it, that in their efforts after reform they forget that words have a history of their own; and after he has made this far from novel remark, he usually goes on to make clear by illustration that he himself has no conception of what it means. "Shall we," asks a recent writer, after reciting this well-worn formula,—“shall we mask the Roman origin of Cirencester and Towcester by spelling them Sissiter and Touster,” as they are pronounced? It is evident in this case from the connection, that this decryer of change intends to say that by altering the orthography of these proper names, their history would be obscured; what he actually says is that their derivation, that is a single point in their history, would be shut out from sight. For the leading idea at the bottom of such an argument, if it has any idea at all, must necessarily be that the particular form which the word has assumed at the first period of its existence is the form that ought always to be preserved. Now if orthography is to represent etymology, there is method in this madness, at least if we are able to both obtain and retain the earliest spelling. But the former we cannot do, save in very few cases; the latter we have scarcely done in any case at all. On the other hand, the maintenance of one form through all periods not only contributes nothing to the history of a word, it actually does all that it can to prevent its history being known. This is a point plain enough to him who thinks on these matters; but, as in the discussions of this subject the feelings are usually brought into play and not the reason, it is no wonder that it escapes the notice of most.

But a little reflection will make manifest at once, that as a matter of fact, it is the spoken word only that can have a history; it is in the changes which the written word has undergone that this history is recorded and preserved. If the latter remains in a petrified condition, all knowledge of the suc-

cessive stages through which the former has passed, or may pass, at once disappears, unless it can be gained from outside sources. The moment the word comes to have a fixed, unchangeable exterior form, no matter what alterations may take place in its interior life, that is to say in its sound, that moment its history, independent of the meaning it conveys, becomes doubtful and obscure. Two terms designating common diseases will serve as illustrations of the opposite condition of things here indicated. They are "quinsy" and "phthisic." The one can be traced through the successive forms of "squincy" and "squincy," "squincy" to its immediate Romance original, and from that still further back to the Greek. In this case a history is unrolled before us. But the word "phthisic," as it is now generally written, gives no such information. At first, to be sure, it was ordinarily spelled as it was pronounced. In Milton it can be found with the orthography "tizzic"; and such a form makes evident at once how it was then sounded, just as do the corresponding *tisico* in Italian and *tisica* in Spanish. But what possible contribution to its history can be furnished by going back to the Greek original, and imposing for all time upon the word a combination of letters which we would not pronounce if we could, and could not if we would? Archbishop Trench has pointed out the transition by which "emmet" has passed into "ant" through the intermediate spellings of "emet" and "amt," which must of course have represented this change of sound. By this means a history has been preserved to us. But he certainly has no right to felicitate himself on such a result. If his theories are true, while we pronounce the word "ant" we ought to write it "emmet"; because, to use his own argument, letters silent to the ear would still be most eloquent to the eye, and in this particular case some of us would be made happy by being reminded of the Anglo-Saxon original *amet*.

Even using history in the narrow and imperfect sense in which those who talk about it constantly employ it, we are no better off. Nearly every old word in the English language has had different forms at different periods of its existence. Which one of these is to be taken as the standard? When does this so-called history begin? Shall we write "head" because it is the custom to do so now? or shall we go back to the Anglo-Saxon original, *heáfod*? or shall we adopt any one of the numerous later

forms such, for instance, as "heved" or "heed" or "hed"? We do not, in fact, cling to the present spelling of the word because it gives us a knowledge of its history, for it does not do this at all; nor because it gives us a knowledge of its derivation, for this it does very little; nor because it conforms to pronunciation, for this it does still less; we cling to it simply because we are used to it. Even in the case of Cirencester and Towcester, above mentioned, the same statement is true, though strictly they would not enter into the discussion of this question. Proper names, being individual in their nature, are more or less under the control of the individuals who own them, and who can and do exercise the right of changing them at will. But for the sake of the argument let us assume that it would be a gross outrage to spell the names of these two places as they are pronounced; let us admit that all knowledge of their Roman origin would be lost by such a change to those who did not care enough about it to make it a subject of special study. It is, accordingly, a legitimate inference that, in the designation of towns, the main office of the orthography is to point out their origin. But this principle, if worth anything, ought to be carried through consistently. What shall be done then in such a case as that of Exeter? The ancient name was Exancester, which subsequently became Excesster, still later, Excester, and as early at least as the reign of Queen Elizabeth, usually Exeter. If it be the object of spelling to impart this interesting information about the origin of places, ought we not to return at any rate to the form Excester, to show that the Romans once had a permanent military station on the banks of the Exe? The value of all such knowledge is invariably something assumed, not estimated. The few who need it can always easily acquire it without the necessity of perverting orthography from its legitimate functions to the business of imparting it. How many of the inhabitants of Boston in Lincolnshire and of Boston in Massachusetts lead happy, honored and useful lives, and go down to their graves in blissful unconsciousness of the fact that the name of their city has been shortened from Botolph's town! How many of them are aware, indeed, that such a saint as Botolph ever existed at all? In every case our prejudices are in favor of the actual spelling now employed, whether it represent pronunciation or derivation, and those prejudices are due simply to the fact

that we are used to it, and to nothing else whatever. It is sentiment that rules us, not science. This may or may not be well; but it is not well for any man to deceive himself or others by allowing the former to masquerade in the garments of the latter. There is no middle ground in this question. The cause of the present orthography may be upheld by an appeal to the feelings: it can never be helped by resort to reasoning. He who sets out to justify the existing system by arguments addressed to the intellect finds himself at once involved in a maze of contradictions and absurdities, and wears himself in fruitless efforts to explain the unexplainable, and to defend the indefensible.

There is still another fallacy, founded purely upon ignorance, which was once the most potent and prevalent of all; but which, with the ever-increasing knowledge of the history of our speech, is now rarely heard. This is the opinion that the current orthography has been in existence from some very remote period, and has therefore about it that sanctity which, when everything else praiseworthy is lacking, we are apt to accord to antiquity. The facts in regard to this have already been stated indirectly, and it is in consequence not necessary to do anything more than recapitulate them here. The present spelling was reached approximately in the latter part of the seventeenth century; that is to say, the majority of words had then assumed the form which they now have. There was still, however, wide variation in usage, as a comparison of different books published at that period clearly shows. Yet while a tendency toward a mechanical uniformity, under the influence of the printing-office, went steadily on from that time, it was not until the appearance of Johnson's dictionary in 1755, that the orthography can be said to have become fixed. Even from that established by this lexicographer, there has been some little change. The final *k*, which he insisted on retaining in words that denoted the same sound by *c*, as "publick" (Latin, *public-us*) and "back" (Anglo-Saxon, *bac*), in the largest number of cases has now been discarded; but not without protest from many who saw in this innovation a blow dealt at the foundations of the language. It must not be supposed that this was a reform intelligently planned and consistently carried out. Had such been the fact there might have been occasions for fear that lurking somewhere in secret, a rational principle was at work in

the effort to bring harmony and order out of the chaos in which English orthography is plunged. To avoid even such a suspicion, everything was left to chance; and as a result of it we write "hammock," for illustration, with a *k*, and "havoc" without one. But in the main the forms which Johnson adopted have been preserved unchanged from his day to our own; and while variations still exist, it may fairly be claimed that, roughly speaking, we have attained uniformity. It is accordingly just to say that the present spelling has all the sacredness which springs from being one hundred to one hundred and fifty years old. The fact has come to be so generally known, that it requires now more than ordinary proficiency in ignorance to advance the argument of antiquity, which once did the most effective service. The decline and fall of this belief is but one of the numerous illustrations of the miserable realities into which the magnificent pretensions of modern orthography sink, when subjected to the scrutiny of history.

There is still an objection to change, which is gravely brought forward by Archbishop Trench, and seems to be regarded by some as so serious that it requires a passing notice. This is to the effect that great confusion would be caused by writing alike words which have the same sound to the ear but are now distinguished by the spelling to the eye, such, for instance, as "son" and "sun," "rain" and "reign" and "rein." This is one of those difficulties which are very formidable on paper, and nowhere else. There is scarcely a common word in the English language that does not have a wide variety of meanings, sometimes possessing apparently little connection with one another. Does this difference of sense produce real practical inconvenience? Does any one experience trouble, on hearing a sentence containing the adjective "thick," in determining whether the word is an adjective or a noun, or whether it denotes "dense" or "turbid," or "abundant," or a measure of dimension? Given the connection in which it is employed, does any one ever mistake "rain" for "reign" or "rein"? The negative answer, which must be made to such questions as these, disposes at once of a difficulty that has no existence outside of the imagination. For if no trouble is experienced in determining the meaning of words sounded alike, in the hurry of conversation, when the hearer has but a moment to compare the connection and

comprehend the thought, it is certainly borrowing a great deal of unnecessary anxiety to fancy that any embarrassment could be caused in reading, where there is ample opportunity to stop and consider the context and reflect upon the sense which the passage must have. The actual existence of such a difficulty would imply a want of capacity in human nature, which were it ever justified to the mind of him who asserts it by his individual consciousness, it would be manifestly unfair to attribute to the whole race.

These are the objections to any alteration of English orthography that are most commonly urged. There are others, but they are directed not against reform in itself, but rather against proposed methods of reform. The object of these articles has been to show the existence and nature of a disease, not to discuss methods of cure. For the difficulty in this matter is that having become acclimated in childhood we have forgotten in what an unhealthy orthographical climate we are living, or have become indifferent to it. Yet it is not so much that the public is opposed to remedying what it deems evil; it simply does not see that there is an evil. To remove the hold that the present spelling has upon the feelings of most persons is one of the first steps that must be taken before reform of any kind can hope to receive serious consideration; and because its hold is upon the feelings and not the intellect, it is necessarily a work that cannot be accomplished in a day. The ignorant and almost puerile prejudices that are displayed in reference to this subject are likely to end for nearly all who are now swayed by them only with their lives; but

it is possible to prevent their perpetuation and spread. We cannot expect any reform to be fairly examined so long as in the eyes of educated men the spelling of a particular word in a particular way is a particular evidence of total depravity. There is no objection under our present system to any person writing "metre" with *re* and its compound, "diameter," with *er*. It is only when he insists that where everything is irrational, his particular irrationality shall be looked upon as a contribution to the purity of the English tongue, that his ignorance makes of him a nuisance. It is full time for us to abandon a groveling superstition, which in the minds of many has confounded the worship of the letter with the worship of letters. If we cannot free ourselves from the trammels of our present orthography, we can certainly free ourselves from the absurd notion that there is anything about it either respectable or reasonable; and those who come after us may be at liberty to consider and remedy some, if not all, of the evils under which we are now suffering. If in the future, to schemes of reform can be given that careful and candid examination which hitherto every single one of them has been prevented from receiving by stupid prejudices and stupid fancies which their owners have dignified with the name of ideas; if this can be given, we may hope that after numberless failures, success will at length be attained; that the language we speak will not be forever disgraced by an orthography, to the vicious variations of which, when we set out to learn it, we can see no end, and in which, after having learned it, we can find no sense.

 WIDOWED.

SHE did not sigh for death, nor make sad moan,
 Turning from smiles as one who solace fears,
 But filled with kindly deeds the waiting years;
 Yet, in her heart of hearts, she lived alone,
 And in her voice there thrilled an undertone
 That seemed to rise from soundless depths of tears;
 As, when the sea is calm, one sometimes hears
 The long, low murmur of a storm, unknown
 Within the sheltered haven where he stands,
 While tokens of a tempest overpast
 The changing tide brings to the shining sands;
 So on the surface of her life was cast,
 An ever present shadow of the day,
 When Love and Joy went hand in hand away.