

mas of the language and ascertains the fundamental sounds. Then he devises a written symbol for each of those sounds. Thus he has a perfectly logical and natural fonic alfabet. As a matter of fact most alfabet has been formed in essentially that way. The English was an exception. By considering for a moment the history of our language, we shall see the reason of its imperfection and viciousness. When the Latin missionaries went to England during the times of the early Saxon kings, of the 8th and 9th centuries, they employed the Latin letters for the yet unwritten Saxon sounds.

Some of these Latin letters made a very imperfect fit to begin with. Some did not cover and some overlapped the Saxon sounds to which they were applied. Hence the English alfabet was a lop-sided affair to begin with. Nevertheless it hobbled along for some centuries, constantly needing a new alfabet and constantly departing farther from it. Then came the Norman conquest in 1066, and it became confusion worse confounded.

The burdened stomach of the language, struggling with Saxon ignorance, was called upon to assimilate a mass of verbal cookery from France. Many Latin and Greek words were added; the English became a fortuitous concurrence of Saxon, French, Latin, and Greek. It was spelled by the laws of permutation and accident.

Many of the Saxon gutturals they tried to represent by the letters gh, but the refined French tongue dropped the guttural, and those letters became silent and have remained so ever since. Furthermore, many words really of Saxon origin, were supposed by the imperfect scholarship of the time to be from the Latin, and were spelled so as to indicate that supposed fact even in violation of the sound. Such words as *island*, from Saxon *iland*, but thought to be from the Latin *insula* and therefore having the unnecessary *s*; *rhyme*, really from Saxon *riman* not from the Greek, illustrate these false derivations and consequent false spellings. There are multitudes of similar cases. Then, after all those blunders and contradictions, the spelling has been changing at random and by accident ever since. Thousands of changes have occurred since the time of Shakespeare.

In brief, our language has never had

any system of spelling. It has been simply one grand hodge-podge of orthographical accidents. If now any editor of a daily newspaper or of anything else is disposed to advocate the excellence of such a libel on spelling, he is welcome to the heroic effort.

What, then, is to be done? Our present system must be obliterated and a fonic system introduced. Our language has forty fundamental sounds. It should have forty letters; fifteen vowels, fifteen sub-vowels, and ten aspirates. Two of our present alfabet, C and X, would be dropped. All silent letters would be dropped. We would have no more double letters, as th or ph, to represent simple sounds.

The sound of k, for instance, would be always represented by the letter k, not by ch or que or ck or c or some other absurd and accidental combination.

We may say without dogmatism that there is no use in reasoning with any one who would deny that such an ideal alfabet would be infinitely preferable to the present. But the next question, of vast importance, too, is this: is such a change as the adoption of that alfabet would involve, practicable? Would it not be better to submit to the acknowledged evils of our present method than to throw the whole literary world into confusion by changing?

Would the future saving counterbalance the present waste? Here lies the practical bearing of the question. We answer, the adoption of a new system must be gradual.

The leaders of this movement realize this fact and their caution must reassure all frightened conservatives. The Spelling Reform Association has advanced, as an entering wedge, the following five rules, (a) omit *a* from the digraf *ea* when pronounced like *e* short, as in *head*: (b) omit silent *e* after a short vowel, as in *have*: (c) write *f* instead of *ph*: (d) when a word ends with a double letter, omit the last; (e) change final *-ed* to *t* when it has the sound of *t*, as in *wished*.

The American Philological Association has made essentially similar rules and has published the following words as illustrating their rules, viz.: *ar*, *hav*, *liv*, *gard*, *catalog*, *tho*, *thru*, *giv*, *infinite*, *definite*, and *wisht*.

That Association is under the control of such men as Whitney, March, Marsh, Child, and others of world-wide fame as scholars, and the public may depend on their acting with prudence. It will, therefore, be seen that these changes are to move so slowly that all can keep up.

In conclusion, let us set before us the main objections urged by opponents of Spelling Reform. They may be reduced to three: 1st, People who have already acquired the old method will find it hard to change. We have already answered this in part by showing that the changes will be gradual; and the acquisition of the new method we may add, will be very easy. I have demonstrated in my school-room that any one of ordinary brains can completely master a fonic system in a week of honest toil.

2nd, Many of our words preserve their etymological history in their spelling; were that changed, their history would be lost. We answer this objection by saying that of only a very few words is this true; that the *people*, for whom the language should exist, would never trace etymological history anyway; and that *scholars* must have a *great deal more* than the spelling in order to study etymology. It is the height of absurdity to drag the corpses of dead letters around with living ones, in order that every body may see when they died. If a scholar wants to be familiar with the demise of ancient words and letters, let him study the old books and manuscripts.

The third objection is one of real magnitude, to wit; the old libraries, worth millions, will become unintelligible to those who are familiar with the new system only. Notwithstanding its weight this objection is something like saying that it would not pay to cure a cripple because then his crutches would be waste property.

It is to be observed, however, that a fonic system would differ from the present but little more than it differs from the spelling of Chaucer and Wycliffe, and most any one can, by a little pains, read those authors. Furthermore, books will be only two-thirds as large and expensive when printed by the new method as now.

We may reduce the advantages of the proposed change to five: 1st, A child or foreigner could learn the language in a *fraction of the time now required*. 2nd, Our fluctuating pronunciation would be fixed by having given symbols always correspond to given sounds. 3rd, Any given amount of matter could be printed on two-thirds of the present space. 4th, *The mastery and constant employment of a sensible system of spelling would give to children at the outset of study a habit of logical thought which would be of incalculable value to their subsequent mental growth*. 5th, The years now squandered in acquiring a senseless and arbitrary mass of verbal forms would then be devoted to useful study. A child would learn a fonic system in a few months, and from that time the question of spelling would never trouble him. So soon as he should hear a word he would know from the sound what letters should compose it. We leave any unprejudiced and thoughtful reader to decide between the competing