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DEVOTED TO PRONUNCIATION AND AMENDED SPELLING.

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LAWS OF SOUND-CHANGE.

(By H. SWEET, M. A., at Filologic Sec.)

It is now generally admitted by filologists that sound changes, as a rule, were exceedingly gradual, and that the greatest revolutions in language were only the sums of long series of slight shiftings of the vocal organs. The orthographies of dead languages preserved no record of these minute variations, hence we had to seek explanations of them in the sounds of living languages. In filology, as in geology, the past was intelligible only by help of the present. Literary professors, who ignored phonetics, could offer no explanation of Eng. vowel-mutation or unmut, such as *wen*, *geese*, *mice*. At best they might surmise that final *i* in early forms of these words, *manni*, *gosi*, *musi*, modified and then disappeared. That was no satisfactory theory; for it did not explain how the modification came, or why it produced these particular results. The phonetic theory was much more complicated, and was deduced from recent investigations into the influence of vowels on consonants, and *vice versa*, as exemplified in living languages. A simple illustration was found in *cat* and *key*, where difference between sounds of initial consonants was due to succeeding vowels. If we interchanged consonants, the words sounded somewhat like [kʰo:] and [kʰwi, or kʰe]. The reason was that *aw* being formed by a low position of back of tongue, drew *k* back towards the throat; while *ey* [iy, or i:], a high front vowel, drew the *k* forward. This influence had formerly given rise to pronunciations [kyaind, gya'd] for *kind*, *guard*. Similar phenomena existed on an immense scale in Russian, where almost every vowel perceptibly modified almost every preceding consonant. . . . Similar reversions had occurred in South Slavonic dialects. That the Germanic vowel mutation was also the result of consonantal influence was proved by Old Norse mutations before fronted *r* which replaced older *z*, as in *cra* from *auzo* 'ear'. The above examples were illustrative of assimilation, which sprang from desire to save space in articulation, and secure *eaz* of transition. Thus *pu* became *pu*, or else *mu*. Saving of time was effected by dropping superfluous sounds, especially at the end of words, as when *sing-g*, with distinct final *g*, was reduced to *sing*. But cases of saving of effort were very rare or non-existent. The loss of trilled point *r*, or its replacement by trilled uvular *gh* and *x*, as in Paris and Berlin, were perhaps due to economy of effort. All ordinary sounds of language were about on a par as to difficulty of production. If children learn *p* and *m* more easily than *k* and *ng* it was not (on) account of any intrinsic difficulty in the latter [sound?], but because the action of the lips was visible and that of back of tongue hidden. The chief cause of sound-change appeared to be *defective imitation*, or the substitution of approximately similar sounds, as in [fru] for *through*. Mr Sweet would divide sounds into stable and unstable: the former class containing the labials, separated from all others by a distinct space; the latter class containing the tongue articulations, all of which interchanged and ran into each other. In addition to the above organic changes, there was an important and numerous class due to grammatical and lexical analogy, and to confusion of meaning, as in *sparrow-grass* for *asparagus*. Mr S. cited cases of co-existence of native and foreign sounds in the same dialect. The Ar-

menian implosives, or choke stops, in which closing and raising the glottis supplied the force checked in the mouth, were believed to have been borrowed from some non-Aryan language of the Caucasus. The general conclusion drawn was that history of words, and their changes, could not be studied in literature alone; all true investigations into the forms of language must be founded on scientific phonetics. In our present university system there was not so much as a practice to study phonetics, and the teaching of filology was therefore deprived of any solid basis.

Several members objected to the theory that sound-changes were rarely if ever due to economy of effort. Dr F. M. called cited the abbreviation of 'clo' (old clothes) and Mr Brandt cited unmut, assimilation and the introduction of the neutral vowel as causes of weakening.

Mr S. replied that abbreviation was saving of time, and assimilation saving of space. Whereas no trace was found of a tendency to eliminate exceptionally difficult sounds. The stops, such as *t*, were often relaxed into open consonants, such as *p*; on the other hand, the convers change was just as common.

Mr J. Lecky said he had independently arrived at the same theory—that sound-changes are seldom attributable to saving effort. A fronted *m* was not necessarily harder than a simple labial; the simultaneous action of different parts of the mouth might be easier than their separate action; just as we find it easier to move all the fingers at once in grasping than to move each finger separately in playing music. Assimilation vastly multiplied the number of elementary sounds, and therefore could not be described as facilitating pronunciation. The neutral vowel was just as difficult as any other; for the English variety of it was rarely learnt by a foreigner; and even a native could not, without phonetic training, pronounce it isolated or accented. The introduction of the neutral vowel was not due to laziness, but to the desire to subordinate some syllables to others, so as to weld the sound group into unity, and make the haze rhythmical. In such a word as *territory*, if a real *o* were sounded, it would suggest a division into two separate words, as *terry* and *torry*. Mr L. did not regard untrilling *r* as economy, but *cauz*, in the smooth consonant, there was the new difficulty of sustaining the point of the tongue without support of the palate. This was a changed distribution of effort, not a saving. Explanation of sound changes might be found in the assertion of individuality. Each new generation, feeling itself different from the preceding, unconsciously develop a new pronunciation sufficiently distinct to be characteristic. Changes in pronunciation were thus analogous to changes in art or costume, which could not, as a rule, be attributed to economy of either effort, space, or time.

(The above deserves careful study for two reasons:

(1) its matter, (2) its spelling; it is the sample from *Proceedings of Filologic Soc. phonist* on p. 142. Sound-change, Sound-shifting, or what Germans call Lautverschiebung, denotes gradual change in pronunciation. The survival of what was current in different stages of shifting largely accounts for variety of pronunciation now prevalent, sounds shifting rapidly in some districts, slowly in others. The critical reader will remark *gemal*, *seprat*, *disfence*, *several* as two syllables, vowel as one. Extreme care has been taken to copy the spelling from the *Proceedings* without change even to what appear misprints. In words