

*power* (*por, pur or pour*), whether "prow" should be *pro* or *prou* (*pro* or *prou*);—whether *i* of *Valentine* should be short or diphthongal; and hundreds of similar points on which analogy may waver and authorities vary! It is a serious responsibility for a poor lad who has been taught at some humble provincial school, after pushing his onward way in life, to find himself under the necessity of speaking or reading in the presence of more cultivated auditors! Better would it be to let these matters be settled by the hundreds who write or publish books, than by the millions who read them. The reader would take the pronunciation as he found it, and it would be to the interest of the publisher to see to its accuracy. The result would be that persons thoroughly qualified for the task would be employed to superintend the choice of characters in printing—and see that they reflected the most approved pronunciation.

5. Where usage is at present divided, diversity of spelling might appear for some time in different books, but in all probability no case of this sort will continue very long. The more exact the general system, the less indulgence will be allowed to irregularities. When social anarchy prevails, many crimes are permitted to pass without inquiry; but when *law* has firmly established its throne, every delinquency is hunted down.

It is next necessary to inquire into the evils which may be expected to arise from a reformed system of spelling—and to ascertain whether they are of sufficient weight to counterbalance its advantages.

That inconveniences would be occasioned by the change is not denied. In what branch of human effort can a radical improvement be effected without producing such a consequence? There is no nation in the world better acquainted with this fact than the British. If there is a principle pertaining to business better established in the public mind than another, it is that improvement *must go on*, notwithstanding partial and temporary evils if preponderating and permanent benefit can be secured. According to this principle of British action then, the only question respecting the subject under discussion is whether the evil incurred is likely to equal the benefit obtained.

It is proper at this point to guard against exaggerated notions of the extent of the proposed change. Some may object to a revolution, who may consent to a moderate reform. Now there are certainly various schemes conceivable, differing from each other in their nature and also in the amount of alteration which they would effect upon the face of the language. We might conceive of the whole Alphabet being remodeled so as to conform it to the law that elementary sounds organically related should have letters exhibiting resemblance. This however might be called a revolution; and it seems best to fore-

go this advantage, which is rather theoretical than practical, and retain as many as possible of the present letters in connection with their present powers. It is necessary however to restrict every letter to the expression of one element,—to discard redundant letters or assign them new functions,—and to furnish new characters for such elements as are unsupplied. A complete alphabet being thus furnished, it remains so to regulate its application so that every element shall be expressed by a single letter, neither less nor more, and uniformly by the same letter. This would sweep away all silent letters and the whole mass of digraphs, *ca. cy, ai, au, o-e, u e sh, ti, U. di, ph. th. ss, etc.*, to the number of about 70; even omitting such as are of rare occurrence. No doubt a smaller measure of reform than this is conceivable, but it would still leave room for agitation, and could not be regarded as a settlement of the question. The measure described may thus be regarded as a medium one, and entitled to the benefit of the Horatian precept "*Medio in istis inus tibi.*"—A medium path is the safest.

Though, therefore, the change proposed brings the whole language under the sway of one great principle and may therefore in a certain sense be reckoned universal, yet its practical effects upon the appearance of the language are not so extensive as may at first be supposed. The letters dropped or altered stand in the proportion of about one to four. Three-fourths therefore of the entire spelling will remain the same as before. In considering objections then it is right to bear in recollection the exact nature and amount of the proposal against which they are directed.

1. The objection which weighs most heavily with most persons of education is the injurious effect upon the interests of etymology which is anticipated from the employment of strictly phonetic spelling. The topic is very extensive, but a few remarks are all that the immediate object of this paper admits of.

The position is, that silent letters and other irregularities in orthography are marks of the pedigree of words, and of the changes through which they have passed, and that the removal of these marks must be detrimental to the study of the history of the words. Thus if "sign" be spelled as pronounced, *sein*, the *g* disappears, but that *i* the letter which connects the word, historically, with the Latin *signum*. So if *gh* be expunged from "though," pronounced thus, we shall lose sight of the guttural sound once given to that digraph. The weight due to this consideration may appear from the following observations.

1. Let it not be forgotten that spelling cannot possibly be so managed as to secure both of the objects thus brought into competition. It cannot both record past transformations and reflect present pronunciation. At the best no more can be done than to give each object a share, and what is gained by the one must be

lost by the other. If *gh* is retained in the word *light* it intimates that there was a palatal aspirate in the ancient pronunciation, but the modern pronunciation is thereby falsified. If again the *gh* is dropped, the spelling comes nearer to the modern pronunciation, but departs further from the ancient. The question then comes to be, which of two unitedly incompatible objects shall be preferred. The decision should turn upon the previous question,—*What is the proper object of spelling?* Will any one maintain that it is to furnish traces of derivation? If not, the inference is, that spelling must be made to serve its own proper ends at all hazards. Were it possible to effect a subordinate purpose in addition to the primary one, no one could object to their combination; but since this is not possible, no one could object to their separation.

2. Even if it should be maintained that Etymology is the paramount interest, and that when ever it comes into collision with pronunciation the latter must give way, the fact would still remain, that spelling cannot furnish a satisfactory index to derivation. It is only in a very imperfect degree that it serves or can possibly serve this purpose. Of several ascertainable stages through which a word has passed, it may perhaps indicate the last; but for the earlier ones, information must be sought elsewhere. Our word "physic" exhibits by its present spelling its relation to its Latin parent, but it fails to show any trace of its Grecian grand sire. If changed to *fizik* it would come nearer to the latter, but depart farther from the former. The case is therefore brought to this point by the objectors,—*that what spelling could accomplish it must not be allowed to do, and what it cannot accomplish it must attempt to do!*

3. The obvious inference is that Etymology should be provided for otherwise. Its proper depository is the Dictionary. There full justice can be done to it, and there it will not interfere with the claims of its rival. There let abrogated spellings as far as they can be traced, and all collateral information fitted to interest the student, be duly displayed in historical order; but let all such matters be banished from the field of Orthography in as far as they intrude upon its rights.

This division of objects meets the requirements of two classes of persons who ought not to be jumbled together. The mass of ordinary readers and writers employ their native tongue alone, which they use as they do the light of day, without inquiring into its constitution and the curious phenomena which analysis may unfold. There is a smaller class who, while using language as an instrument, make the instrument itself a matter of study. They distinguish between indigenous and imported words, they group both into families, they trace out affinities between the vocabularies of different languages; they notice the transmutations of consonants from one order to another, etc. For the former class, traces of derivation and affinity left in the spelling of words are quite superfluous; for the latter class they are quite insufficient. Those who have studied the Greek, Latin, and other tongues, least require the meagre help which modes of spelling can afford in exploring the history of their own language; while those who have not will find that help of very slender service. Those who require the help cannot profit by it, and those who could profit by