

PHONETIC PIONEER.

There is the case of *adult learners*.—A proportion of those who have been neglected in childhood make an attempt at a more advanced stage of life to repair the deficiency. The memory has lost the pliant facility of early years and can no longer grapple with rules general and special,—with their attendant exceptions, and exceptions to exceptions. But reason has become strong, and can easily work out the application of one distinct and universally operating principle. Thus in dealing with the existing orthographic system, the adult learner is in some respects at least, in a worse case than the child, but substitute a phonetic system and the tables are turned in his favor. It is to be hoped that the time is approaching when there shall be few of these cases to disgrace the land. Unhappily they have hitherto been far unrequited; and we believe that none who have tried the benevolent work of teaching such persons will fail to affirm that our imperfect and irregular spelling constituted a formidable barrier to their success.

Viewing these three classes last mentioned as a whole, it may be affirmed that many who make some progress in reading and spelling, acquire too little to be of any use.—Few will put into operation an instrument which cannot be moved except by an effort oppressively unskilful and laborious.

There is the case of *foreigners*. It is passing strange that the people who have most to do with other nations,—whose ships are found in every harbour, whose treaties are numberless,—and whose agents civil and commercial, are dispersed over the whole world,—should wield a language which bears the character of being peculiarly difficult to acquire. But with the exception of its irregular verbs, the grammatical phenomena of the language are the simplest possible.—The difficulty exemplified of *must*, therefore, resolve itself mainly into the complex and intricate machinery employed to represent the elements of the language to the eye.—Simplify the relation between the sounds heard and their visible symbols, and the consequence will be that no language, in proportion to its extent, will be mastered more easily. If the plea of benevolence is of less force in this description of case, that of self-interest is specially strong. What facilitation of intercourse with other nations, and what consequent benefit to ourselves, would result from moving out of the way that source of tribulation which our present spelling occasions!

7. There is the case of the *deaf and blind*. These labor under very special difficulties, and peculiar modes of elementary instruction have been devised for their benefit. But the cause, of which so much has been said, extend their influence to these sufferers also. The deaf, who are, of course,

saved the embarrassment caused by comparing the *sound* of the language with its visible representation,—have still to contend with all the superfluities which that representation involves, and which add one-tenth to the amount of manipulation in the use of their finger alphabet which the strict necessities of the language require. The blind, having the faculties of hearing and speech, are in much the same case as the ordinary reader, so far as regards the difficulties occasioned by the system of spelling itself; but these difficulties are enhanced in their case by the nature of the expedient which they require to employ.

Is it not matter of regret that persons suffering under privations so heavy should find unnecessary perplexity and trouble in their humble efforts after the acquisition of knowledge?

8. To these may be added the case of the *teacher*. Let all who have tried to impart to others an acquaintance with the English tongue bear witness to the trouble that attends the task. What incessant discrepancies between the powers of the individual letters and their combined effect! What corrections and reiterations! What charges to remember this and that inexplicable anomaly! What abortive gropings in the poor pupil's mind after a conception of the laws by which the vowel and consonant signs are regulated! What increase of trouble from defective skill on the part of the teacher himself! What tendency on his part to inattention and unreasonable severity of rebuke! What danger of fretting the child out of all relish and into all aversion to the incomprehensible drudgery! And all this going on in tens of thousands of schools every day! It is to go on in perpetuity merely because our ancestors, some hundreds of years ago, led away by the lustre of the Latin tongue, adopted its alphabet for a task to which it was inadequate,—that of expressing to the eye the elements of English speech!

11. Besides the principal advantage thus noticed, consisting in the easier acquisition of reading and spelling, there are several others which, though inferior in importance, are yet worthy of consideration.

1. The saving of expense in printing, and of time in writing. By the proposed change a reduction of not less than one-tenth will be effected. If the reader will examine the number of letters in Addison's hymn as given in both forms of spelling at the end of this paper, (which we have omitted,) he will discover that the old is to the new nearly as 6 to 5, the number of letters in the old spelling being 552, and in the new spelling 533. Other specimens would give the proportion as 10 to 9. The greatest saving is in the Saxon part of our language, a letter being saved in early, etc. Assuming the only one-truth less letters, are required in phonetic spelling, it follows that nine pages of printing, or writing, will

contain the matter now occupying ten,—that nine volumes will be equivalent to ten, that the hand-writing now requiring ten hours will be despatched in nine,—that of the money expended upon books in Great Britain a tenth may be saved, or that a tenth more value may be obtained for the same money,—and that of the aggregate time spent in wielding the pen, a tenth may be redeemed for other purposes; or else a tenth added to the work accomplished in that time.

2. Though the practical advantages were less than are anticipated, it would be something to possess an alphabet, and a method of using it, theoretically complete. To complete an instrument symmetrical, consistent, adequate to its appointed work, and free from any obvious defect, would surely prove a source of general satisfaction; and it would be an agreeable task to present such an instrument and its working to foreigners instead of the tangled mass which now excites their wonder and derision.

3. Though the trial has not been made, there is good ground for believing that pronunciation will be less liable to fluctuate when a strictly phonetic principle of spelling is employed. That numerous changes in pronunciation have taken place in the past history of the language, and even in comparatively recent times, is a well known fact. Dr. Johnson rather smiles at the idea of attempting to refix the orthography, reminding us that the process of change is going on even while we are employed in the reformation. But he overlooks the power of unambiguous and unmistakable modes of representation to *prevent* change. It is when everything is vague, confused and uncertain, that many doors of admission are opened for irregularities and fluctuations. The word *give*, for example, exhibits a different sound of the vowel *i* from that which occurs in words of similar formation, as *strive, dice, live, etc.*; but still it bears the sound given to it in *pin, tin, bid, etc.* The transition from the one to the other is easy when the same character represents both. *Give* may therefore have been pronounced at one time like *dice*, and have been corrupted into its present utterance. Phonetic spelling would have assigned to *i* in *dice* a different representation from that of *i* in *pin*, and thus the transition from the one to the other would have been more difficult.

If again *give* was originally pronounced with the short *i*, the final *e* should never have been attached to it, and thus it could never have come to rank as an anomalous word.

4. Phonetic spelling would devote the task of dealing with questions of pronunciation upon authors and printers instead of the mass of general readers good, bad and indifferent. At present every reader is expected to know all the niceties discussed in Walker's or Smart's Principles of Pronunciation,—whether "*pour*" should be *poor, pour or*