

ENGLISH ORTHOGRAPHY AND PHONOTYPY.

(From the Watchman of the Valley.)

That the orthography of our language is greatly defective, is the united testimony of Lexicographers, Grammarians, and Orthoepists. Dr. Webster, in the quarto edition of his American Dictionary, remarks. "From the period of the first Saxon writings, our language has been suffering changes in orthography. The first writers having no guide but the ear, followed each his own judgment or fancy, and hence a great portion of Saxon words are written with different letters by different authors: most of them are written two or three different ways, and some of them fifteen or twenty. Nothing can be more disreputable to the literary character of a nation, than the history of English orthography, unless it be that of orthoepy. The irregularities of the English orthography have always been a subject of deep regret, and several attempts have been made to banish them from the language."

Every foreigner, who attempts to learn our language, knows that the English language as spoken, has no written representation. After a pretty thorough investigation, it has been found, that there are but about fifty words in our whole language, that are pronounced as they are spelled; that is in which the alphabetic-name sounds of the letters are followed. We have but twenty-three available letters in our alphabet to represent about forty sounds! This deficiency is supplied by assigning several different powers to the same letter, or by using a combination of letters. For example, there are only five monosyllabic words in the language in which the letter e represents its alphabetic sound, while there are 125 such words in which the combination ea, represents that sound. In respect to the letter a, the case is still worse; there being only one monosyllabic word (bass) in which this letter unassisted by a final e, or any other letter, represents its proper alphabetical sound.

Taking letters and combinations together, there are about 200 effective letters in our written language. But it unfortunately happens that these 200 letters are by no means confined to one meaning or sound each. One of them (ie) has eleven, six have nine each, five have eight each, &c.; giving 552 meanings to the whole 200 letters, and an average of 2 $\frac{2}{3}$ meanings to each letter. Hence the difficulty of learning to read English—hence the fact that none of us can with certainty pronounce a new word on being presented with its written form only—and hence the necessity of a true orthography.

But it is far more difficult to spell English than it is to read it, as the following facts will show.

Orthoepists generally agree in estimating the number of elementary sounds, in our language (vowel, consonant and diphthongal) to be about 40. A phonetic alphabet would of course, appropriate a distinct character to each of those forty elements of speech. If we take forty-two letters, and make one of them always represent the name and sound of e, we shall find that this character has, in the present irregular and fanciful spelling twenty-three equivalents, as may be seen in the following words: Cæsar, be, complete, each, leave, Beauchamp, feat, impregn, conceit, conceive, people, key, keyed, albino, magazine, parliament, grief, grieve, antique, foetus, quay, mosquito, carry. The long sound of a, and the sound of oo, in food have twenty forms each; and the whole phonetic alphabet, representing the forty-two distinct elements of our spoken language, has 377 equivalents, in the present method (it does not deserve to be called system) of spelling. Upon an average then, our orthography gives nine forms to one sound or element; and the difficulty of learning to read is to that of learning to spell, (so far as guessing at sounds, in the one case, and at forms in the other, is concerned) as two and three quarters to nine for each element.

Says Dr. Rapp, an eminent German scholar, "Although the French language has for centuries been the common language of Europe, in a diplomatic and social sense, yet it has never obtained a firm footing in large tracts of country beyond Europe; for France was not much more enterprising than Italy in colonization. On the other hand English may be considered as the language of the world out of Europe; and this idiom, which, by a bold mixture of Gothic and Roman elements, and by a fusion of their grammatical forms, which this rendered necessary, has attained an incomparable degree of flowingness, appears destined by nature more than any other that exists to become the world's language. Did not a whimsical antiquated orthography stand in the

way, the universality of this language would be still more evident; and we other Europeans, may esteem ourselves fortunate that the English nation has not made this discovery."

"It may be fairly assumed" says Mr. Cobb in the preface to his Spelling Book, "that one third of the whole time spent in acquiring a useful education is devoted to this particular branch," spelling. Phonotypy would save all this; as children of six or eight years old, would learn to read in a month; and as soon as they could read, they could spell any word they could accurately pronounce.

Noah Webster undertook to reform our orthography by expunging from it superfluous letters; and some little advance in this respect has been made.—Writers very generally, and printers universally, are agreed in dropping the u from the final syllable in honor, senior, Savior, and the like.

A Mr. Pitman proposes a radical reform which will change our whole system of spelling; a Herculean task. To aid him, societies of literary men, we understand, are forming in England and America, who publish periodicals and conduct correspondence on his new system of orthography.—There is one thing that promises to introduce it into pretty extensive use:—The Christian enterprise which at the present time is labouring to put the Bible into the hands of every body, will find this labor of love greatly facilitated by the use of Pitman's characters and orthography; because this new written language can be acquired in much less time by foreigners and by the poor, than the one now in use.

Mr. Pitman's alphabet is pleasing to the eye. He has, as far as was possible, chosen English forms for his new letters; and has retained the old, except q, k and x.

He has with great skill preserved so much resemblance between the old orthography and the new that almost any person who can read the old, can learn the new in ten minutes.

There are already eight or nine periodicals in Phonotypy and Phonography, and we have no doubt but that this reform will take the people in the south and west by surprise, like Morse's Telegraph, which was in operation in some parts of the United States before it was heard of in others.

PROMPTITUDE.—Every scene of occupation is haunted by that "thief of time," procrastination; and all his ingenuity is directed to steal that best of opportunities, the present time. The disease of humanity, disinclination to the work God has given, more frequently takes the form of dilatoriness than a downright and decided refusal.—But delay shortens life and abridges industry, just as promptitude enlarges both. You have a certain amount of work before you, and in all likelihood some unexpected engagements may be superadded as the time wears on. You may begin that work immediately, or you may postpone it till the evening, or till the week be closing, or till near the close of life. Your sense of duty insists on its being done; but procrastination says, "It will be pleasanter to do it by-and-by." What infatuation! to end day in a hurry, and life itself in a panic! and when the hurried evening has closed, and the fevered life is over, to leave half your work undone! Whatever the business be, do it instantly, if you would do it easily: life will be long enough for the work assigned if you be prompt enough. Clear off arrears of neglected duty; and once the disheartening accumulations of the past are overtaken, let not that mountain of difficulty rise again. Prefer duty to diversion, and cultivate the athletic frame of soul which rejoices in abundant occupation; and you will soon find the sweetness of that repose which follows finished work, and the zest of that recreation in which no delinquent feeling mingles, and on which no neglected duty frowns.—*Life in Earnest, by the Rev. James Hamilton.*

"CHRISTIAN DANCING."—A gentleman hereby offers a premium of \$50, for the best Tract, not exceeding 12 pages, on the question of "the propriety of Dancing by church members, and the expediency of teaching it to our children." Committee of Award—Rev. Stephen H. Tying, D. D., New-York; Rev. E. W. Andrews, Troy, N. Y., and Rev. Wm. A. Hallock, 150 Nassau St. New-York; to either of whom manuscripts, each accompanied by a sealed envelope containing the name of the writer, may be addressed (post-paid) until Nov. 1st, 1846.

We heartily concur in the propriety of the above offer, and trust it will attract general attention. We trust the Tract which will receive the premium will consider thoroughly the subject of dancing, and show why the popular abomination of dancing in hot, crowded rooms, from fair-bed time to day-light, with a hot and heavy supper after midnight alternating in flimsy garments from an atmosphere of frost to one of steam, tricked out for Vanity, Fuir, and mixed up with all sorts of company, ought to be condemned and hounded, not only by devout Christians, but by all considerate human beings.—*Tribune.*