

this matter, and in his reply received this morning he states: "In the absence of Mr. Fielding I cannot say whether he has received any communication upon the subject or not."

Whatever may have been the conditions in the service when this Act was framed, it must surely be recognized by all that with the large number of women now in the service and under present day conditions, which make it often as necessary for the women as for the men to make such provision, in justice this privilege should be extended to the women.

Yours truly,

M. L. E.

Comment on 'Otium cum Dignitate.'

To the Editors of *The Civilian*:

Although I fully appreciate the humorous character of the article, 'Otium cum Dignitate' that appeared on page 523 of *The Civilian* for Jan. 27, 1911, I think it contains two remarks, of a somewhat similar nature, that ought not to be allowed to pass without correction.

It is quite probable that the writer of the article referred to is aware that the correct pronunciation of the word 'clerk' is 'clark,' and that 'Smythe' and 'Smyth' are older spellings than 'Smith'; but, as apparently there are many people who are not so well informed, it is a pity to help to confirm wrong impressions by ridiculing correct forms even in fun.

With regard to the first point, although the English language is living and growing, which means changing, so that it is a difficult thing for dictionaries to keep up to date, still, as a rule, the verdict of good dictionaries is accepted, on the ground that they are supposed to represent the usage of the majority of people of education and culture.

The Imperial dictionary gives the pronunciation of the word 'clerk' as 'klark', and I fancy that this pronunciation is the only one to be found in any dictionary published in Great Britain.

While the American dictionary called 'The Standard' gives only the other pronunciation of the word, namely, sounding the letter 'e' as in the word 'over', it adds the following significant quotation:—

A familiar illustration of this may be found in the words Derby, *clerk*, in which the er sounds as ar, but which many persons, especially of that class which is beginning to claim educated work, now pronounce literally.

Earle *Phil. Eng. Tongue*, ch. 2, p. 164.

The tendency of 'e' to broaden into 'a' is quite recognized. Speaking from memory, I might cite such words as 'heart', 'hearth', 'sergeant' or 'serjeant', 'parson', all formerly pronounced like the word 'her' (the word 'parson' was originally 'person', old Fr. 'persone', Lat.

'persona'). Recently when examining some old deeds, I noticed the old spelling 'Jervis', now 'Jarvis', and in an old French deed I observed the old spelling 'jerdin', now 'jardin' (English, garden); while anyone knowing Latin and French must have noticed that the Latin 'per' has become 'par' in French. The history of the name 'Malta'—the island of Malta, in the Mediterranean sea—might, perhaps, also be mentioned as an illustration of the principle under discussion. The older form of the name was 'Melita' (with the accent on the first syllable). The tendency of language is to shorten the number of syllables: this name probably underwent two changes,—first, 'Melita', then 'Melta', now 'Malta'.

With reference to the name 'Smith', it may be remarked that the history of this name is quite clear. 'Smite' is an old English word, meaning to strike hard. The man who was striking metal all the time was called the man that 'smitheth' ('th' being the old form for 's' in the present tense of a verb). In short he was called the 'Smiteth', which naturally became shortened into a name of one syllable 'Smythe', the 'y' being considered necessary to indicate the long sound, which would become lost in the adoption of the spelling 'Smith'. So, while the word indicating the trade of a smith has become shortened, both in sound and spelling, to 'smith', there is a reason why the proper name should be retained in its old form if persons holding it choose to do so.

Yours truly,

H. C. ROSS.

Feb. 1, 1911.

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