

ledge of the language. The result was that mistakes in spelling were of frequent occurrence, and in time were actually used as being correct. Their system of setting type was not as complete as that of more modern date, and it is said that letters were frequently dropped out or inserted into a word as the spacing required. Much of the irregularities may be traced to the capricious sway of Johnson's dictionary. I think it was Johnson who wrote that "C had no determinate sound and it never ends a word." Again, many of the beginnings of our orthographical anomalies originated in part with the slavish retention of symbols which had ceased to be pronounced in words, even before they were brought into the English language, while others have come through the gradual changes which occur in every language from time to time. We hold intercourse with the vast mass of mankind by means of writing or speaking. This communion of mind with mind is certainly greater, and I think more powerful, by means of the former than by the latter. Is it not, therefore, of the utmost importance that our alphabet which forms the foundation of all literature, should be faultless and true. It is a lamentable fact that very few even in the present day can tell with any degree of certainty how to pronounce a word that may be given them in ordinary orthography, unless, they should have heard it pronounced by others. This fact was exemplified to me on several occasions during the time of the Zulu War. The frequent and misleading combination of letters to represent sounds in English alphabetic writing is a characteristic not to be found in the spelling of any other living language, not even excepting the French. The object of all writing should be the representation of alphabetic sounds. In other words, the primary aim of orthography should be to

analyze words into syllables and syllables into sounds; that each character have a fixed sound which should not have more than one symbol to represent it.

Much speculation exists regarding the primitive alphabet. Some assert that it was an invention, while others maintain that it was simply a discovery. The first letter or mark used for that purpose—whatever it may have been—worked out by the fertile brain of its author, was an invention, but the application of such to sounds which formed the elements of words, and the adaptation of these marks to ordinary conversation, was possibly the grandest fact in the history of the alphabet. The analyst of spoken language may have been one man, while the translator between the eye and ear may have been another. In order to discover the true number of letters we have to give representation to all our sounds, we shall, therefore, dwell more closely upon the alphabet. We have in all thirty-eight sounds to be represented by twenty-six letters. Three of these letters (x, q, c) are redundant, their phonetic value being represented by the remaining twenty-three. The arrangement of the vowels with the consonants appear to possess much regularity and scientific construction. The vowels are found at regular intervals. First we have "A" followed by three consonants; "E" followed by another three; "I" with five consonants; "O" with a similar number; then "U" with another five consonants; if we consider "W" and "Y" as vowels, each of them is followed by a single consonant. Then, again, every letter in the alphabet with the exception of "J" and "Q" has the fashion of appearing silent: as Balaam, lamb, scrub, Wednesday, tame, cuff, gnaw, hour, business, knee, calm, mamma, autumn, trouble, receipt, purr, miss, often, build, seven-night,