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A DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

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It has ever been a just cause of complaint against the English language, that its orthography is varied and unsettled. Hence any effort to reduce the anomalies which abound it, to something like system, deserves the approbation of every lover of English literature, provided the end is attempted to be gained by suitable and proper means. Many thanks, therefore, are due to Dr. Webster, for the unwearied diligence with which he has pursued this object; and though we do not consider this as one of his happiest efforts, he has accomplished much for which he deserves praise. If we were to instance the point in which we think the doctor has been most successful, we should direct the reader to the *etymology* of his dictionary; and though we cannot say we think it all sound, we believe he has done that which will perpetuate his name, while philology shall be studied as a science. And we attribute his great success in this department to the apparent fact, that this has been pursued less with reference to a *preconceived theory*, than his system of orthography. We shall therefore notice some points where we think his orthography is at variance with the true principles of English spelling, and which seem to have been induced by an adherence to *theory* rather than by deference to *principle*.

But before we proceed to the main object of this article, we beg leave to tarry long enough to venture a remark as to the *cause* of the varieties of orthography which abound in our language. The base of our language, and by far the most important part of it, is Teutonic, and has mostly been subject to the laws which have governed the orthography of the Teutonic languages, while an important part of it has been derived from the Latin, and mainly through the medium of the Romance language. Words of the latter class have generally obeyed the laws which prevailed in the Romance dialects, and the reason for their orthography is to be sought in those dialects. We have, therefore, what for convenience may be denominated a Teutonic and a Latin side to our language, and the reason of the original orthography of words from either side, is to be sought in the laws which regulated contemporaneous changes in the kindred dialects. But neither of these can properly be called a standard of *English* orthography. Such a standard must lie between the two extremes, and to it we can only refer such words as, borrowed from either side, have become perfectly *Anglicised*. Bearing this in mind, we shall proceed to consider some of the things above referred to.

The first point to which we shall turn our attention, relates to the use of the letter *u* in *honour* and other similar words; and that we may see distinctly the reason why Dr. Webster excludes this letter in that class of words, we will quote his own language from the 'Introduction to the Quarto Dictionary.

"Soon after the revival of letters in Europe, English authors began to borrow words from the French and Italian, and usually with some little alteration of orthography. Thus they wrote *athour*, *embassadour*, *predecessour*, &c., using *our* for the Latin termination *or* and the French *eur*, and writing similar words in like manner, though not of Latin or French origin. What motive could induce them to unite these words, *errour*, *honour*, *favour*, *inferiour*, in this manner, following neither the Latin nor the French, I cannot conceive."

These principles are recognised and repeated, in an article on Philology in the *Knickerbocker* for 1836. From the foregoing quotation the following positions are sustained.

1. The practice of spelling these words with *u*, commenced with the revival of English literature; and in the section from which the above is copied, the doctor admits that it continued down to the seventeenth century.
2. That this orthography was used, whether the words were borrowed from the French, Italian, or other languages. To this we may add, that it is frequently extended to words from the Teutonic side, as in *neighbour*; Sax. *nehbur*, *neghbur*; Germ. *nachbar*; Dutch, *nabar*; Sw. *nabo*; Dan. *nabor*; &c.
3. The doctor omits this letter on account of the supposed fact that *our* is neither French nor Italian, and because he cannot imagine the existence of any motive for introducing it.

Upon these we remark, that since this letter was uniformly used, "from the revival of English literature to the seventeenth century," it is to be presumed, in the absence of all proof to the contrary, that it is really part and parcel of the English language, and as such ought to be retained. And farther, the idea entertained by the doctor, that *our* is neither Latin nor French, we take to be altogether erroneous. If we are correct in the foregoing, then upon the principles by which the doctor professes to guide himself, the letter should be retained. These principles are laid down in the *Knickerbocker*, where he says, "By research into the history and principles of the language, I have attempted to ascertain what is genuine English, and what is error and corruption; and by moderate reform to rectify what is clearly wrong." Now it is altogether surprising that it did not occur to the doctor, if this letter has been in use so long, and so uniformly as he supposed, and if he was so much at a loss to know how it came there, as that he was wholly unprepared to say that *our* was not "genuine English," that he could not pronounce that "error and corruption," of which he did not know the origin or cause. The doctor, therefore, has made out a case against himself upon his own principles.

But there is another point of view in which this subject should be considered, by omitting which, the doctor, as we suppose, fell into the error under consideration. We refer to the analogy of the Romance languages. By the "Romance languages," we mean those derived from the Latin, including Provençal, Italian, Spanish, and French. By comparing the changes which the words under consideration have undergone in those languages, it will be seen that a law has operated to change the orthography in this and other similar classes of words, in all those dialects. And if we find such a law, governing the whole class, we presume it will not be denied that that orthography alone can be *philologically correct* which is in conformity with it. To the same law the English has had reference, when borrowing words directly from the Latin, and also from the Saxon.

OR—This termination in Latin embraces two distinct classes of words, those denoting *persons*, as, *pastor*, *author*, &c., and those denoting *qualities*, as *honor*, *favor*, &c. Concerning the first of these we have now nothing to say, as the question at present only affects such words as denote *abstract qualities*. The following synopsis, the materials of which are mainly drawn from the 'Grammar de la Langue Romane,' of M. Raynour, and from 'An Essay on the Origin and Formation of the Romance Languages,' by G. C. Lewis, Esq., shows at a glance the influence of this principle in the various dialects of the Romance.

1. Latin *amor*, *color*, *honor*, *favor*, *labor*, *vigor*, &c.
2. The Spanish has retained the Latin orthography, as *amor*, &c.
3. The Italian adds an *e* to the Latin, as *amore*, *colore*, *favore*, *onore*, &c.
4. The Provençal adds an *s* to the Latin, as *amors*, *colors*, *honors*, *favors*, &c.
5. The orthography of the old French was unsettled, vacillating between the Latin and Provençal, as *amor*, or *amors*, *favor*, or *favors*, *honor*, or *honors*, &c.
6. The middle French changed the *o* of the Latin into *ou*, as *amour*, *favour*, *colour*, *honour*, &c.
7. The modern French has changed *ou* into *eu*, as *ameur*, *honneur*, *faueur*, excepting *labour*, where the orthography of the middle period is retained.
8. With the middle French agrees the English in all the words we have adopted, as *honour*, *favour*, *labour*, &c.

To whatever principle the *u* owes its introduction into *honour*, &c., to the same we may undoubtedly attribute the addition of an *s* in the Provençal, of *e* in the Italian, and the introduction of the *u* into the middle French and English. To the operation of the same principle must we look for the cause of the introduction of the *o* into the Saxon *neghbur*, *thu*, *thusend*, *thurh*, &c. English *neighbour*, *thou*, *thousand*, *through*, &c. We see, therefore, that this is not only a law of the Romance languages in this particular class of words, but that it pervades the *English language*, affecting alike words from either the Latin or Teutonic side.

Immediately connected with this point, and bearing directly upon the importance of this orthography, is the question, when this rule first began to exert an influence. It seems to be admitted by Dr. Webster, and is no doubt the fact, that the foregoing class of words came into the English from the Italian but through the French, and, if so, they came from the middle French, while the orthography was *ou*; and hence, the *u* is an important item in philological history, as it points to the source from which, and marks the channel through which, these words have come. If there be no other reasons for retaining the letter, this alone would be amply sufficient.

We may also obtain further confirmation of this conclusion from the laws governing the changes of other words derived from the Latin in the Romance languages. *Osus*.—The Latin has a large number of nouns with this termination; we have a couple of dozen before us, every one of which has undergone some change in the derivative dialects. The first, is the omission of the Latin termination *us*, which is done by all the modern dialects of that language. The following synopsis will show the nature of these changes:

1. Latin; *amorousus*, *curiosus*, *furiosus*, *generosus*, *luxoriosus*, &c.
2. The Spanish and Italian have dropped the termination *us*, and substituted an *o*, as *amoroso*, *barioso*, *furioso*, *generoso*, *luxurioso*, &c.
3. The old Provençal simply omits the Latin termination, as *amoros*, *curios*, *furios*, *generos*, *luxorios*, etc.
4. The old French dropped the Latin *us*, like the Provençal, but sometimes changed the *s* into *x*, as *amorois*, *amorois*, *generois*, or *generoiz*, *furiois*, or *furioiz*, &c.
5. The middle French changed *o* into *ou*, as *amorous*, or *amorouz*, *glorious*, or *glorioruz*, *generous*, or *generouuz*, &c. The first form of this letter was sometimes written with a final *e*, as *glorioruse*, and the second with *z* instead of *x*, as *amorouz*. This orthography is found in a poem of Raoul de Coucy, who died 1249.
6. The English and modern Provençal add an *u*, as *glorious*, *furious*, &c.
7. The modern French have changed *ou* into *eu*, as *glorieux*, *furieux*, &c.

From this table it is made evident that the *u* in *honour*, *favour*, &c., owes its introduction into those words to the cause, whatever it might have been, which introduced it into *amorous*, *curious*, *furious*, *glorious*, *generous*, *injurious*, *imperious*, *laborious*, *luxurious*, &c. &c.

Us—its—To the foregoing we must also add those words which,

denoting qualities, have been derived from the Latin nouns ending in *us* and *ius*.

These words would not allow the dropping of the termination, and we have, therefore, copied their orthography, inserting an *o* to make them correspond with similar words in English. Thus the Latin *arduus*, *barbarus*, *ludicrus*, *odorus*, &c. become in English *arduous*, *barbarous*, *ludicrous*, *odorous*, &c. So, also, the Latin *ensorius*, *gregarius*, *pious*, *impious*, *serious*, *vicarius*, &c. in English are written *ensorious*, *gregarious*, *pious*, *impious*, &c. But the all-pervading character of this principle is still more strikingly confirmed by the fact that, when we could not bring the Latin nominative, —the case we have usually followed in these derivations—under this law, we have taken some one of the oblique cases as the basis of our English word. Thus, Lat. nom. *victor*, gen. *victoris*, Eng. *victorious*; Lat. nom. *saluber*, gen. *salubris*, Eng. *salubrious*; Lat. nom. *uxor*, gen. *uxoris*, Eng. *uxorious*, &c.

It would seem that, if any position in philology be capable of demonstration, the foregoing is sufficient to establish the authority of *honour*, &c., and, if we are not much mistaken in our conjectures, it was the omission of this mode of comparison which prevented Dr. W. from discovering the reason for writing the words in question in this manner, and led him to attempt to expurgate them from our language. If, by omitting this letter, our language could be made uniform, there would be some good ground for the change; but, so far from that, it in fact introduces still greater irregularities, compelling us to omit the *u* in such words as *Saviour*, and the like, where every principle of analogy and propriety is opposed to it. There are also some two or three other points of orthography to which we have not room at this time to allude, but to which we intend a reference at some subsequent period.

UTILITY OF KNOWLEDGE.—Neither constables, nor bayonets, nor muskets, can prevent the devilry of incendiarism, and various other means of *stealthy outrage*. No; these alone can be prevented by the quiet and internal agency of moral conviction. None but the blindest ignorance can harbour the belief that these villainies are instrumental to good; nevertheless, this blind ignorance does exist, nothing but its removal can remove its results. More knowledge is wanted, moreover, to teach men the impolicy of selfishness; to teach men that nothing that injures their neighbours can by any possibility ultimately benefit themselves. If there were no power on the part of one man to retaliate the injuries he receives, selfishness might, temporarily speaking, benefit the aggressor; but this is not the case; selfishness is reciprocal, and a man can and does repay injury by injury, and thus does selfishness beget a state of mutual injuries by which there cannot be a question that society at large, and hence individuals, are the sufferers—the losers and not the gainers. Now, education is necessary to enable them to see these things.

SPRING.—There is but little to be seen in a great city which marks the changes of the seasons; the busy denizen plods on, from day to day, unmindful of the "outward shows of sky and earth," till, by the warmth of the weather, demanding a change in his apparel, he is admonished that spring has passed and the summer begun. The most delightful season of the four, the season of buds and blossoms, is entirely lost to a large majority of our inhabitants. Happy, indeed, is he who can escape from the turmoils of business, in the pleasant month of May, to the green valleys and blooming orchards of the country. The selfish and corroding passions engendered by the absorbing pursuits of trade, are softened and subdued by frequent intercourse and communings with nature; the feelings are liberalized, the soul expanded, and the heart purified by her gentle ministrings. These thoughts were suggested by observing a variety of flowers, in pots, standing before Thorburn's seed store, in John-street, a morning or two since; the weather was mild and summer-like, and those little earth-stars had a magical effect upon our feelings.

"Not useless are ye, flowers! though made for pleasure,
Blooming o'er field and wave, by day and night,
From every source your sanction bids me treasure
Harmless delight."

"Were I, O God! in churchless lands remaining,
Far from all voice of teachers or divines,
My soul would find in flowers of thy ordaining,
Priests, sermons, shrines!"

N. J. Mirror.

BOZ'S NEW WORK.—The reading public are anxious waiting for Dickens's new novel. We learn, from our English papers, that it was to be issued about the first of March.—*lb*.

There are many who, in their eager desire for the end, overlook the difficulties in the way; there is another class who see nothing else. The first class may sometimes fail; the latter rarely succeed.

The great essential to our happiness is the resolution to perform our duty to God as well as we are able; and when this resolution is deeply fixed, every action and every pursuit brings satisfaction to the mind.

The most important truth cannot be too early learned, nor the journey that leads heavenward too soon begun. The enemy is awake while we slumber, and if we neglect to cultivate the good seed, his tares will cover all the surface.