

read at all. This, however, is learning by imitation, just as the child learns at home. When this method is employed, the school-room does not go a step beyond the nursery. The improved methods which have been introduced during the past fifteen years have awakened great hopes and made flattering promises; none of which, however, have been or ever can be fulfilled. While they have rationalized the process of teaching, and developed brilliant results in the primary grade, they have not materially shortened the time required for the acquisition of the language, nor removed any real difficulty out of the way. In spite of improved methods, in spite of the superior skill and intelligence with which they have been plied, it is still an unwelcome fact that it requires from ten to twelve years to read and write English with a tolerable degree of accuracy. In proportion to opportunities enjoyed there are not as many good spellers now as there were twenty-five years ago; partly because the common school course has been overloaded with other studies, and partly because alphabetic spelling has been neglected under the erroneous impression that phonetic spelling is a substitute for it. Our language has increased its vocabulary at least twenty-five per cent. "since you and I were boys," and yet our spelling books are but primers compared with Cobb, Emerson, Towne, and others who initiated us into the mysteries of English orthography. As a consequence, there are more poor spellers among educated people to-day than formerly; and the *Pioneer Press* was right when it complained that it received few communications, even from teachers, that were not marred by inaccurate orthography. It becomes us, therefore, as candid teachers, to cease the adulation of our methods, and discover, if we can, why they are

so brilliant in promise and so meagre in results.

When Johnny enters the primary class, he learns but one sound for each vowel and consonant used, and silent letters are carefully kept out of his reach. A royal road is made for him, and he travels with astonishing rapidity, to the delight of his parents, who charitably permit the new method to share the honours with inherited brains. He soon acquires the power to spell and pronounce new words without assistance, and it looks as though he were going to learn to read in a single term; but after a while, new sounds must be introduced, and that, too, in pretty rapid succession. The same letter represents many sounds, and some none at all; their position determines nothing, and the child becomes bewildered, often hesitating on words which he would have pronounced instantly at the end of his first term. As difficulties multiply on his hands, his progress becomes less and less remarkable, and by the time he reaches the high school he is but little in advance of the boy who entered the academy of thirty years ago. This unsatisfactory outcome must not, however, be charged to faultiness in our methods, but to the language itself. A scientific method can be applied to scientific matter only, and that cannot be found in the language which we write and speak. As it is perfectly anomalous both in its orthography and pronunciation, it must be learned, as it always has been, by the slow, illogical process of imitation and experience. This is proven by the fact that adult foreigners, whose reasoning faculties are fully developed, are constantly led astray by fancied analogies where none exist. If an adult foreigner cannot acquire the language by a scientific process, neither can a child; and the effort to so teach it, however flatteringly it may promise in the outset, must end