

CONTEMPORARY OPINION ON EDUCATIONAL TOPICS.

THE SPELLING REFORM.

AN article in a late *Princeton Review*, by Professor Francis A. March, entitled "Spelling Reform," is noteworthy not so much because of its arguments as for the reason that it is printed in part in conformity with the theory it upholds. Alphabet is spelled *alfabet*; are is *ar*, have is *hav*, learn is *lern*, philosophy is *filosofy*, and so on. The arguments continually advanced by the spelling reformers are that many letters in English words are silent, and should, therefore, be excised; that it is possible in many instances to advantageously substitute one letter for another; that our system of spelling, which is now so conflicting, ought to be more uniform. There is no denying these assertions: there are silent letters; there are instances where a word would be spelled nearer to the sound by the change of a letter; and there is irregularity in our system of orthography. But the extent of these evils is greatly exaggerated by spelling reformers; and certainly we should only add confusion to confusion if every writer may at his pleasure set up a system of spelling, and every printer print books according to his notion of a reformed orthography. Already there are differences in spelling between English and American books, and even between Boston and New York books, that are vexatious to scholarly readers, and doubtless perplexing to others; and one can but wonder what sort of spelling reform that is which begins by widening differences and intensifying the existing confusion. Reformers who prematurely force new divergences into common practice simply shew that they are very much more enamoured of their theories than intent upon rendering practical service in the cause they espouse. To our mind it is very desirable that the

English-speaking world should unite upon a uniform method of spelling and pronunciation. Whether there are a few more or less silent letters in use, or whether an occasional word is spelled contrary to established analogies, seems to us unimportant beside the question of uniformity. American spelling is already so distasteful to English readers that they are repelled from our literature; and, if books are now to be printed in the manner of Professor March's article, our authors would be set down by English readers as writers in a barbaric tongue, and their books shut out altogether. And then a very large number of books read here are published in England, while in many instances those published here are printed from stereotype-plates made from the English originals, giving, of course, the English spelling. Inasmuch as readers thus fairly divide their attention between British and American books, it is almost imperative for a uniform system of spelling to be adopted. Whether men shall spell *hav*, or philosophy *filosofy*, seems to us very much less urgent than for such co-operation between English and American printers as will render books from either land equally easy to comprehend and equally agreeable to read by English-speaking peoples everywhere. There ought to be prepared an international dictionary under the joint supervision of English and American scholars, having the sanction of the great seats of learning in both countries, which should be accepted as the final standard everywhere. If our spelling reformers would labour to bring this about, they would do the Anglo-Saxon world an immense service. But it is hopeless to expect this so long as people entertain an exaggerated idea of the defects of English spelling. We sometimes hear of the enormous saving to writers and printers the