

ways, each of which can be supported by examples of analogous spellings, thus:—S is represented in 17 ways; short I in 36; Z in 17; E in 33; R in 10; Z in 17, and these multiplied together,

$$17 \times 36 \times 17 \times 33 \times 10 \times 17 = 58,366,440.$$

So that in this particular case the chance that a person who had only heard this word would spell it incorrectly are about 58 millions to one.

What is the practical meaning of all this? It means the loss of three or four years of precious time to every child who learns to read by this system; it means days and months and years of useless drudgery for both teacher and pupil; it means that years which might, if the Phonetic System were introduced, be employed by our children in acquiring useful knowledge, are now squandered in unnecessary and unprofitable learning and breaking their hearts; it means that 90 per cent. of the pupils in the schools of England go out into life unable to read a paragraph from a newspaper intelligently; it means that 15 millions of dollars are annually thrown away in England alone; it means that the English national education is a failure; it means that ignorance prevails through the land. Here is our great argument for phonetic spelling, which no objection from our friends opposite can shake. They will tell you, no doubt, in the most eloquent terms, as they are well able to do, that we want to destroy the etymological and historical value of our language, and a great many more things of the same kind. A weighty thing indeed to counterpoise against the blessings of the phonetic system! Forsooth, our children are to be compelled to waste from four to seven years of their short lives because some people have an idea that the new system would destroy our etymology. I appeal to you, especially to those of you who are engaged in the noble profession of teaching, and a very noble profession it is, I appeal to you if it would not be an inestimable blessing to the race if boys and girls, old men and women, could learn to read and write within the short space of six or twelve months. If there are any sisters here who have helped to teach their younger brothers how to read, if there are any elder brothers who have helped their sisters as they toiled day after day over those miserable pothooks and hangers, if there are any such here, and I am sure there are, I appeal to them to give their vote this evening in favour of the system which will bring emancipation, power and happiness with it.

But besides the utter waste of time involved in learning to read, a great mischief is done to the minds of the children by subjecting them to such unscientific teaching. Hear what Max Muller, probably the greatest living philologist, says upon this point:—

"What, however, is even more serious than all this, is not the great waste of time in learning to read, and the almost complete failure in national education, but the actual mischief done by subjecting young minds to the illogical and tedious drudgery of learning to read English as it is at present. Every child who learns to read in this manner (communication and spelling is fractional: one rule contradicts the other, and each statement has to be accepted simply on authority, and with a complete disregard of all those rational instincts which lie dormant in the child, and ought to be awakened by every kind of instruction) learns to read in a manner which is irrational: one rule contradicts the other, and each statement has to be accepted simply on authority, and with a complete disregard of all those rational instincts which lie dormant in the child, and ought to be awakened by every kind of instruction."

"I know there are persons who will defend anything, and who hold that it is due to this very discipline that the English character is what it is: that it retains respect for authority; that it does not require a reason for everything; and that it does not admit that what is inconceivable is therefore impossible. Even English history has been attacked because of this hidden source, because a child accustomed to believe that *though is though*, and that *through is through*, would afterwards believe anything. It may be so; still I doubt whether even such objects would justify such means."

"But with all that, the problem remains unsolved. What are people to do when language and pronunciation change, while their spelling is declared to be unchangeable? It is, I believe, hardly necessary that I should prove how corrupt, effete, and utterly irrational the present system of spelling is, for no one seems inclined to deny all that. I shall only quote, therefore, the judgment of one man, the late Bishop Thirlwall, a man who never used exaggerated language. 'I look,' he says, 'upon the established system, if an accidental custom may be so called, as a mass of anomalies, the growth of ignorance and chance, equally repugnant to good taste and to common sense.' But I am sure that the public mind is not so easily won by a tenacity proportioned to their absurdity, and are jealous of all encroachment on ground consecrated by prescription to the free play of blind caprice."

After considering these things who will assert that Reform is not necessary?

Again, the ignorance of so many grown up people at the present day may be traced to the same source. In England alone there are about five million grown-up people who cannot read. Why is this? Because, in the words of Maria Edgeworth, among the most famous, "the labour and disgust of learning to read render it the most difficult of all human attainments." This, however, can all be changed by the introduction of the phonetic system, which is so simple that it does not necessarily require the addition of a new letter to our present alphabet, but only that the present letters be used in a different way, though it would be more satisfactory for each simple elementary sound to have a single sign. Our present spelling we must consider not only a scientific failure, but also a moral failure, because it deprives a large proportion of our population of the enjoyment of one of the most indispensable blessings of civilized life—the power to read.

Many other evil results attend on our present mode of spelling occur to my mind, but time will not permit me to dwell upon them. My learned friend who is to follow me on the same side will, I daresay, refer to some of these points. Amongst other things our present spelling occasions great difficulties to those who endeavour to reduce unwritten languages to writing; it obscures the names of persons and places, and it disables us from ascertaining the real condition of our spoken language, even a few hundred years back.

Amongst the incidental advantages of phoneticism I may mention that the system will cause a diffusion of correct pronunciation over the whole Empire, and will tend to do away with provincial dialects; that it will diminish the number of letters with which it is necessary to write a word, and reduce the bulk and therefore the expense of our books by about one-tenth.

Summing up, then, the advantages of phonetic spelling, we see that—

- (1.) It will render reading easy.
- (2.) It will render spelling easy.
- (3.) It enables, as soon as he has learned the phonetic alphabet thoroughly, to spell any word with the same accuracy that he can pronounce it.
- (4.) It renders the task of learning to read delightful to teacher and learner.
- (5.) It will consequently tend to remove the present ignorance of the poorer classes.
- (6.) It will render the language less difficult for foreigners.
- (7.) It will render the business of reducing unwritten languages to a writing system more easy.
- (8.) It will show the exact state of the language at a given time.
- (9.) It will tend to do away with barbarisms in pronunciation.
- (10.) It will reduce the bulk and therefore the cost of our books.

Now let me turn to some of the objections chronically urged against phoneticism.

The most important objection is that which maintains that the system would tend to obscure etymology, and produce confusion. We answer to this, first of all, that phonetic spelling, so far from being a hindrance to etymology, is a sure and safe guide, for the science of etymology is built upon the science of phonetics. In the second place we may ask our opponents if the change which we propose will destroy the etymology, how is it that the etymology has not already been destroyed? We know that in Queen Anne's time our orthography was not the same as at present. We know that in Queen Anne's time the orthography was different from that of Queen Anne's time, and if we go back to Chaucer we find that English is almost like another language. The truth is that etymologies at present are very uncertain, and we do not look to them for the present meanings of the words. If, to take a celebrated example, I should call my friend opposite a *fovere* and a *villain*, he would hardly be satisfied with my telling him that one of the words originally signified only a lad or servant, and the other a ploughman. But even if the etymological value of our words was somewhat impaired by phonetic spelling, I ask should the latter on that account be rejected? Ask yourself carefully how often do you look to the etymology of words in your every day life. I imagine that the occasions are very few and far between. It would only be the scholar who would lose and he would still possess the records of our present books. I shall give you the opinion of the greatest living etymologist upon this point—

"Language is not made for scholars and etymologists; and if the whole race of English etymologists were really to be swept away by the introduction of spelling reform, I hope they would be the first to rejoice in sacrificing themselves in so good a cause. But it is really the case that the big game of English etymology, and the language as a whole, by adoption of phonetic spelling, and the profession of the etymologist would be done forever? I say, No, most emphatically, to both propositions. The real answer however, is that no one could honestly call the present system of spelling, either historical or etymological; and I believe that, taken as a whole, the loss occasioned by consistent phonetic spelling would hardly be greater than the gain."

Hear also the distinguished Dr. J. A. H. Murray, the lexicographer, upon this objection:—

"I hardly need appeal to my dictionary experience has already shown me that the ordinary appeals to etymology against spelling reform utterly break down upon examination. The etymological information supposed to be enshrined in the current spelling is so apt to be a very foundation by the fact that it is, in so far as it often wrong than right, that it is often the fancy of pedants or snobs of the Renaissance, or monkish etymologists of still earlier times, that are thus preserved, than the truth which alone is etymology. From the fourteenth century onward, a fashion swept over French and English of refashioning the spelling of words after the Latin ones, with which rightly or wrongly they were supposed to be connected; and to such an extent has this gone that it is, in nine cases out of ten, now impossible, without actual investigation, to form any opinion upon the history of these words—the very thing the current spelling is supposed to tell us. The real history is recovered only by marshalling the phonetic spellings of the various languages, as the only way whereby we are enabled everyone to do, piercing through the mendacious spellings of later times to the phonetic facts which they conceal or falsify, and thus reaching a genuine etymology. The traditional and pseudo-etymological spellings of the last few centuries are the direct foes of which genuine etymology has to contend; they are the very enemies of the etymologist who seeks the thorns and thistles which everywhere choke the golden grains of truth, and afford satisfaction only to the braying asses which think them as good as wheat."

These Ladies and Gentlemen, is the great objection with which our opponents arm themselves, this is the broken reed upon which they so confidently rely.

The next objection is that while in the new spelling we are unable to distinguish words pronounced alike but now spelled differently, such words are distinguished by the old spelling. For instance *ph* and *ps* and *ph* and *ps*. Our answer to this is, that if at present in the hurry of conversation there is hardly ever a doubt which word is meant, surely there would be much less danger in the slow process of reading a continuous sentence where the context would remove any possibility of doubt. That this objection is a most flimsy one will be seen from the fact that there are already in written English about 600 words with different meanings which, on the reasoning of our opponents, should be provided with separate spellings. For instance the word *box* would require eight spellings, for it might not mean, different meanings. The objection is really an objection to the English language, and not to phonetic spelling.

The only other objection deserving of our consideration is that there would be no uniform method of spelling—that each one would spell as she or he thought fit. This objection has, in reality, no basis, and primarily arose from an erroneous idea that phonetic spelling was advocated only by teetotalers, vegetarians and uneducated people. True, people could spell as they liked, just as they can spell now as they like, for we cannot prevent utterly ignorant people, in the phonetic system, or in the present system, or in any system, from spelling as they please. The only advantage of the latter would be an infinitely greater likelihood of their spelling correctly