

PUBLIC OPINION OF AMENDED SPELING.

It requires no very close observation of signs of times to be aware that reform of orthography is rapidly becoming one of the most important of minor questions of the day. It is perfectly correct to assert that only a few years ago it scarcely excited any particular interest outside a very limited circle of scholars. Suggestions of change, of whatever nature, were rarely even referred to save as illustrations of harmless lunacy of crack-brained theorists. If they were spoken of seriously, it was nearly always for purposes of protesting against the audacity and impidity of that fanaticism which, for sake of ideal perfection in unimportant details, would be willing to unseat foundations of language, and impair, if not entirely destroy, a sacred legacy from the past, bound up forever, whether for good or evil, with the literature of the race.

All this is now altered. Within five years, the question has assumed an entirely different character. Demand for reform is no longer confined to a few scattered scholars without influence and usually without even so much as notoriety. On the contrary, it has extended in some cases to whole classes. Philologic societies appoint committees to examine and report what is best to be done. School boards petition government to establish a commission to investigate the whole subject. Nor is participation in the controversy that has sprung up limited to those alone who have direct interest in educational aspects of the question. Either on one side or the other, men of letters of every grade, and scholars in every department are entering for a tilt in the orthographic tournament now going on. All this to be sure is strictly far more true of England than of this country; but, to a certain extent, it is true of this.

What has brought about this sudden change it is not easy to determine. Doubtless there has been for a long time wide dissatisfaction with existing state of things, though it has found little audible expression. To this dissatisfaction a powerful impulse has been given by study of our speech in its earlier forms, a study which has made its most rapid progress during the few years just past. The principal objections which prejudice opposes to change have their force almost wholly destroyed when facts of language are brought directly home to attention. Shrines upon which ignorance conferred sanctity, and to which stupidity bowed with

unquestioning adoration, have been utterly and instantaneously demolished by the remorseless iconoclasm of scholarship in Early English. Moreover, the character of the advocates of reform is something that of itself makes an impression. To opinion expressed by them, their abilities and attainments may not be sufficient to command assent, but are sufficient to impose respect. There is an uneasy consciousness in mind of those most opposed to change, that it is no longer quite safe to indulge in the contemptuous treatment of the subject which, a short time ago, was the only argument. A reform which numbers among its advocates every living linguistic scholar of any eminence whatever, which in addition includes every one who has made the scientific study of English a specialty, may be inexpedient, impracticable, even harmful, but it can't well be demolished by brief editorials nor superficially thrust aside with an air of jantiness and superiority. If the question is to be argued at all it must now be argued on its merits. In such a discussion it will be found that favorers of change, however unreasonable in their expectations or not, know precisely what they are talking about, and a charge that can rarely be brought against their opponents.—THE TEACHER.

WHAT A LANGUAGE IS.—A language is a number of connected sounds which convey a meaning. These sounds, carried to other persons, enable them to know the speaker is feeling, and what he is thinking. More than ninety per cent of all language used is SPOKEN language, that which is written forms an extremely small proportion. But, as people grow more and more intelligent, the need of written language is more and more felt; and hence all civilized nations have, in course of time, slowly and with great difficulty made for themselves a set of SIGNS by aid of which sounds are, as it were, indicated upon paper. BUT IT IS THE SOUNDS THAT ARE THE LANGUAGE, NOT THE SIGNS. Signs are a more or less artificial, more or less accurate, mode of representing language to the eye. Hence the names "language," "writing," and "speech" are of themselves insufficient to show that it is SPOKEN and not WRITTEN language that is the language, that is the more important of the two, and that indeed gives life and vigor to the other.—MEIKLEJOHN.

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