

and development far beyond their immediate control. It is true, that there is no known language of the globe, living or dead, which has not contributed something to the English vocabulary; and it may be at least gratifying to pride of race to believe that the facts we deplore are but the fruit of innumerable conquests, and a predominating activity in literature, arms, and commercial competition. However this may be, the fact of obnoxious and expensive imperfections remains, and with this fact we are compelled to deal as best we may. And we may safely add, that a capacity to organize and utilize the verbal conquests of the English speaking races would redound to their credit quite as much as the methods by which their victories in this department have been achieved.

The agitation of this question is not promoted at the present time under such auspices as to beget any timidity on the part of those who possess any legitimate means of imparting positive aid to the proposed reform. The weight of scholastic opinion is positively on the side of every wholesome effort in this direction; and organizations in this behalf, in this country and in England, at the present time, embrace scholars and statesmen of the highest personal attainments and public repute. In England, more than one hundred school-boards of the kingdom, including the school-board of the city of London, petitioned the crown for the appointment of a commission to initiate measures of reform in this department. Similar commissions have been appointed by one or more legislatures in the United States, and the movement is being actively supported by philologists of distinguished character in American and foreign universities and colleges; also by organized bodies of citizens and by ably conducted publications. During

the past season, nearly four hundred residents of Wisconsin, officers and professors in our colleges and teachers in our public schools, have united with Professors March, of Lafayette College, Goodwin, of Harvard, Trumbull, of Hartford, Whitney, of Yale, and Haldeman, of the University of Pennsylvania, in a memorial to Congress asking the appointment of a national commission, and representing that the irregular spelling of the English language causes a loss of two years of school time of each child, and is a main cause of the alarming illiteracy of the people.

The objections to reform in orthography sometimes urged by philologists, are not deemed worthy of extended consideration in this connection. The proper purpose of language is not to preserve its own imperfections, and thereby supply historic hints to verbal experts. Nor is the modern significance of written words, in a vital degree, dependent on their origin and historic form. Nor is the historic character of language necessarily lost or essentially obscured by improvements in its orthographical structure. A natural and rational method in orthography — such a method as the word orthography itself implies—at the worst, could be regarded as but one change in addition to innumerable previous changes — the last certainly equal in historic and illustrative value to any preceding series of modifications. And the sounds of words, really the more useful and reliable source of information in respect to the origin and definition of words, would be rendered far more definite, permanent, and secure than under existing circumstances.

As we have already intimated, the opinions of English authorities are now practically in accord as to the utility and propriety of reform. Unfortunately, however, the same unan-