

IRREGULARITIES OF ENGLISH SPELLING.*

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THE occasion which has brought us together is one of especial interest. We are assembled as the teachers and advocates of a method that has many opponents as well as friends, feeling an honest pride in our conviction and theory; to witness the progress that has been made by our students; to exhibit the ripened fruits of the labours of some of our *confères*; to gather, I trust, many important lessons from the experience of those long in the work, and to prepare more thoroughly for our particular work at home. Although my position to-day is not wholly free from embarrassment, yet, I am glad to be with you and to contribute my mite towards the success of this Convention. The occasion furnishes me with an opportunity highly appreciated of exhibiting the deep interest I take and feel in the worthy cause of educating children who are deaf. I am well aware that there are many of my co-workers more capable of furnishing a few facts suitable for a paper upon orthographic irregularities, and as the subject is an extensive one, their conviction may be that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread." Well, sir, it is by mistakes that we learn, and if it were for no other reason than to gratify a personal desire to become acquainted with my subject, I shall occupy a few moments of your time trusting I do not speak to an unsympathetic audience for, if you take no interest in our work you would not be here. By your past as well as your present connection with institu-

tions for the deaf; by your relation to those that you teach; by your desire to see the survival of the fittest methods for their instruction; by your appreciation of the benefit that has already characterized the oral method, and by your sympathy for the deaf mute generally, the moulding of his character, the enlightenment of his intellect and the shaping of his destinies, by all these motives you show an interest in our work.

The teacher of articulation, after a few years' experience does not require to be told that our language possesses possibly the most ambiguous system of orthography of all the languages using the Roman letters. In treating this subject, we will take a superficial retrospective view of some of the earlier methods of writing by means of which we may in a measure account for a few of the anomalies which are characteristic of our English spelling.

It is supposed that the Phœnicians were the inventors of alphabetic writing. The Egyptians and the Babylonians had a system of hieroglyphics in which they represented sounds by figures and forms, but it was not alphabetic. They had a large number of ideographs, or signs for ideas and both employed a number of signs for the same sounds. Their system was clumsy and complicated, and we are told unfit for general use. The characters used by the Babylonians did not represent definite sounds of the human voice as in speaking. Their sounds had no definite value and were sometimes used for a complete syllable. The Egyptians went beyond this. They analyzed their syllables

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