

Phonetic spelling would not obscure the derivation of any considerable number of words; it hardly affects any, and when it does the alteration generally favours the derivation. To say that the form of words would be greatly altered by phonetic spelling is to admit that the question has not been carefully examined. If any one will take the trouble of writing phonetically a few hundred words selected at random from the pages of a dictionary, he will see how very slightly the form of the word will be changed; and when it is changed the change will not be sufficient to destroy the connection between the present and original form. Would a scholar—or any one—be in any way disturbed by seeing *metaphor* spelled *metasfor*, or would it completely overturn his knowledge of the language if he saw *deign* spelled *dan*, or *impugn* *impun*, or *yacht* *yot*, or *debt* *det*, notwithstanding Archbishop Trench sees so much eloquence in the silent letters of these and similar words? (*Past and Present*, 287.) When looked at in this way it resolves itself into this, “which is the language, the spoken or the written word?”—a question easily answered when we consider that the spoken word was the original, and that it can and did exist independent of the written word. Writing is only a conventional mode of representing language to facilitate communication between individuals. If that be the aim of the written word then it should assimilate as closely as possible to the spoken word and be spelled phonetically. Let many men declare that the written word is what

fixes the language—gives it stability—as the spoken word is always changing. Men may maintain such a doctrine with all their ability, but I think it only requires a very short examination to see its fallacy. If men have chosen a particular mode of representing a language it would seem a strange transformation to say that what was chosen to represent the language has become itself the veritable language—just as if the word *h-o-u-s-e* should become the thing itself.

This Etymological Objection looks formidable at first, but when we approach it critically it somehow becomes shaky, and eventually tumbles. It is one of those arguments men seize in despair and urge with alarm and hope. The etymology of words is of no use to any but the educated, and they would still have it even with a phonetic diction. Etymological dabblers may wish to retain our present spelling, but the real etymological scholar will be as much pleased by the change as any one. He will still have all the material he wants left him. I think it a piece of great presumption on the part of these etymological dabblers to ask a whole nation to continue an absurd system of spelling simply for the pleasure of the thing. The question merits serious consideration, but there will be no use sitting down to examine it with a sarcastic grin and a mind determined not to be convinced; and is there anything gained by simply contradicting arguments which cannot be refuted? That will not change facts.