

Concerning Certain Inconsistencies.

IF consistency be, indeed, a jewel, it is one to be found in but few treasure houses; if a virtue, it is one rarely practised. Lip-service, to be sure, like all the other virtues, it has in plenty; most of us, in truth, pride ourselves on possessing it. Unfortunately, there is another quality, common to most of us, which passes current as consistency. Its true name is obstinacy. But it passes current, nevertheless.

Human inconsistency, to say truth, has passed into a proverb. "There was never yet philosopher who could endure the toothache patiently." Yet, since the world, as Augustine Birrell says. "Is governed by logic," [*via Media*] by the logic of events, it is obvious that when our inconsistency runs counter to this same logic, as, of its nature, it must do, trouble inevitably ensues. Nature, though feminine, is consistent, *mirabile dictu*, and has little or no tolerance for the opposite quality. The sex, indeed, are not prone to be tolerant.

To pass from the general to the particular. Your would-be reformer is always more or less inconsistent, generally more, and the spelling reformer, so far from being an exception to the rule, comes, rather, under the category of a shocking example. There is no need, surely, to specify inconsistencies, which are sufficiently obvious. That which the opponents of "reform" chiefly object to is, I take it, that it is to be forced upon us by the arbitrary dictum of a convention of scholars, the most unpractical of all men. The active partner of the concern has no claims to scholarship, and has the contrary fault of being merely practical. The world of English literature has not yet fallen under the domination of the business man. Nor has it been handed over to an oligarchy of university professors. The business man, in this instance, as a Scottish-American, belongs to the two most aggressive and self-confident races on the face of a suffering creation, John Bull himself not excepted. The University professors might, possibly, find Swift's "Voyage to Laputa" profitable reading, should they condescend to read it.

The world, in truth, is governed by custom, as well as by logic, and neither is to be set aside so easily as reformers would have us believe. Two points may, however, be touched on briefly here, the