

PHONETIC PIONEER.

The Writing and Printing Reform.

There is a movement going on among us at present, of which comparatively few persons are aware, but which is gradually working a far greater and more beneficial revolution than any of those political ones of which past years have been so prolific. The spirit of revolution starts up often when least expected, and shows its capacity for subverting powers once thought utterly impregnable. It attacks in turn all institutions whose principles are at variance with those great laws established at the foundation of the world, which involve the distance and decency, sooner or later, of a full monopoly, self-love, exclusiveness, and uncharitableness. After exhibiting itself, century after century, as the determined victor of the wrong, and the attempted victim of the right, in everything that concerns the social, political, and religious condition of civilized humanity, it is now, and has been for some years, working with equal energy and confidence in its own good cause, to clear the air upon *written knowledge*. Revolution in its true character sees not to *reform* but to *destroy*. It has so long to do with destroying by force, its object is to "overcome evil with good." When our Saviour came into the world, and preached peace, he did not say it was to be sought by overturning the institutions, political and military, of the time, but by men individually practicing mutual good-will, love and charity, and thus introducing a new order of things, during the growth of which the old would die out for want of sympathy and supporters.

And this is just the species of reform which is now developing its noble object and its gigantic efficacy among us in respect to written language. It is a reform which is seeking to supersede the current *faulty* mode of printing and writing by a method more consonant with nature, and common sense. It levies war certainly, in one sense, against the current method, (or rather *no-method*), but its tactics are not so much of a hostile character, as directed to the winning over of every one to its own side by the magnanimity of truth, and the arguments of superior merit. It does not seek to quell that to which it is adverse, but to bestow such brighter and wider revenues and rewards that the other shall soon have no friends.

You who are now reading these words with ease and fluency, may perhaps exclaim "What need of reform! Everything on this page is perfectly intelligible to any one who has been to school; and, if you simply refer to inability to read why the rapid increase of schools will soon make readers of the poorers." Granted. But it can never be by means of reading and writing as they are now taught, that the poor can be educated. Some of them may be taught to read and write more or less perfectly, but these things, as we all know, do not constitute education.—Reading and writing upon the present system, require from three to six years to be acquired; and how many persons are there, even among the most intelligent and cultivated, who never acquire so complete an acquaintance with orthography, even in the course of a long life, as to be invariably correct in their spelling! The thing is impossible. The writer of this article would enter the lists with any man in England as "a good speller," yet it is barely a week since, in a little exercise contrived by some friends as an orthographical puzzle, he made no less than *five* mistakes. How many are there, again, well educated, amiable, and intelligent people, who shrink from reading aloud in company, simply from their distrust of their pronunciation of new or unusual words. So great is the difficulty in learning to spell, among children, even with the

aid of kind and affectionate sympathy on the part of the anxious mother or sister, that, with rare exceptions, it is one of the keenest troubles of what has been called the "heavenly era of early life," and a perpetual source of vexation, weariness and tears. If the children of the upper classes are forced to spend so much time and labor on learning to spell and read, having still several years allowed them to acquire *real knowledge*, what must be the doom of the *poor man's* offspring? We see that doom every day. It consists in this, that he never gets beyond a most superficial acquaintance with the instruments of education, and is wholly debarred from all the high and lovely truths of nature and art, all the graceful amenities of intellect, and almost all the benign and genial influences of morals, reading and writing a *curse*, in fact, the *ultimatum* of the poor man's education, whereas with no one can they ever truly be more than the *means* to the real end.

Why are spelling and reading so difficult?—Because only 50 words out of the 50,000 which constitute the English language are pronounced as they are spelt! When a child or foreigner has learnt our alphabet, he is no nearer the language than before. He has still to learn how to pronounce the words, and of course can only learn one at a time; and this operation, as we said before, occupies at least three diligent years, without reckoning unusual or technical terms, for technicalities are a later, and not an inevitable requirement, while all unusual words are left to the pupil's own private acquisition in after life. When a child for instance, has been taught that *trough* spelt *tuff*, he has still to learn that *plough* does not spelt *pluw* but *plow*. And when he has learnt to pronounce *plough*, he is as far as ever from *cough* and *trough*, and *accough*, and yet he sees that the final letters are the same in all. When he has learnt how to pronounce *near*, he is still ignorant how to pronounce *bear*, and is sure to mispronounce it if he tries. Equally so he attempts to sound *head* by what he has been taught concerning *bead*; and so with the sands upon thousands of our commonest words. The same combinations of letters are seldom pronounced in the same manner, and the same sound is repeatedly given to combinations which are very different; for instance, *may* and *neigh*, *write* and *right*. That such a mode of spelling is altogether forced and unnatural, is proved by the constant tendency of children and illiterate persons to write down words phonetically. A friend of ours, whose address is "High street, Manchester," recently received a letter from a poor man in the country, directed "Mr. ———'s Street." Phonetic writing, indeed, is to articulate language, just what language itself is to *thought*. Language is thought outwardly projected, on fixed and eternal laws of expression. Phonetic writing exhibits articulated sounds on a natural and uniform principle.

It is clear, then, that so long as we continue to spell our words in so absurd a manner, the greatest obstacles are thrown in the way of those whom we exclaim we are so wretchedly should be taught. It is of little use subscribing and granting money for the education of the poor, if we allow such barriers to lie across the avenues to all real education. The poor have not the time for such a process as they are called upon to go through at present; and with the real lives classes, some of the best years of life are shamefully and irrecoverably wasted by it. For it is nothing less than a wilful waste to consume three years in what might be done in three months; it is a waste with regard to many substantial forms of knowledge which might be acquired during the period so inconsiderately devoted to a

mere preliminary, and a waste in regard to its unprofitableness as a medium of instruction, when one so much easier and better is at hand. This easier and better, and we may say the only rational method, is that of *spelling words as they are sounded, and pronouncing them as they are spelt*.—Nothing is more simple and straight-forward when conducted upon natural and philosophic principles. With our present alphabet of 26 letters, it certainly can not be done, but when 17 others are added, to make up the full number of 43, which is the *real* number of sounds used in speaking English, we have an alphabet which will allow any word in the language being represented in such a way that it can not possibly be mispronounced, although never seen before; and that will also allow of any word being written down with such exactitude that it speaks from the paper as distinctly and unmistakably as from the lips.

To show the reasons why our alphabet is so imperfect in its construction, would involve a long historical account of it. We shall, therefore merely repeat the fact, long since familiar to philologists, that it is defective to the extent of 17 letters. With some of these letters we are well acquainted from meeting with them in other languages. In the Greek alphabet, for instance, there is the letter *theta*; the long *z*, and the short *z*, as in our words *leaf* and *left*; and the long *o*, and the short *o*, as in our words *loaf* and *log*, are also recognized. The letter *th*, both *lig*, *t* and heavy, is also included in the Anglo-Saxon alphabet. It is, therefore, nothing new to introduce such letters. The deficient letters are at present represented in English, by combining certain of the 26, and arranging them in certain arbitrary and ineluctable ways, or by agreeing that they shall be sounded so and so, or so and so under certain circumstances. It is impossible to conceive anything more ludicrously absurd than the expedients which writers upon English orthography have been forced to adopt, in order to explain how various words are to be pronounced. In fact, no rules can possibly be given, because the exceptions would be like leaves on October pathways.

Seeing, then, what lamentable results have attended this imperfection of our alphabet, and the consequent mysticism and endless hindrances and difficulties in the spelling of our language, is it not high time that steps should be taken to supersede so great an evil by the introduction of some simple and consistent method, which shall at the same time, release the mind from all its trouble, and confer a positive advantage?—Is it any wonder that throughout this country and throughout the United States, there are rising up multitudes of earnest and honest souls, as advocates of the Spelling and Writing Reform? Truth is so beautiful, that wherever her soft glances fall, she is sure to meet with loving and enthusiastic admirers; and the great truth involved in this new reform, is vindicating its reality, and prophesying the permanence of its recognition, with all the majesty and ease that ever accompany the advent of such genuine blessings.

Already there are several magazines and newspapers published in the new mode of spelling.—Yet the new spelling is very silent in its spreading. There are millions who have never heard of it. It is like the cicada on the water; it is like the oak-sapling among the weeds and bush-wood—young, vigorous, with a coronet of green leaves, and a native strength and energy in its heart that, in the course of a generation or two, will send it overtopping everything that now grows so proud and rank around it. The original promulgator of this new system of spelling is Mr. Isaac Pitman, of Bath, who has devoted the last eighteen years to its promotion, in the most indefatigable and alternate manner. About ten years ago he was joined by Mr. Ellis, a gentleman possess-