

The two letters *ea* form one of the most frequent combinations in our English words, but they have one sound in the word *head*, another in *bead*, another in *heard*, another in *heart*, and another in *real*. It is alleged by one author that the sound of *sh* in the word *shall* occurs in over 3,000 English words, and is represented in twenty-two different ways. Some years since, a record was kept in one of the post-offices in this state of the various combinations of letters resorted to for spelling the word *Chicago*, on letters addressed to that city, and the total number was found to be not less than eighteen or twenty; but the most interesting fact about the matter is that the erroneous spellings, phonetically considered, generally excelled the approved orthography. Prof. Wm. T. Harris, the distinguished Superintendent of Public Schools for the city of St. Louis, is our authority for the statement that the word *scissors* can be spelled in many thousand different ways, and have Romanic analogies to authorize each spelling.

Examples of these difficulties and discordances might be multiplied indefinitely; they extend to all phases and complications of the system. The pupil readily realizes that he is to spell by sight, and not by sound; that the signs of sounds are comparatively meaningless and worthless; that the composition of words is to be memorized arbitrarily; that he can write no sound with certainty of accuracy, until he has seen it written; that he can pronounce no word with certainty of accuracy, until he has heard it pronounced; that he cannot hope to become master of the language until he has conquered the dictionary of words piece-meal, and he enters upon life impressed with the painful consciousness that he must spend years of time in learning that which should be learned in as many months. In the cultivation of our lands, the wooden

plough and the slow sickle are rejected, but in the acquisition of knowledge our facilities, in respect to orthography, scarcely surpass those of the semi-civilized peoples of the east, who are alleged to be content with no less than 3,000 characters to represent 500 syllabic sounds.

In an address by Prof. March, of Lafayette College, in 1876, that learned scholar in philology referred to a computation which had been made, showing that "we throw away \$15,000,000 a year, paying teachers for addling the brains of our children with bad spelling, and at least \$100,000,000 more in paying printers and publishers for sprinkling our books and newspapers with silent letters." In a paper, read before the State Teachers' Association of Wisconsin, in July last, the late Prof. Stephen H. Carpenter, of the University of Wisconsin, stated that "as a basis upon which to estimate the loss occasioned by the employment of useless letters and combinations," he had counted the letters in the defined words, upon two pages of Worcester's Quarto Dictionary, and found an average of twenty-three per cent. of such letters silent; from which he assumed that twenty per cent. of the cost of every book is occasioned by our vicious system of spelling, and that a reformed orthography would reduce Webster's Dictionary from 1,700 pages to 1,350 pages, and the price proportionately.

The proposed reform, based upon the use of a definite sign for every distinct sound, and the rejection of all signs which do not fulfil this office, practically requires the banishment of at least three letters from our present Romanic alphabet, and the addition of eighteen or twenty new characters. Should such a modification be adopted and agreed upon, the contrast between the old and new orthography would not be essentially greater than that of the original text of Chaucer,