

a Spelling Code by authority of Parliament, and make all statutes invalid whose spelling deviates from it, so far as those provisions are concerned which contain words wrongly spelt? Of course Sir Charles Reed means nothing of that nonsensical kind, but what in the world does he mean by the "legislation" which is to follow? Still more surprising is Mr. Lowe's proposal to launch fifteen new letters on the English public, and interpolate them, we suppose,—nothing less can be meant, for nothing less would be of any use,—in all documents issued by the authority of the Government. Just imagine Members of Parliament conning their Blue-books with not only the Anglo-Saxon letter for "th" interspersed wherever that sound occurs, but fourteen other similar hieroglyphics staring them in the face whenever they come to the study of their favourite political hobby. It might be said that, of course, the new notation would only be introduced slowly, as the rising generation learned to understand it; but the truth is, that a people which has arrived at the mature stage of literary civilisation attained by Great Britain cannot suddenly change its language, either written or spoken, and interpose such a chasm as this between the literature of the past and the literature of the future. Indeed, even if the attempt were made,—which it never will be,—the only result would be that children, to be of any use, would have to learn two written languages instead of one,—one language to understand their own age, and another to understand all that had been written before the Right Hon. Robert Lowe carried his amazing plan for revolutionising the written language of Great Britain. It seems to us that these enthusiastic and fanatic spelling-reformers are so eager to help small children, that they imagine they can change the face of a great society by a mere decree. Nor even, if they could have their way, and society were really to obey them, to drop all these silent *b's* and *g's*, and make an end of all anomalies, to get in all the *dets* (as "debts" is to be spelt in future) which custom owes to reason, and so change the written and printed language at a stroke that the literature of the latter half of the Victorian period would differ from that of the first almost as much as the

written language of the Elizabethan age differed from that of the time of Chaucer,—not even so would the children have received the great benefit imagined. No enthusiasm, unfortunately, can transform the spelling of the millions of books already in existence, and the chief use of education in spelling is to enable people to read easily and correctly whatever it may be their duty to read in their discharge of ordinary functions. Yet how would children brought up on the patent system of reformed spelling stumble and blunder over the old spellings with which they would always be coming in contact! The silent *b's* and *g's*, the anomalous diphthongs that ought to be obsolete and yet declined to disappear, the 'throughs' and 'boughs' and 'coughs' which would always be running into them, or tripping them up, or obliging them to clear their throats, would soon compel any of them who were worth their salt to learn the whole lesson over again, so as to render the language of their fathers as familiar to them as their own. And so all that the reformers would have done would have been to make a great gap in the history of our literature, without having served anybody, except the few who would never use any system of spelling correctly, and might much better be allowed to spell badly in the few letters and bills it would be their duty to write, than have all this dust blown in the eyes of those who really know what the genius of a language is. But in truth, the whole thing is a mere dream. Where our modern spelling is doubtful, we may just as well be advised which spelling to prefer. But where it is fixed in the literature of the last century, you can no more alter it to please a few pedants and help a multitude of puzzled children, than you can root rid by a fiat of the trailing plants of a Scotch-American forest, in order to make the way easier to explorers who don't like the fatigue of cutting through them. It is a wise and sagacious proposal to teach spelling by any method which at once instructs the child which letters are to receive their natural sound, and which are to be silent or sounded in some conventional manner. But the ordinary literature of our day cannot be given in two, even to make it easier for children to learn to read.—*London Spectator*. (June 2, 1877).