

peated until the whole are thoroughly mastered. Well ; this can be done. But the difficulty is even greater than this. Of these 168 habits, some are inconsistent with and destructive of each other ; and the *experience* of the child is not a regular process of addition and cumulation, but sometimes of subtraction and loss. Let me take an example. There are in the language 59 words in which the symbol *ou* sounds as in *house*, *noun* &c. ; and, of course, if the child meets with a large number of such words, he naturally and quite unconsciously draws the conclusion that *ou* will always have this sound. But, by and by, he lights upon words like *your*, *four*, *would mould* ; and now, not only is his previous experience entirely upset, but he forms a vague idea that to *ou* may be attached almost any sound whatever. Now, if we attempted to 'give an arithmetical value to his experience we might say. He has met the first case of *ou* nine times ; he has met the second class six times ; and his experience is therefore equal to three. This is, however, rather a favoring way of putting it. The fact is, that, in our every-day procedure with children, the exceptions make themselves quite as important as the rule ; and both teacher and child, in a kind of silent intellectual despair, give up the guidance of the rule altogether, and teach and learn each word separately, as an individual, and not as one of a class.

The child at first expects to find a certain truth in these marks ; but he quickly comes to feel that it is no matter what sound you give to a sign—that the sign itself has only a chance value ; and so far as training is concerned, the teacher soon discovers that his eye is never rightly or thoroughly educated until after the expenditure of a disproportionate amount of time and money. He has constantly to read off letters that are not there, and to ignore letters that are there ; he is constantly coming upon new forms for the same sound, and new sounds for the same form, so that habit is out of the question. So far as the mind of the child is concerned, unless the teacher adopts a scientific method, no wish for classification ever arises in the child ; or it sets in late, if it sets in at all. His past experience is constantly putting him out—constantly tripping him up ; until at last he comes to feel that he need not rely on his own exertions, but must be constantly helped over the stones by the teacher. Thus all *teaching* of reading becomes *telling* ; and these are just contraries and exclusive of each other. And here is another loss ; our evil notation tends to destroy good teaching.

To put all this in a few words : *The character of our Notation prevents the formation of habits.* How serious a matter this is in education, how serious an expense it is to the country, a little reflection will show. The whole aim of education is to form habits. Habits are formed by the perpetual repetition of small acts of the mind or of the body ; and the more often these acts are repeated, the more easy it is to perform them, until at length they become a part of the spontaneous nature, and are performed with perfect ease and pleasure, and beneath consciousness. In other words, power has been produced ; and the exercise of power is always accompanied by a relax of pleasure—stronger or weaker according to circumstances. But not only is power produced by the repetition of innumerable acts of attention : a method or *path* is beaten through the subject itself by this perpetual treading of the feet of thought ; and the trained child can use the knowledge he has gained for the conquering of the unknown. He does not need to be *told* this and that and the other thing ; he knows himself how to *learn*—he has a method ; and he takes hold of every new appearance by the right handle. But these perpetual inconsistencies, these constantly recurring self-contradictions, this interminable challenge to the child not simply to recognise so many letters, but to ask himself what is their value here and there—to

ask himself whether he must not ignore and cut them altogether—prevent the growth of habit, the production of power, the formation of a path or method. They almost compel both teacher and pupil to *learn every word as a separate and individual entity*—just as he learns to know men and women. If, when the symbol varies and the sound remains the same, the child cannot believe his eyes ; and when the sound varies and the symbol remains the same, he cannot believe his ears ; and if the eyes and the ears are the two main avenues to knowledge, it follows that we begin the mental education of most of our children by demoralizing and confusing these two all-important organs. We invite the children to walk in what ought to be a plain path—the smooth and delightful road to the city of knowledge ; but this path is strewn with rough historic boulders, which delay their goings and weaken their intellectual limbs. For, as I have said, most of the letters have only geographical values ; and the young child's mind has to solve the difficult practical problem of Sir Boyle Roche, and to be 'in two places at once.'

The two sets of difficulties I have described so interlace with and ramify into each other, as to entirely prevent the formation of habit. In fact, they destroy mental habit. And habit, as has been said, is power ; and these two difficulties really go therefore to paralyze all mental power in the child—so far as reading is concerned. The logical conclusion that our English children must learn each word as an individual is borne out by the fact that they do learn to read in this way. Every person I have spoken with—H.M. Inspectors, Teachers, Managers, and many others—have expressed to me their conviction that English children learn their words as separate and individual existences ; and many of them go farther, and affirm that classification is useless if not impossible. Thus, for the child, our language sinks nearly to the level of Chinese. The essence of European thinking is classification ; but, so far as the notation of our language is concerned, we are out of the European sphere. And it is this tedious and mindless process that costs the country so much ; the improvement of our methods would result in an enormous cheapening of the process. This is a consideration which cannot be too earnestly pressed upon the attention of the Education Department, School Boards, and School Managers. In the schools I have visited in every part of the country, I have always found both teachers and children working with far too much strain against these difficulties, beating up against contrary winds, driven hither and thither by the cross currents and chopping seas of our different notations, and accumulating solid and trustworthy experience—at the expense of the country—in the slowest and most laborious possible fashion. Just as twenty-five per cent. of base or depreciated coin thrown into the circulation of the country would upset all commerce, and turn bargaining into barter or merely individual transactions, the twenty-five per cent. of anomalous notation (and this is a very moderate estimate) turns almost all the mental effort of the child into a momentary shift—into a series of hand-to-mouth transactions. In other words, the child cannot accumulate experience with ease or economy ; he is constantly meeting with new complications which his past experience will not unravel—in fact, he works as if he had no past, or—what is worse than no past—a past of broken habits and loose perceptions, behind him. No wonder that the lower classes find it difficult to learn to spell.

There is a passage in *Alice through the Looking-glass* which describes, as if in a parable, the difficulties felt by most children in their attempts to master the reading of our mother-tongue :

Whenever the horse stopped (which it did very often), he fell off in front ; and whenever it went on again (which it generally did rather suddenly), he fell off behind. Otherwise he kept on pretty well, except that he had a habit of now and then falling off sideways ; and as he