

of the seventeenth century and in the earlier years of the eighteenth an effort was made to bring order out of chaos. Unfortunately this attempt toward uniformity was not guided by wisdom or by knowledge, but rather by chance and by caprice, since it was the work of the printers themselves, who knew nothing about the principles which should control the adjusting of spelling to pronunciation. A certain kind of uniformity was achieved in time by the acceptance of the standards set by the printers. This uniformity, from which our children are now suffering, was external, arbitrary, mechanical, and unscientific. In effecting it, so Professor Lounsbury has declared with characteristic plainness of speech, 'propriety was disregarded, etymology perverted, and every principle of orthography defied.'

"It was a grave misfortune that the makeshift spelling thus casually manufactured was accepted by Bailey, and after him by Dr. Johnson, whose 'Dictionary,' published in the middle of the eighteenth century, gave it currency and authority, which his more ignorant disciple Walker only helped to extend and establish. And if the English language has today the worst spelling of any of the modern languages, this is due largely to the influence of Dr. Johnson, and to the weight of his ponderous personality. If he had only known just a little more about the history of his own language, and if he had exerted his dominating influence against the more obvious absurdities and inconsistencies foisted into our spelling by the narrow pedantry of arrogant proof-readers, secure in a perilous half-knowledge—in short if Dr. Johnson had not only known more about English, but had also cared more—our orthography would be less unsatisfactory to-day and it could be more easily set right.

"In his regard for Latin, and in his ignorance of English as it had been before the printers came, Johnson accepted *comptroller*, ignoring the older *controller*. He allowed *sovereign* and *foreign* (as tho they had something to do with the Latin *regno*) instead of the older *sovrain* (Milton's *sovrain*) and *ferrain*. He countenanced *debt* and *doubt*, with the useless and disfiguring *b*, which was thrust in by earlier pedants. He kept a Latin *p* in *receipt*, tho he left it out of *deceit*. He spelt *deign* one way and *disdain* another. He was willing to leave a needless and misleading *s* in *island*, altho it had been *iland* in Shakespeare's time. He seems to have supposed that the older English *agast* would look more ghostlike if spelt *aghash*. He saw no harm in *delight*, altho the older form, representing more accurately both the sound and

the origin, was *delite*. He cast out the Shakespearean *ake* for a labored *ache*. He kept up the accidental and perfectly useless distinction in the spelling of the final syllables of *accede* and *exceed*, of *precede* and *proceed*.

"The more clearly we see the full effect of Johnson's accidental influence in fixing upon our orthography all these infelicities and many others like them, the more we are moved to regret that the burly doctor undertook to prepare the dictionary of a language which he had not investigated historically, and in which he held it disgraceful to compose an epitaph. The arguments which Dr. Johnson advanced in his pamphlet on 'Taxation no tyranny' did not convert our forefathers then fighting for their freedom; and perhaps the time has now come when their descendants can decide for themselves whether they accept or reject the cumbersome spellings preserved in the dictionary made by the man George III pensioned.

"If only we had in our hands a satisfactory history of English orthography, we should find an easy answer to one protest frequently made against any proposed simplification of our spelling. This is to the effect that it is our duty to preserve for our children the orthography which was used by Addison and by Swift, by Milton and by Shakespeare, since the spelling that was good enough for these great masters of English literature ought surely to be good enough for us. But this protest is never voiced by any one who is familiar with the original editions of Milton and of Shakespeare; it is possible to those who are familiar only with the ordinary library editions set up in 'modern spelling'—that is to say, in the spelling arbitrarily agreed on in the printing offices of the eighteenth century, and ignorantly accepted by Dr. Johnson. This 'modern spelling' misrepresents the text of the masters of English literature. Altho it was accepted in most of the editions issued in the nineteenth century, it is now rejected by the severer scholarship of our own time, which insists on reproducing the original orthography.

"The multiplication of these more scholarly editions of the English classics will soon convince even the careless reader that English spelling has always been shifting, and that it was often simpler in the past than it is to-day. It will convince him that the so-called 'modern spelling' has no sanctity from use by the masters. It is not the spelling of Addison and Swift, of Milton and of Shakespeare; it is only the spelling of Samuel Johnson, author of the 'Vanity of human wishes.' It is the spelling of yesterday, but it is not the spelling of the