

that of Shakespeare and the Bible—not to speak of Spenser and still older writers—and not always for the better.

In order to be able to determine the comparative excellence of different modes of spelling it is obviously necessary to have some principle to refer them to. What constitutes good spelling? When is one mode of spelling better than another? Is there any general principle underlying our spelling which will serve as a test? Or, are the forms of words determined entirely by usage, which is too often another name for caprice? Spelling reformers contend that there is such a principle. They claim that as spoken language existed before written language the latter should be made to accommodate itself to the former, just as the clothing is made to conform to the body clothed. Written marks make up the dress of spoken sounds, being intended to represent to the eye the spoken language addressed to the ear. In other words, spelling should be phonetic, and the more phonetic it is the better it is. On the authority of Mr. Skeat, one of the foremost English scholars, old English spelling was intended to be phonetic, and it would have been more so than it is but for three causes: (1) the defectiveness of the English alphabet, (2) the carelessness or ignorance of copyists, and (3) the local variations of pronunciation.

I propose to show by means of a few illustrations that if we choose to avail ourselves of them we can get many hints from old English orthographical forms for the improvement of our modern English spelling. We cannot overcome the chief source of confusion and irregularity, our defective alphabet, which has only twenty-three effective letters to represent about forty elementary sounds—three of the letters, *c*, *q*, and *x*, being required to perform phonetic functions already assigned to other letters, *s* and *k*. We might, however, use our alphabet, and also our ordinary orthographical expedients, more consistently than we now do, and in this way greatly enlarge the area of constant orthography which is at present so lamentably small; and any improvement of this kind should be hailed with pleasure by all who have to go through the drudgery of teaching reading and spelling to beginners.

Milton's spelling is comparatively modern, but not so much so as to be useless for my present purpose. In his "Hymn on the Nativity," I find the following forms: Wherewith, darksom, vers, welcom, approaching, quire (choir), toucht, aw, mirtle, sorron, wherin, raign, kist (kissed), stedfast, com, don, weltring, som, agast, dumm (dumb), nimphs, dread, worshipt, jail. I find in "L'Allegro" the following additional spellings: Darknes, washt, skumbring, wher, plowman, sithe, nibling, brest, boosom'd, sed, ern, swet, mattin. We have a great deal of importance attached in our day to etymological spelling, and yet we find Milton spelling, in the clearest violation of etymology, "nimph" and "mirtle." Nor is he even consistent, for while he spells "nimph" in the "Hymn" I find "nymph" in "L'Allegro." I find him also using the forms "saide" in the one poem and "sed" in the other, to suit the exigencies of his rhyme:

Such music (as 'tis saide)
On earth was never made.

—*Hymn*.

She was pincht and pull'd she sed;
And he, by friars lanthorn led.

—*L'Allegro*.

It would be absurd to accuse a scholar of Milton's standing of illiteracy because his spelling is neither strictly etymological nor strictly uniform; why then are modern writers not allowed the same privilege? I leave the opponents of spelling reform to furnish the answer.

Shakespeare's own spelling looks quite antiquated alongside of the modernized text of his plays. I select the following pas-

sages as illustrations, for the benefit of those who so persistently plead for the retention of "the English of Shakespeare":

At this fusty stuffe
The large Achilles (on his prest bed lolling)
From his deepe chest, laughs out in lowd applause,

That's done, as neere as the extreamest ends
Of paralels.

—*Troilus and Cressida*, I. 3.

You speake your faire pleasure, sweete Queene faire Prince,
Here is good broken musicke.

—*Ibid* iii. 1.

Do you thinke I will?
No, but something may be done that we wil not.

—*Ibid* iv. 4.

Grew like the summer grasse, fastest by night,
Unseene, yet crossive in his facultie.

—*Henry V*. 1.

Spenser's spelling is very antiquated, and his text abounds in forms more phonetic than their modern representatives. Take, as examples, the following from his sonnets: Hart (heart), blis, ryme, doo, toung, ravisht, wil, colord, flowre, hir, raine (reign), implido (implied), thretning, honor, spred, drido (dried), brest, al, through, moov'd, forst (forced), yeeld, climo (climb), peece, skil, pittie, disobey. Spenser's orthography is extremely irregular; it is not uncommon to find the same word spelt two or three different ways on the same page.

I take the following examples of archaic and phonetic spelling from Ascham's "Scholmaster": Therefore, exceding, delite, somment (meant), els, honor, yong, nie (nigh), cumlic, corage, solumme (solemn), presens, hed, wherby, foloe (fellow), ar, cum (come), compas, cold (could), beleve, readines, forse, ilnes. Of course Ascham was too much of a scholar to be chargeable with illiteracy because of either odd or inconstant spelling.

Gascoigne, who wrote about the middle of the sixteenth century, spells words as follows: Dwol, welth, shoperds, shuld, al, therin, lieftnants, sceptor, don, smel, bin (been), crookt, mont, skil, of (off), plowman, forain (foreign), wil, yong, ful, fel, cal, deckt, comly, evry, faine (feign), threts, grevous, hart (heart), stil.

Lord Surrey, who flourished a little earlier, has the following forms: Futhers, hed, doutfull, hye (high), els, mist (missed), hart, wher, brest, renuer (renewer), ther, fredome, releafe.

In the celebrated ballad of "The Nut-Brown Maid" will be found the following: Ther, furst, gon, greve, beleve, shal, redy, thief, deth, plesure, ful, wher, cum, erl, wurs.

The only other text from which I shall quote is that of "The Vision of Piers Plowman," which belongs to the third quarter of the fourteenth century. In it I find such terms as sesun, brod, dredful, dich, leve, seneth, Heven, plesse, gittles, cheef, peple, ese. I may add that in this, and most of the texts older than it, the combination "th" is represented, as every simple sound ought to be, by a single letter, the Anglo-Saxon "thorn," which we have unfortunately lost. If this old letter could be restored it would greatly simplify the spelling of an enormous number of words, including such common ones as "the," "that," and "this." Only those who have looked into our old English texts can appreciate the benefit of such a simplification of spelling.

In view of the above specimens of archaic English spelling I may be permitted to quote, with warmest approval, the following remarks by Dr. Murray, the editor-in-chief of the new "Historical Dictionary," the first part of which has just appeared:

"If you would know to what extent our words have changed during the past two hundred and fifty years, compare the English of the Bible of 1611 with that of the edition now in use. In the first chapter of Genesis you will find 135 spellings which are different from those of the present day—135 differences in thirty-one verses, though the same version, word for word! Yet there are simpletons who, when 'spelling reform' is mentioned, scream hysterically: 'You are going to alter our language! Keep your sacrilegious hands off the language of Milton, Shakespeare, and our English Bibles.'"

* From Dr. Murray's address on retiring from the Presidency of the English Philological Society.