

(For the WRITER.)

FONOGRAPHIC FACTS AND FANCIES.

THE RELATION OF PHONOGRAPHERS TO THE SPELLING REFORM.

The prevailing attitude of phonographers towards the Spelling Reform, like that of the public in general, is one of indifference; and it is not altogether surprising that it should be so. Mankind have never shown much zeal in planting fruit trees exclusively for the benefit of posterity, and there is a vague belief afloat that the tree of Spelling Reform is not likely to produce much fruit in our day. However that may be, the position taken is selfish and dishonorable. The reform outlined is a grand one, the blessings resulting from which are destined to be felt all down the ages, and each one of us should feel honored in speaking or writing a good word in its favor. One cannot but admire the faith and perseverance of such pioneers as Isaac Pitman and Elias Longley, who have grappled with the subject all these years through good report and bad report. Let us never forget that phonographers initiated the movement, and how that they are no longer an insignificant body in point of numbers, it would be very fitting that they should take the lead in carrying it on. I am aware that certain learned professors have recently come to the conclusion that something is wrong with the spelling, and propose to experiment a little. Forty years of experimenting ought to suffice; and more than that time has already been devoted to it. It is not so much great learning that is required as careful thought and a little common sense. Gentlemen with very delicate ears are as much to be dreaded in this connection as those who, so to speak, have no ears at all. My belief is that the alphabet wanted will be found either by taking Isaac Pitman's font and substituting a few pieces of Mr. Longley's type, or by reversing this mode of procedure. The former plan would make it more strictly phonetic, the latter, I think, would slightly improve its appearance. The partial reform contemplated by the gentlemen above alluded to can have no other effect than to divert the mind of the public from the Reform proper. Phonographers should set their faces like flint against any half-way doings in a matter so momentous. They can and should have an alphabet worth working for and thinking of. Representative phonographers from English-speaking countries "in congress assembled" should be able to settle this thing speedily and permanently. Unless some such action is taken the Reform must continue to drag, and to dissipate its force. I believe the people are quite prepared for a forward movement, but they cannot brook so many rival alphabets. Longley's belief that the proper one will be secured by the survival of the fittest, is too slow a notion by a hundred years. This thing should be settled now. In the language of a western orator, let Messrs. Pitman and Longley "pool their issues," or allow impartial men to do it for them, and the Reform will take new shape and new life.

These are the first words I have ever written on the subject, although my sympathies have been with the movement ever since the days of the old *Phonetic News*. There are thousands just like me who would instinctively rally round an alphabet that would command their respect, but who are too lazy and lukewarm to do much until this grand climax has been reached. I firmly believe that the time has arrived when a forward effort by leading phonographers would be hailed with *eclat*, and would eventually snuff out the little distracting side movements which bode no good to the cause.

J. W.

[We wish to justify and modify some published statements in the WRITER on this subject. The objection to "half-way doings" might fairly be made to the peculiar spelling used in our May number, and others. In justification we say that "half-way doings" are better than no doings at all. Now as to modification: our criticism of Isaac Pitman's radicalism was justifiable from a Canadian or American standpoint, for on this Continent we have had no such education in phonetics as the English Society has imparted. Where the groundwork is once laid, nothing short of a purely phonetic alphabet would be satisfactory. We are daily receiving evidence of the need of an enlarged alphabet. Why should there not be an International Congress of Philologists to settle upon the alphabet? In the latest number of Longley's *Phonetic Education*, Prof. Earl re-asserts the "survival" argument which our correspondent ridicules,—comparing the introduction of a new alphabet to that of a new harvesting machine or other tool. He contends that while language is a divine gift, the mode of representing it is human, and must be subject to change in accordance with the trend of the times. We see no real antagonism between our correspondent and Mr. Earl. Let a Congress be called to settle the question, and the result would be that the fittest would survive—provided the Congress recognized, without actual and prolonged test, which was most perfectly adapted. We would suggest a middle course. Let there be a Congress to discuss, in all its bearings, the question of a change of alphabet. Then, having decided on the change, without officially adopting any particular alphabet of letters, let there be a test of Pitman's and Longley's, or the two intermingled, for such a time as would be sufficient to discover their relative merits. At the next meeting of the Congress let the question of method be discussed and decided—and we have no doubt wisdom would prevail in the councils of such a Congress, composed of unselfish reformers, and the best system would be chosen. After that, let it be advertised and advocated without cessation,—used in correspondence,—printed in newspapers,—taught in schools and colleges,—painted on signs,—played with by children in the form of toy-letter-blocks,—studied by scientists and sages in standard works,—let this be done, and there will be a complete revolution within ten years. Those who, like the writer, are on the bright side of thirty will live to see it.

ED. C. S. W.]