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A MODERN BABEL.

By HARLAN H. BALLARD, Berkshire Athenæum, Pittsfield,
Massachusetts.

On August 27, 1906, President Roosevelt sent to the Public Printer a list of 300 words and ordered him to direct that thereafter in all Government publications of the Executive Department those words be spelled as therein set forth.

The President added, "There is not the slightest intention to do anything revolutionary, or to initiate any far-reaching policy," and for the reasons for his order he referred the printer to Circulars 3, 4, and 6, issued by the Simplified Spelling Board of New York City.

If the reasons set forth in these circulars had been incorporated into a preamble, the order would have read: "Whereas the present spelling of our language is unscientific, irregular, and irrational, and whereas the study thereof imposes so intolerable a burden upon children and foreigners that an entire year of their school life is wasted; and whereas the printing of silent letters causes an unnecessary annual expenditure of millions of dollars, therefore direct that hereafter in all government publications of the executive department the 300 words contained in Circular No. 6 of the Simplified Spelling Board be spelled as therein set forth."

The contrast between the greatness of the evils alleged and the simplicity of the remedy proposed led to an examination of the list. It seemed incredible that any one could have selected 300 words whose present spelling in the publications of the executive department could be held responsible for the loss of a year in the school life of American children, for the imposition of an intolerable burden upon foreigners, and for an annual waste of millions of dollars. The wonder was increased when it appeared that, of the 300 words in the list, 153 were already in preferred use by the Public Printer, as he distinctly stated in his letter of Sept. 4, transmitting the President's order, and that forty-nine of the others were already used by the Public Printer whenever requested.

Thus the President changed the spelling of only 98 words. An examination of these 98 added to our surprise, for we found that less than 30 of them could by any ordinary possibility be used in an executive communication. The others, including

mamma, coquette, apothegm, cutlass, decalogue, exorcise, phantom, gazelle, hiccough, prologue, rhyme, scimitar, woe, woeful, caressed, blushed, blessed, cursed, chapped, winked, clasped, kissed, æsophagus, æolian, etc., are of a nature quite foreign to documentary requirements. Furthermore, of the 30 words remaining, eighteen are simple and easy to spell in their present form, and the only change in their spelling consists in the substitution of final 't' for 'ed.' Indeed, the present spelling of these words is the easier, for it follows the rule of adding 'ed' to the present tense of a verb to form the past. When a child has learned the rule, and has learned to form 'hunted' from 'hunt,' 'cooked' from 'cook,' and 'taxed' from 'tax,' it will be easier for him to write 'looked' rather than 'lookt,' and 'mixed' rather than 'mixt.' The new forms introduce exceptions which must be learned by rote, since no reason is given for changing these particular words, and leaving unchanged all others of a similar character. So far, then, as the 202 words already authorized by the Public Printer, and the 60 or more which he can never have occasion to use, are concerned, the President's order seems to have been unnecessary; and so far as the words which are changed by the substitution of 't' for 'ed' in words which are actually easier to spell in their present form are concerned, it seems rather to aggravate than to relieve the evils which it proposes to remove.

Only twelve words remain, or if we consider words derived from the same root, as thorough, thoroughly, and thoroughfare, as really one, only five, viz., though, gauge, surprise, through, and thorough. But in these five words, as indeed in nearly all of the 300, there appears a perplexing inconsistency of omission and inclusion. Of all the words ending in 'ough' why should only three be changed? Why should the Public Printer spell 'though' 'tho,' and not 'furlough,' 'furlo?' Why 'thoro,' and not 'boro?' Why must 'through' be spelled 'thru,' while 'who' remains authorized for who? Why is the Public Printer required to spell 'kissed,' which he will never use, 'kist,' but left without authority to spell 'taxed,' which he must frequently use, 'taxt?' Why required to print 'carest' for 'caressed,' when he will never want to print it either way, yet not permitted to print 'redressed,' which he may need to use, 'redrest?' Why insist upon 'deprest,' which is not found in documents, and not authorize a similar spelling for 'assessed,' which is continually found in documents?

The only man in America, qualified by linguistic ingenuity to put the President's order into successful execution, is Mr. Dooley, of Chicago. He alone could devise a way to work the words of that list into a public document. His first official

communication might, with apologies to Mr. Dunne, run as follows:

"The White House,
Washington, D' ye see?

Me deer Hinnesseey:

Me furrst act after bein' appinted Seckretry to the Prezident, was to reckymend me auld frind Hinnesseey for Liberian o' Congris.

"Phwhat kin he do?" says the Prisedent? "Phwat *is* he?"

"He's a fanatick" I says, "a fanatick spelur like meself," I says,— "and fanaticker." "He can lave out more letthers from where they do belong," I says, "and introjuice more, and quarer wans, where they hadn't orter be," I says, "than any man in the whole Simplified Boord," I says.

"Appint him," he says, "but raymimber when you write to him officiously," he says, "y'ar to spell 'mamma,' 'mama,' " he says.

"She's long dead," I says, "and maybe I wouldn't have to mintion her, officiously," I says, "an' we used to spell her 'Mither,'" I says, tears springin' to me eyes.

"There, there," says he, soothin'ly, and throwing his arm around my neck in his impulsive way, "the nu way o' spellin' will coom aisy to ye, waunst ye undertand th' idee."

"Phwat's the idee?" I says.

"See Cerculars No. 2, 3, and 6," he says.

"So I did," I says, "but I can't make out from them," I says, "how the childer," I says, "and the eyetalyans," I says, "will be relayved of their intollerable burrdins," I says, "by the way I spell the words I don't never use," I says.

"That's the very idee," says he.

"Phwat's the idee?" says I.

"This"—says he:—"Y'ar to spell all the words ye don't have to write," he says, "in the Carnegee shtyle," he says, "so's to kape the ould gentleman aisy in his mind," he says, "an' libral in his conterrhybushins," he says; "an' all the wurrds ye do have to to use," he says, "ye must just kape on spellin' them," he says, "as ye durn pleeze."

"We don't wahnt to do anny thing farr-rachin," he says, "nor suddin," he says, "nor vilint."

"But these silent letters are terrible wasteful," he says, "and ixpensiv."

"We must econymize," he says, "on them 300 wurrds we nivr use," he says, "and save our money," he says, "for to dig the Panama Canal an' to build the biggest battle-ship in the wurrl'd," he says. "Think of Japan" he says, "an' the ixpinse of the new spellin' refawm circulars," he says.

But I must close this letter Hinnisseey; and I persayve that I

have not as yet worked in all the nu spellin's fur ye. I must spell some of them, annyway, or I'll lose me job.

So I inclose a civil sarvis ixamination paper, which I have prepared for ye.

The civil ixaminers have adopted the nu rules, so's to be civil to the President, but they haven't had toime to larn the 300 worrds. So they tolt me make the paper fur them.

If ye answer with your ushil intelyjunse, its Libraryan y' ar.

1. Has the Pedobaptist kist the coquet?

2. Who is the author, (a) of the Husht Hiccup; (b) of the Enamored Esophagus."

(Confidenshil.) I thought there wad be an 'f' in that word, same as 'fantom,' but the Prsident axed me was I doin' his thinkin' ferrim' or his ritin'? So I says, "Anny one, even tho he was a way-faring man," I says, "an' a fanatic," I says, "wud no that if 'f' goes in 'fantom,' by the same token," I says, 'ph,' should go in 'Esophagus,' I says, "and 'phenomenon.'"

"I'm deeliteid wid your quicknis," he says, "an' pinitray-shin. Yo' ought to jine the 'spellin' Boord." I held me tung. I nu the Boord was only takin' in Dictionary men, an' figger-heads,—but I held me tung. (But to rayzoom.)

3. In what era was Eolian born?

4. How can a libry exorcize the esthetic hypotenuse of an anesthetic pedagog?

[Confidenshil.] "If anny o' thim wurds is t' much fer ye, Hinnissey, raymimber ye can lave thim out. The Commishin marks ye highest on the wurds ye don't use. Put in them ye noes how to spell, and say in a foot-note:

I accept the 300 tho sum wan has blundered.
Into the jaws of Dith, into the mouth of Hell;
Thim's the three hundred;"

That'll pass ye thru all right.

Having proceeded thus far with my study of the President's list, it seemed to me that, if it were designed for the guidance of the public printer, issued in the hope of curing the evils set forth in circulars 3, 4, and 6; and if it must be accepted as a single and final list, limited and defined by the voluntary and emphatic declaration: "It is not an attempt to do anything far-reaching, or sudden, or violent," it was unnecessary, redundant, contradictory, inadequate, and ridiculous.

By this reasoning I was convinced that the order did not originate with President Roosevelt.

In order to be certain, however, I addressed the following question to the Secretary of the Simplified Spelling Board: "How did you succeed in enlisting the co-operation of the

President?" The reply, dated Nov. 27, I now quote: "I know somewhat of the proceedings antecedent to the President's order of Aug. 24, but the entire narrative is not in a form for publication at the present time. There was a little campaign."

That the President was ill-advised I am satisfied; but that under the circumstances he yielded to solicitation I neither wonder nor seriously regret. It brings the question before the people, and draws attention to the Spelling Board. Now the first thing that strikes us about this board is that this is not a 'board' at all. A board is a "number of persons organized and constituted under the direct authority of law for the stated performance of some designated official function, as a board of health." This definition is taken from the Standard Dictionary published by one of the most prominent members of the "Board." To settle this question, I addressed a point blank inquiry to the secretary, who replied, Nov. 23, 1906: "It originated in a group of members of the Spelling Reform Association, also members of the Am. Philosophical Association, . . . and other bodies. . . . They formed a committee, received, after prolonged effort, the requisite promise of financial support, and thus formed the S. S. Board. It may be regarded as an *independent campaign committee*." Whether the old "Spelling Reform Association" changed its name to "Simplified Spelling Board" with the purpose of leading the public to suppose that it was acting under official government sanction, I do not know. Nor do I know any other reason for the change.

The members of the Simplified Spelling Board are the following:

Brander Matthews, professor in Columbia University, *Chairman*.

E. Benjamin Andrews, chancellor of the University of Nebraska.

O. C. Blackmer, publisher, Oak Park (Chicago), Ill.

David J. Brewer, justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University.

Andrew Carnegie, New York.

Samuel L. Clemens, New York.

Melvil Dewey, lately director of the New York State Library, Albany, N. Y.

Isaac K. Funk, editor and publisher of the Standard Dictionary.

Lyman J. Gage, ex-secretary of the treasury, New York.

Richard Watson Gilder, editor of the Century Magazine.

William T. Harris, commissioner of education, Washington, D. C.

George Hempl, professor in the University of Michigan.
 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Cambridge, Mass.
 Henry Holt, publisher, New York.
 William James, professor in Harvard University.
 David Starr Jordan, president of Leland Stanford University.
 Thomas R. Lounsbury, professor in Yale University.
 Francis A. March, professor in Lafayette College.
 William W. Morrow, U. S. Circuit judge, San Francisco, Cal.
 Homer H. Seerley, president of the State Normal School, Cedar Falls, Iowa.
 Benjamin E. Smith, editor of the Century Dictionary, New York.
 Charles E. Sprague, president of the Union Dime Savings Institution, New York.
 Calvin Thomas, professor in Columbia University.
 E. O. Vaile, Chicago, Ill.
 William Hayes Ward, editor of the Independent, New York.
 Robert S. Woodward, president of the Carnegie Institution.
 Charles P. G. Scott, etymological editor of the Century Dictionary, New York, Secretary.

To the mind of the average citizen this list of names is the strongest argument in favor of the changes proposed. This argument the Board itself urges even to the verge of arrogance. In an address before the National Educational Association, Secretary Scott said: "The deliberately formed opinions of all qualified scholars are on the side of spelling reform." Again he said: "Those who understand the matter approve the proposal." Members of the board have gone so far as to say that not a single intelligent argument can be brought against their proposition.

Then, neither Lindley Murray, nor Richard Grant White, nor Archbishop Trench, nor Professor Earle of Oxford, nor Professor Münsterberg of Harvard, nor President Eliot, nor the editor of the New York Tribune, nor any one of the 32 out of the 36 members of the Board of Education of New York City who, on Nov. 28, 1906, voted against the innovations of the board, is a qualified scholar.

Public assumption of exclusive wisdom invites personal scrutiny. If these gentlemen are entitled to speak 'ex-cathedra,' there can be no discussion. But are they? In the first place they are divided in their counsels. President Jordan has already resigned his membership from this cause. Mr. Clemens has published a paper declaring his inability to agree with the simple alterations ostensibly advocated by his colleagues, and urging upon the Associated Press the immediate and radical reconstruction of the English language upon a phonetic basis. Brander Matthews, on the other hand, has published a letter

in the 'Outlook,' in which he asserts with some vehemence that he has been misunderstood, and that he is not in sympathy with any far-reaching purposes of revision.

Professor March, again, and Mr. Funk, and Secretary Scott have for years been advocating the most radical changes in our language, even to the introduction of a new or modified alphabet.

Nor do the gentlemen named in the list impress us so deeply when considered one by one, as when they stand before us in a serried, though discordant phalanx. Mark Twain is, first of all, a genial humorist. We refuse to take him very seriously. Mr. Carnegie has been induced to lend his name and to give his money, only after "prolonged effort." Mr. Dewey has long been known as an enthusiast. Only a few years ago he spelled his own name phonetically. Mr. Funk published, about a year ago, a book entitled "The Widow's Mite," devoted to the narrative of certain spiritualistic seances in which he believed that he received, through a female medium, a communication from the ghost of Henry Ward Beecher. He certainly deserves to be associated with the author of 'Innocents Abroad.' Several of the other members of the Board have been for many years, some of them since 1876, so ardent and radical in their advocacy of phonetic spelling, that they are generally known as "Spelling Cranks," and the vagaries of the Reformed Spelling Association have been so often and so rudely rejected by the American people, that its reappearance under a modified name creates only a wearied amusement. It might also possibly detract somewhat from the weight which the names of men so distinguished in letters ought to carry if any large proportion of them should appear to be in a position to derive pecuniary benefit from the success of the cause which they advocate. Ten of their number are either proprietors or editors of the Standard Dictionary. Three others are connected with the Century Dictionary, and at least three more are editors-in-chief of other dictionaries. One or two of them have written revised spelling books. Their circulars look like progressive advertisements of their dictionaries. At all events, the board has no authority.

That the list of 300 words was not primarily intended for government use, but for the general public and for schools, is evident not only from the character of the words in it, but also from the wording of the circular in which it first appeared, and from the action of the spelling board immediately after its publication. Circular No. 7, issued Sept. 27, opens with a renewed promise of conservatism and this alarming sentence: "The Simplified Spelling Board holds that its most promising field of work is in the schools." Later it says: "Teachers in

all parts of the country have welcomed the list of 300 words." "Teachers understand that there is nothing radical or violent in this first list." The entire circular is devoted to the school propaganda. Circular No. 8 followed on Oct. 8, and is headed "Simplified Spelling and the Universities."

Now from this point of view the list loses much of its absurdity. The majority of words in it still seem superfluous, because they are already in general preferred use in the schools, just as they are in public documents; the unexplained inclusion of a large number of words rarely if ever used still perplexes us, but most of the words are less ridiculous when offered for general adoption than when proposed for documentary use. Children and foreigners do use the words 'mamma,' and 'kissed,' and 'winked,' though not often 'eponyme,' or 'pædobaptist.' The inconsistencies of omission and inclusion are not relieved. Even a child knows that if he is commanded to spell 'crushed' with a 't,' it is only fair to let him spell 'rushed' with a 't.' But although the list is not now so absurd, it is more menacing than before, and the threat which it contains appears in the fact that it has been cleverly and insidiously compiled to serve as an entering wedge to a far-reaching and violent revolution in the form and structure of the English language.

Precisely what the spelling board repeatedly volunteers to proclaim that it is not, precisely that it is. Its underlying purpose is the very purpose which the board repeatedly volunteers to disclaim. I submit the following evidence:

1st. The incompleteness and inconsistency of the 300 recommendations. If the list is final it is absurd; if it is preparatory it is insidious. The gentlemen of the spelling board are not stupid.

2nd. The language of the nine circulars already issued confirms this view. Admissions which are perhaps inadvertent, are frequent. I quote a few of them:

The title of Circular No. 1 is "A First Step." The opening paragraph insists that the only thing which prevents English from becoming the dominant language of the world is its "intricate and disordered spelling." The next adds that our present spelling "keeps our children from one to two years behind the children of Germany," and that the printing and writing of useless letters "wastes every year millions of dollars." The changes proposed are quite inadequate to remedy so great evils. Further on we read: "Plans for a campaign which will extend over a number of years have been formed." "The recommendations of the board will be announced from time to time." In this preliminary circular the board "desires merely to ask those who sympathize with its aims

to *take a simple initial step.*" These 300 words are "not the complete list."

In Circular No. 2 we read: "There are in this list (of 300) about 40 distinguishable classes of words. Certain large classes are, for the sake of brevity, omitted from the present list." Twenty of the classes included are specified, beginning with: 1. Words spelled with 'œ.' 'Rule, drop the 'o.' Example, Esophagus. 2. Words spelled with 'ph,' or 'f.' Rule, choose 'f.' Example, 'fantom.'

In Circular No. 3 Professor Calvin Thomas says: "Let literary men be brought to see, by an infinite series of slight shocks that spelling was made for man."

In Circular No. 4 Dr. Brander Mathews, after an introduction in which he protests over and again that the Board is going to refrain from all radical suggestions, drops this remark: "Slowly and steadily without haste, without rest, it [the Board] will try to win acceptance for many little simplifications inconspicuous and unimportant individually, but collectively putting our spelling in a position to take a longer step in advance whenever the public has been prepared to consider this favorably."

In Circular No. 6, after a page of the usual assertions that nothing 'radical' is proposed, we come upon this: "The Board has not yet proposed any innovations of its own;" and later, "But the Board will in due time make suggestions of its own," and later, "The Board does not pretend to be consistent" in the spelling of its own publications. This spelling "is made to conform to the lists, *or rules* (sic), the Board may have adopted up to the date of issue." "Until all of the old spelling is improved, some of it will remain unimproved."

Most significant, after all, is the list itself. First we have in it more than 150 words already in popular use. "Why, yes, if the board wish us to spell honor without a 'u,' we will not object, that's the way we spell it now." Those words which at first we thought superfluous, are simply the grease on the wedge. After these words come the 70 in 't' for 'ed.'

Well, they are pretty easily swallowed, if a man shuts his eyes, for such spellings can be found here and there in Milton and in Shakespere, and everybody uses them now and then as contractions.

But the rest of the words in this list have been selected so as to serve as illustrative *examples* of far-reaching, radical, and violent *rules*, which the Spelling Reform Association formulated years ago, and which it has long been vainly trying to cram down the throats of the American people; and furthermore, such words have been selected for this purpose as are least likely to arouse opposition.

Take 'phantom' for instance. No one cares particularly about that. But there are in the English language more than 2,500 words beginning with ph, and thousands more middling, or ending in ph. Once 'fantom' is officially adopted for the sake of simplification, who can logically refuse to adopt 'fílosofy,' and 'fotograf.' Like the fisherman's genie, this innocent-looking 'fantom' rises from the earthen jar of the Board's diplomacy until it fills the sky with menace.

Then take 'rhyme.' How cleverly chosen! This is one of a few words whose later spelling has obscured its earlier form. 'Rime' is actually a going back to first principles. Moreover it matters little to the day-laborer or the man-about-town what we do with it. But its adoption will open a crack for nearly a thousand other words beginning like itself with 'rh,' and once we authorize 'rime' we must write 'rubarb' and 'rumatism,' etc., *ad finem*.

Moreover, this word serves also as typical of all words in which 'y' is pronounced like 'i', and its adoption would leave us without logical ground for refusing to adopt 'time' for 'thyme,' 'tipe' for 'type,' and so on.

Once more take 'apothegm.' In itself of small significance to the child or foreigner, it represents the large class of words which contain a silent consonant.

Absurd as the list at first appeared, it has now, I think, become evident that there is method in its absurdity.

How far reaching its apparently simple simplifications really are appears from a consideration of the effect of changing the spelling of any one of the forty classes of words of which it is so artfully composed.

Take, for example, the change of final 'ed' to 't.' This change not only affects our spelling, but interferes with our music and our poetry. Instead of the "Blessed damozel" Rossetti's poem must become "The blest damzel." Instead of "Out damnèd spot," Lady Macbeth must exclaim with unrhythmical profanity, "Out damd spot."

Shakespeare's 'Painful warrior famoused for fight,' must hereafter be merely "famoust for fight."

Passages of scripture endeared by solemn and sacred associations must be robbed of their charm:—we must say not "Blessèd are they that mourn," but "Blest are they that mourn." More than this, the grammatical structure of the language is to be shaken. It may not seem sudden or violent to substitute 'walkt' for 'walked,' but how about the second person singular of the past tense in that elevated form which we use in prayer and worship?

"When thou wast young," says the Evangelist, "thou walkedst whither thou wouldst." If 't' be substituted here for

'ed,' the word 'walkedst,' becomes 'walktst,' and is unpronounceable. Try to pronounce in the amended spelling "Thou vextst thine enemies."

Again, note the confusion which must follow the dropping of a silent consonant from the root or stem of a word. If we write 'sin' for 'sign,' that is by no means the end of the matter. We have yet to deal with the rest of the family, signal, signet, signify, significant, signature, signatory, etc., in which the *g* is *not* silent.

Shall we cut the *g* from sign, and leave it in signal? the *g* from phlegm, and not from phlegmatic? the *n* from damn, and not from damnation? Shall 'n' go from autumn and stay in autumnal? be removed from hymn, and left in hymnal?

Yet if we drop it in all such words we alter the very substance of the language, obscuring our derivations, and entirely changing our pronunciations: sinal, flematic, damation, autumal, and hymal, would be new and bastard words. Is not this a far-reaching and violent change?

The effect upon the construction of our laws and statutes may be inferred from the confusion already caused by the change of one word in the President's list. An official order was issued affecting 'past' commanders of the Navy. But it seems that there were also 'passed' commanders, who were not all the same persons; and the order had to be referred to the President for elucidation.

Conclusive as this reasoning seemed to me, the results were so startling, and the purposes hidden under the innocent face of this introductory list appeared so sinister and far-reaching, that before denouncing it I wrote to the Spelling Board under date of Nov. 24, as follows: "What is your ultimate aim? After securing the adoption of the 300 words, and of the rules upon which that spelling is based, and the revised spelling of all other words affected by those rules, will it not be necessary to press for the addition of a few new or modified letters to our present phonetically incomplete alphabet?"

If we had *carte blanche*, would we or would we not, substitute a scientific, complete, regular, and rational phonetic language for our present English conglomerate?"

I received the following reply:—"Certainly the movement will not stop where it is. There must be simplification, regulation according to the analogies of English spelling toward the ideal phonetic standard. If you and I were given *carte blanche*, with an assurance of the acceptance of our recommendations, we should recommend a scientific phonetic spelling. With a sufficient motive, as necessity or high compensation, you and I could be reading Tennyson or the Bible in extreme

phonetic form, with entire ease, in twenty-four hours. But it would gravel the general public."

If any further proof be desired, it may be found in the less diplomatic but more radical efforts of the Spelling Reform Association, of which the present board is an offshoot, from 1876 to 1902. They then offered a first list of nearly 3,000 words, and they devised and attempted to secure the adoption of a phonetic alphabet.

Some periodicals, and I think some schools, accepted even this extreme measure, and I have several papers printed in it. Text-books were prepared by members of the Board, in this strange form.

What was aimed at in 1876 is the aim in 1907. Aided by the \$100,000, and the Scotch "canniness" of Mr. Carnegie, the method of attack is now changed from an open charge to an ambuscade.

The question for us to decide is not, therefore, whether we will favor a harmless and benevolent attempt to amend the spelling of a few uncouth and unusual words, but whether we are willing to surrender our entire heritage of English speech and literature into the hands of a self-appointed committee, with power to lead us blindfolded into the mazes of so intricate and extreme a phonetic wilderness as, to use their own expressive phrase, will "gravel the general public."

I have shown that the Simplified Spelling Board is responsible for the list of 300 words, and that the ultimate aim of that Board is to change the English language to an extreme phonetic form.

Such a change, as Mr. Richard Grant White has already shown is, 1st, Unnecessary, 2nd, Undesirable, 3d, Impossible.

It is unnecessary because our present spelling is no more difficult to learn than the new, and because, in the opinion of Professor Hugo Münsterberg, with whom I fully agree, it is easier now than it would be then.

It is unnecessary, also, because, although printing silent letters is somewhat expensive, any troublesome expense can better be saved by printing fewer circulars and books than by omitting silent letters from those we do print.

If the Spelling Board would refrain from printing and distributing its literature for a few years it could save enough to enable us to keep the 'ph' in 'phantom' without danger of national bankruptcy.

Unnecessary, finally, because we already have a better and completer phonetic language at our command than the Board could construct; I refer to our current stenography. For all cases requiring unusual expedition and facility we resort to short-hand. Its alphabet is vastly simpler and more graceful

than that of the reformers. It can be written in one-half the time and printed in one-half the space required by theirs; and it is unobtrusive; ready to serve when called upon, but never insistent when not required. Then, if we need a universal code, there is Esperanto.

It is *undesirable* because in a great many instances it would conceal the derivation of words from the perception of the man of ordinary education. A single example must suffice. 'Bos'n' is less easily derived from boat and swain, than 'boatswain.'

It is undesirable also because its effect would be to render all books printed in our current spelling as hard to read as the new phonetic language would now be; because being put forward, with no authority to enforce its adoption, it would be used in some parts of the country and not in others. This, as Prof. John Nugent Cleary, has well said, would

"Destroy the unity of elementary education; Cause discrimination between persons educated in different localities; and induce a condition of general disagreement and disorder."

It is undesirable because it would increase the difficulty of learning the language. The new alphabet would contain many more letters than at present. The number of words spelled and pronounced alike would be increased. 'Two,' and 'too' and 'to,' for example would all be spelled 'tu,' after the analogy of the monstrous 'thru;' and this, as Professor Münsterberg points out, would seriously add to the difficulties of foreigners and children. Curious spellings are often easiest to remember.

Again, the new language would not remove the necessity of learning the old. Those who use it must still communicate with those who do not, and all must be able to read the literature of the present and the past.

To the children's present 'intolerable burden' there would then be added the burden of learning also four new and more intricate alphabets (the capitals and lower case letters of the printed and manuscript phonetic style proposed), and a second method of spelling.

The difficulties of children and foreigners would be further increased by the discrepancies which would be created between the spelling of ordinary words, and that of proper names, which latter, as they would require special legislative action, and for other manifest reasons, even the Simplified Spelling Board publicly acknowledges it is hopeless to attempt to change.

How great the confusion from this one cause alone would be, may be inferred from a single example. There are 1,180 names of places in Lippincott's Gazetteer, which begin with the word "New," as New York, New Jersey, Newfoundland, etc., and

in the New York Directory alone there are nearly one thousand names of persons which begin in the same way.

Now the new spelling of 'new' is 'nu.' Will it lighten the burden and help the logical spelling of children and foreigners to force them to learn "nu," in their spelling books, and 'new' in their geographies?

Then, too, observe the inconsistencies which must arise between the spelling of the common and the scientific names of plants and animals. The scientific names are not to be changed. How would this look in our botanies: "*Phlox maculata*; spotted flox," "*Nymphæa*, water-lily, so called because dedicated to the nimfs?"

The reformers cannot reach the uniformity they seek without changing the spelling of the Latin language also. They must change also our present manner of reproducing the spelling of Greek and other foreign words.

It is undesirable, again, because instead of saving money, it would entail expenses which I believe would be greater than its economies. Revised editions of dictionaries, cyclopedias, and text-books would have to be issued at frequent intervals. The introduction of a phonetic alphabet, which is a necessary prerequisite to a phonetic orthography would require the introduction of new type in many styles and sizes into every printing office, and the re-education of printers and proof-readers. All card catalogues would have to be re-made. There would have to be revised editions of the great bulk of the books constituting our English literature. This would cost millions of dollars. Professor Matthews tries to answer this argument by saying that the same thing is being done all the time as books wear out and are replaced by new. Is he not aware that much of this reprinting is now done from stereotyped plates? A revolution in spelling would require the destruction of all these plates and the making of new ones.

Moreover, the recasting of a literature into phonetic form is a different thing from making occasional new editions of a few standard works, without revision or change.

There is also a vast treasure of manuscripts which cannot be reproduced except by photography, and which to those unused to our present spelling would become more and more difficult to read. Then, too, our present spelling is indelibly engraven upon innumerable tablets of bronze and marble. It appears in artistic beauty in the decoration of countless walls, and in connection with costly paintings. Would Mr. Matthews think it an easy matter to change the spelling upon the tomb-stones in a hundred thousand cemeteries?

Yet otherwise, side by side in the same family lot, how incongruous must the new and the old appear. On the father's

headstone "William the Son of Thomas;" on his son's monument, "John the Sun of William."

Who will be the first American to win distinction by erecting a memorial of granite with this inscription "Tu mi Muther?"

Phonetic English is undesirable again, because it would be at the best a machine-made, inflexible and monotonous code, rather than a natural and magnificent language, the outgrowth of our history and of the social, religious, political, poetical, and oratorical aspirations of the race; and because, it would, as already shown, mutilate our grammar, hamper our rhythm, spoil much of our poetry, render much of our music impossible, and destroy our freedom of expression.

It is undesirable, finally, because it would open a linguistic chasm between the United States on the one hand, and England, Canada, Australia and other English speaking countries on the other; for it is not to be supposed that those nations will adopt the recommendations of a New York City spelling club.

But, besides being unnecessary and undesirable, the proposed plan is *impossible*.

First, because there is no agreement, even among the advocates of the phonetic plan, as to the pronunciation of English words. More than two thousand words of "disputed pronunciation" are given in the Standard Dictionary, with their different pronunciations, as spelled in phonetic style by their several advocates.

Among the fifty or sixty gentlemen who have here officially indicated their own pronunciation, are six of the present members of the Spelling Board. They do not agree in the pronunciation of so simple words as 'Christianity' and 'Caricature.'

This is fairly illustrative of disagreements running through the disputed 2,000 words. This list of disputed pronunciations is twice as long as the list of disputed spellings, and the number of ways of pronouncing each disputed word is greater than that of the recorded variations in spelling. The Standard Dictionary recognizes three different pronunciations of 'conduit,' five of 'courteous,' seven of 'breviary,' nine of 'dandelion,' and fourteen of 'violoncello.'

This takes no account of sectional or dialectic pronunciation, such as prevails in New England, Virginia, and the West, nor of the foreign variations included under the word 'brogue'; nor of illiterate mispronunciations, nor of our everyday indolent slurrings or imperfect pronunciations; such as 'independunt' for 'independent.' To reduce all these varieties of pronunciation to one standard is at present impossible. But until that is done, we cannot have a phonetic language.

If it is so important, which I deny, for spelling and pronunciation to be in phonetic accord, it can, in many cases, be done more cheaply, easily, and rationally by making the pronuncia-

tion conform to the spelling, than by changing the spelling to conform to the pronunciation. Would it not be easier and more rational, for example, to teach our children to pronounce "been," "been," and so bring it into harmony with 'seen'; and back to its earlier historic sound, than it would be to change the spelling of 'been,' to 'bin;' which departs from its historic sound, obscures its derivation from 'be;' adds an exception to our rules of grammatical structure, violates the analogy with 'seen;' adds another troublesome pair of words of different meanings, but of the same spelling, and involves the expense of a change in all our text-books?

The tendency of pronunciation is to deteriorate. The stronger vowels are weakened through laziness. Consonants are elided. 'To-morrow,' becomes 'tuhmorrah;' 'singing' becomes 'singin';' 'steelyard' becomes 'stilyerd;' 'handkerchief' becomes 'hankerchif.' Correct spelling is a continual protest against slovenly speech. It is a constant plea for accurate and nice distinction of sound. To establish the principle that spelling must conform to popular pronunciation would be to destroy the unity and dignity of the language.

The second reason for the impossibility of the success of this propaganda is that the people do not want it and will not accept it.

The great mass of newspaper and magazine criticism is adverse. I have been able to find only fourteen magazine articles in favor of it, and fourteen of these were written either by members of the Spelling Board or by those closely associated with them; namely: one in the Independent, by William Hayes Ward, a Standard Dictionary man and a member of the Board; one in Current Literature, by Edward J. Wheeler, a director in the Company which publishes the Standard Dictionary; one in Littell's Living Age, by Professor Skeat, a dictionary man and member of the Board; one each in Scribner's, The Century, and Harper's Monthly, by Professor Lounsbury, a dictionary man and a member of the Board; one by Mark Twain, a member of the Board; one in the Forum, by Professor March, a dictionary and revised spelling-book man and member of the Board; one each in The Century, Outlook, and Bookman, by Brander Matthews, a member of the Board; one in the Critic, by Jeannette Gilder, sister of Mr. Gilder of the Century Company; one by Calvin Thomas, in The Nation, a dictionary man and member of the Board; the fourteenth and last, is by William Dean Howells. So far, as my observation goes, also, all the periodicals which have adopted the new spellings are published or edited by the same gentlemen, or their friends.

It is impossible, finally, because the English is the growth of more than a thousand years; and has taken unto itself from time to time, the best of many other tongues. It is so com-

posite and vast in structure, so infinite in rich adornment, and so manifold in forms derived from distant sources, that to make it over into a scientific system to suit the philological theories of a subsidized coterie of technical linguists is beyond the power of any man or body of men. A distinguished philologist after many years of effort along this line said in the end; "the longer I work after a consistent phonetic system for the English language, the greater the difficulties appear."

It must needs be so. Every word in the language has come to its present spelling for some specific reason, good or bad. In making alterations these reasons must be given a fair hearing.

We recognize a very slow and natural modification in progress in English, as in every other living organism, but we do not think that any society can materially accelerate or guide its evolution.

But, although this violent and far-reaching scheme is doomed to failure like its long line of predecessors, from the Emperor Claudius to the middle ages, and from Ormin, in the 12th century, to the present day, it is, nevertheless, capable of much mischief, and as the editor of the *Dial* well says: "Its chief menace is directed toward our public school systems. These, too often, are under the control of men prone to favor any change that is tagged as a reform. The mischief that can be done, and has been done, by a city board of school trustees, or even by a single school superintendent, is enormous, and we counsel the friends of English undefiled to be everywhere watchful on behalf of their children, lest they be made the victims of a false educational economy."

I have demonstrated that the list of 300 words originated with an unofficial society, lacking in harmony of purpose and method.

I have demonstrated that the purpose of this society is the violent dislocation of the English language, preparatory to its attempted reduction upon an extreme phonetic basis.

I have tried to show that this plan is neither necessary, desirable, nor possible, but that the partial success of the first part of the programme, *i. e.*, the confusion of our present standards of spelling, is to be feared in connection with some public schools, and that there it may cause mischief. I hope that the present discussion may so emphasize this danger as to confirm us all in the determination to turn a deaf ear to the song of the phonetic siren, and even to cast out from the literature of our libraries, the few deformed spellings which have been sporadically adopted, beginning with 'catalog' and 'program.'

Let no librarian, even though in charge of a Carnegie library, voluntarily bow his head in servile submission to the threatened curse of a Modern Babel.