A PHONETIC ORTHOGRAPHY.

A new system of English orthography is proposed in Science (July 21), by Prof. J. I. D. Hinds, of Lebanon, Tenn., and endorsed with slight alterations (Science, August 25), by Frederick Krafft, of Jersey City Heights.

Reform, not revolution, in English orthography, is very desirable; but reform, to be successful, must be in accord with the spirit of the English language; it must also be attempted a little at a time. "Great reforms progress slowly."

Any system proposed that is simply phonetic must fail for the following reasons: (1) Our alphabet is inadequate; (2) the people of different sections or schools pronounce many words differently; (3) everyone would spell according to his own ideas of pronunciation, and there would be no standard. The fact that Prof. Hinds and Mr. Krafft, who attempt to agree, differ is evidence of that.

People are not all born with perfect audition and perfect powers of enunciation. These are matters largely of education. Perfection in these two particulars is very rare, in order that two persons pronounce all their words alike they must be of the same race or family and have the same teachers all their lives.

In America, where the most perfect English is said to be spoken, there are great differences in some of the vowel sounds in the different sections of the country. In any neighborhood in the west the same differences may be found according to the section from which the different neighbors came. The state or section from which a man came may usually be determined by his speech.

Without laying claim to perfection myself, but only to show the differences of pronunciation in different parts of the country, I wish to point out discrepancies in the pronunciation of these two gentlemen:

Professor Hinds offers aa to represent the sound of a in father, and then gives as an example, voaw for was. That will not do. The sound of a in was is very nearly the sound of o in dog. It would better be represented waa. Again he gives waa for watch. The vowel sound in that word is identical with the sound of o in not, and should be represented by wee (watch). Mr. Krafft's representation waw, as if to rhyme with thatch, is worse yet, and is probably a typographical error. Leaf will do for laugh, if he likes it; but is it not rather pedantic and affected? Better the sound of a in last. Let the following nonsense sentence be read aloud and the differences of sound of the vowel a noted: "Father laughed hard after Fanny's hairless watch-dog was last granted fat."

Lay in villej will not do. Village is much pleasanter. The sound of a in village is as a in make, shortened, unaccented, and rendered somewhat obscure, less in time than short e in edge and less open in quality.

With in Prof. Hinds's extract may be an oversight. With would be better.

Or should be oor, — long sound of o, not short.

Murmur will do; but yondur, sober and hard will hardly do. They have not the sound of u in up. Dher by Prof. Hinds, in the same line, may do for their if the word is not domestic; otherwise his dther (probably dther was intended) for there, and Dr. Krafft's dher for both there and their would be better. Yonder, sober and herd, ordinary spelling, would be less liable to be mispronounced, considering that e followed by r differs from e in met.

Puel, skuel and tues are very bad, when we is given to represent u in rule. Undoubtedly Prof. Hinds meant that we should represent oo in tool. U in rule is the same as u in made, except that in made a is distinctly sounded before the e, and in rule the y is indirectly sounded. On account of the preceding r. Pool, school and looser are much different from pule, skule and luce.

U in playful should not be sounded as u in up. It should be as u in pull. For this sound Professor Hinds proposes oo. The notation then should be playful.

Weird should be wind (short sound of i). The word does not rhyme with mind and should not be so read. The rhymes are allowable, not perfect.

Some words in the extract are lengthened, defeating one of the objects sought, as waaaz, woekont, konzfuzion. Again, dissyllables are written with a single vowel, as sifnd, gobbld.

Thus all this is designed to show the impracticability of a phonetic system. The one proposed is as good as any. No phonetic system will meet all requirements for the reasons here given: (1) Differences of pronunciation among different people, and (2) defective alphabet, necessitating the use of digraphs to represent some of the simple sounds.

Speaking of digraphs, how can we limit a simple sound to single digraph when our language now furnishes us with such a vast variety of digraphs, trigraphs, and even polygraphs to represent the different sounds? Take, for instance, the sound of a in made. We are by no means limited to the twenty combinations presented by Professor Hinds. We must spell plague with p-l-e-a.

Naas with na, Measlar with me, and Greene with g-e. Mr. Baehr is particular that we shall spell his name with baehr; while another Baehr is equally strenuous that baeh shall go into his name. Bracko, however, gives the letters dekko. Mr. Hinds, in the same line, may do for there if the word is not domestic; otherwise his dther (probably dther was intended) for there, and Dr. Krafft's dher for both there and their would be better. Yonder, sober and herd, ordinary spelling, would be less liable to be mispronounced, considering that e followed by r differs from e in met.

Mr. Baehr is particular that we shall spell his name with baehr; while another Baehr is equally strenuous that baeh shall go into his name. Bracko, however, gives the letters dekko. Mr. Hinds, in the same line, may do for there if the word is not domestic; otherwise his dther (probably dther was intended) for there, and Dr. Krafft's dher for both there and their would be better. Yonder, sober and herd, ordinary spelling, would be less liable to be mispronounced, considering that e followed by r differs from e in met.

The sound of a in made, except that in made a is distinctly sounded before the e, and in rule the y is indirectly sounded. On account of the preceding r. Pool, school and looser are much different from pule, skule and luce.

U in playful should not be sounded as u in up. It should be as u in pull. For this sound Professor Hinds proposes oo. The notation then should be playful.

Thus all this is designed to show the impracticability of a phonetic system. The one proposed is as good as any. No phonetic system will meet all requirements for the reasons here given: (1) Differences of pronunciation among different people, and (2) defective alphabet, necessitating the use of digraphs to represent some of the simple sounds.

Speaking of digraphs, how can we limit a simple sound to single digraph when our language now furnishes us with such a vast variety of digraphs, trigraphs, and even polygraphs to represent the different sounds? Take, for instance, the sound of a in made. We are by no means limited to the twenty combinations presented by Professor Hinds. We must spell plague with p-l-e-a.

Naas with na, Measlar with me, and Greene with g-e. Mr. Baehr is particular that we shall spell his name with baehr; while another Baehr is equally strenuous that baeh shall go into his name. Bracko, however, gives the letters dekko. Mr. Hinds, in the same line, may do for there if the word is not domestic; otherwise his dther (probably dther was intended) for there, and Dr. Krafft's dher for both there and their would be better. Yonder, sober and herd, ordinary spelling, would be less liable to be mispronounced, considering that e followed by r differs from e in met.

Mr. Baehr is particular that we shall spell his name with baehr; while another Baehr is equally strenuous that baeh shall go into his name. Bracko, however, gives the letters dekko. Mr. Hinds, in the same line, may do for there if the word is not domestic; otherwise his dther (probably dther was intended) for there, and Dr. Krafft's dher for both there and their would be better. Yonder, sober and herd, ordinary spelling, would be less liable to be mispronounced, considering that e followed by r differs from e in met.
whether the word is singular or plural. We will distinguish crocheted with of, crocheted with etc., piqued (the cloth) with we, croqvet with vault, and roqueted with vete. We must not forget that Duchesne requires ce-e, Duquesne use-e, Niquex use, Torquay way, and Queyrac way. Chasez ("sashay") completes our French list with ce.

We spell some with ei-e, eigne with eig-e, and eyot (aif) with eyo. We must remember raphie with his. Those in England with ai-e, heir with het, and remigie with ai-e. As an oddity we find quegh, which ought to be pronounced with eigh or aigh (quach), quoit ("quaint" in the country) has oi. Theys (tay) goes with keys, and old Mr. Trew (Tray) is ever faithful to ew in his name.

But why prolong this exhibit? The reader is already exhausted, and the chapter is not yet complete. Suffice it to say there are nearly one hundred different ways of representing the long sound of a, many of them in patroynics and names of places that need to be pronounced by English-speaking people. For other vowel sounds there is an equally extensive variety of representations.

All this would, perforce, show the necessity of a reform in spelling—phonetic reform, if need be; but, on the other hand, the letters of a word are the earmarks, if you please, that indicate ownership—that show the philologic derivation and history of a word. Phonetic reform could never touch the majority of irregularities in spelling and retain any intelligence in the word. Therefore, with all its faults, our heterographic orthography is preferable to any homographic orthography that can be devised with our present alphabet.

What we can do is this: Drop some of our redundant letters as me from programme, we from catalogue, etc.; final e from styrche, etc., when the preceding vowel is short; a from plead (pled), past tense and pp, and similar words; change ph to f, as in sulfur. There is plenty of scope for good work in this direction, and such work will finally become permanent. We would become accustomed to these words, as to dock-tailed sheep, and prefer them.

B. B. SMITH.