COMMUNICATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

THE SPELLING OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

As a teacher of university classes, both in psychology and education, I have naturally been interested in the mistakes in spelling committed by my students, as these mistakes often throw light upon the nature of the mental processes underlying the use of language, and at the same time indicate in a general way the degree of efficiency of the public school training in spelling. For these reasons I have for several years kept a record of the words most commonly misspelled by members of my classes.

Perhaps I am becoming hypercritical, perhaps my field of observation is too limited, and my "samples" unrepresentative, but I have the conviction that present-day college students spell far less accurately than did those of a decade ago, and I infer that the teaching of spelling in the schools must either be deprived of its proper allotment of time or be conducted by inadequate, if not incorrect methods.

To illustrate this contention, I shall make use of a list of 160 misspellings, culled from 58 examination books written by students of all four classes in a certain western university. For the sake of putting these errors in high relief, I shall assume that a single student is guilty of them all. Let us suppose that he is a senior, clad in cap and gown, brandishing his coveted sheepskin, and that, as his favorite aunt was unable to attend the Commencement exercises, he thoughtfully indites the following epistle in review of his college days and discussion of his future plans:

DEAR AUNT: Today I recieved my diploma, and now, thank fortun, I am educated. I have not yet intirely detirmined my carere. Wheather I shall finally earn my livlihood by going into the solliciting buisness as my uncle's pardoner will dipind on his perferences. At any rate, laborous and humulating manuel pursuits are furtherest from my intentions, as I am concious allready that the university invironment has prooved particularly valuable to me in evry way. My intellegual equipement has been advansed harmonously; by immetation of the best sholars my vocabular has been strenghthened; suberstitions allmost as bad as those of the heathern have been analised and prooved incorect to me; my inaetiative has been arroused and intencified; socialy I am well acquiped and incidentily the rough eyes

I used to show have been eliminated; again, the dicipline I have recieved from the pratice work in the labratories of physsics and chemistery, where persistance courtsy, couragousness and similar quallities are definately emphazed, and the knowlege I have recived from the lecturs and disscussions of my proffessors in bonay, rhororic, mathematics, phisiology, ect. shoud be a sourse of inestimatable benifit to me from whatever angel it is regarded. In fact, aunty, untill you have been here, you would never suspicion how desireable and influencial a college eduecation is even to a person who has been given by heridity a meerly adverage amount of nural placticity and a comparitively poor mental calaber. In the light of my pratical expirience, however, I can testify that a college education is alright.

It is to bad that the epedemic of diptheria and scarlet tina and the confussion and fuss of fumugation shoud have involentarily kept you from comming ro the exersices. You inquire about my helth: during my course, as you probibly remember, I have been ill but seldem, an attack of measeles with some nauseau and other unpleasant symtoms during the Christmas hollidays, and one spell of thrachoma, due, I think, to my astigmaton, are the only deseases I have had, as this is a very intelegent and hygenic city, notible for its clenliness. One of my friends, however, an enginiere, has not had the happeist lot; he lived in a room oppisete mine, with a very low cieling, where tramsons were the only devises for ventalating, and even these were ordinarally nelected, as they were of no earthy use. Hense he was unable to brake up an attack of typhoid, and was compeled to loose quite a bit of his scholl work. They could not trace the sourse of the desease itself, but put him under quarentine, as they said he might be a neucleus or focas for the developement of other cases.

I have to go out now to walk for a peace with my chum, so good-by,
Your obeident nephew,

Now, I submit that such spelling as this (and let it be understood that these are bona-fide errors), even when regarded as the summation of the inaccuracy of several dozen students, is totally unwarranted. By hypothesis, college students represent a selected group—selected for their intellectual attainments and capacity to profit by their college training. But ability to spell, like ability to use fluent and idiomatic English, is a well-nigh indispensable prerequisite to culture and to success in practical life. Spelling, to be sure, can scarcely be termed a cultural study; it is rather a tool for the attainment of culture, but it is a most necessary tool. Yet, if one were pessimistically inclined, one might imagine that the average college graduate had never learned the use of this tool.

It will probably be objected that the greater portion of the errors I have produced were accidental, attributable to the haste of examination work. To this it may be replied: first, that I have not included here errors that were of a certainty mere "slips of the pen;" second,

that most of the errors were repeated errors, *i. e.*, that they were committed several times in the paper or by several students; third, that in all my classes I demanded a revision of the papers before they were submitted and placed special emphasis upon the detection of errors in construction and orthography, while in two classes a dictionary was provided for free consultation by the students; fourth, and most important, speaking psychologically, one cannot claim to "know" a word until one can spell that word automatically and correctly, however much one's attention be taken at the time with matters of thought and diction.

In short, the goal in the teaching of spelling should be—ability to write automatically and correctly all the words common in everyday experience, and this goal, obviously, should be attained in the grammar grades. As to the means for its attainment there, it is not my place now to speak, even had I sufficient knowledge to do so. I am told, however, that large numbers of teachers and superintendents have been impressed with a sort of *laissez-faire* doctrine in spelling, have revolted from the old-fashioned drill, and have argued, either that it doesn't matter how one spells, or that spelling will be absorbed incidentally by the "natural-born spellers" and can't be taught to the rest. Still others cling to drill, but the drill is of the lifeless, mechanical, time-consuming sort that has been so justly condemned.

The only way to meet these difficulties is to take the matter seriously and to devote intelligent thought and energy to the teaching of spelling. I cherish the idea that if teachers only knew how to teach, we could attain the goal I have mentioned and could train prospective college students to a higher degree of accuracy than is at present exhibited.

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TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF CLARK UNIVERSITY

At the recent scientific meetings on occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of Clark University most of the lectures and discussions in the departments of psychology and pedagogy were concerned with subjects in the field represented by the JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY. Lectures were given by distinguished psychologists from this country and Europe, and conferences in regard to the problems of teaching and research were held.