

INGGLISH AZ IT IZ RITEN

The Case For Simplified Spelling

THE art of spelling, or to give it its Greek name, orthography, is a difficult one to acquire in English, though once in early Anglo-Saxon days it was quite easy; for then the spelling was phonetic. Words were spelt as they were to be pronounced. And this indeed is the principle that came to be adopted in European languages. In Chinese the written characters do not represent sounds, but ideas. In ancient Egyptian writing the hieroglyphic symbols consisted of pictures and arbitrary signs. There was no attempt to do what was later done by some genius, i.e., to offer pictures, not of things, but, as it were, pictures of the elements of sounds issuing from the mouth—in other words, an alphabet, a phonetic alphabet.

But all things change. The great Roman Emperor Augustus spoke contemptuously of the theoretical spelling rules laid down by the grammarians, and said that Latin should be spelt as it was pronounced. One hundred years later, the great Roman critic, Quintilian, laid down the principle that the use of letters was to preserve the sounds, and that therefore Latin spelling should be phonetic. But those who use any language use it their own way, and as a rule they have no knowledge of the origin of words. Thus, one who knows Latin will spell *occasion* with two c's and one s, and *professor* with one f and two s's. But the average person just chances it, unless he has learned these and other catchy words from one of the innumerable spelling books that were and still are a standing reproach to English indifference to what planned spelling might do to diffuse our language widely and rapidly, and at the same time remove an intolerable burden from teacher and pupil. How many people, even among those who have some Latin, can spell *rescission*—the noun formed from a part of the Latin verb *rescindere*, "to cut back," hence "to rescind"? A rational spelling according to sound would be *resizhon*, for which no knowledge of Latin is required. But just think of *r-e-s-c-i-s-s-i-o-n*!

Any shorthand writer would be at home immediately with phonetic spelling, because when he hears, say, the word *knock*, he writes the sound *n-o-k*, or *plague*, *pl-ae-g*. But shorthand is too remote from daily use, and too liable to be misread, ever to become general.

One Sound, One Character

A better hope lies with the use of the international phonetic alphabet, now used in the best modern dictionaries both English and foreign, and becoming increasingly known in all schools in English-speaking countries. Most of the pupils in New Zealand's secondary schools are quite at home with this alphabet, and the University of New Zealand has issued a printed sheet with its 44 characters for the use and guidance of teachers. The plan is simple—one sound, one character, and always the same character for the same sound. But this ideal will not come into

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By PROF. R. LAWSON

general public use for many generations yet, because the public are not prepared for it.

The problem before the Simplified Spelling Society of Britain was to produce a system of reformed spelling within the limits of the present alphabet of 26 letters. Of these 26 three are duplicates e.g., c is not wanted, except in *ch*; for *cat* is to be spelt *kat*, and *peace* is to be spelt *peas*. Also *q* is not wanted, as it equals *kw*, e.g., *queen* is *kween*; and *x* is not wanted, as it equals *ks* or *gs*; e.g. *axe* is spelt *aks* and *example* is *egsample*. Being thus confined to 23 letters to represent the sounds of English, nearly 50 in number, be it noted the persons working on the new system could not make, and did not attempt to make, a thoroughly scientific phonetic system. They have, however, produced a system, though they have definitely retained some spellings of small words in common use that do not fully conform to the system.

Derision—Neutrality—Approval

When you first see isolated words spelt in the new way such as *speshal*, *dogz*, *meny*, you will probably be moved to derision, but when you examine these as the necessary products of a carefully planned system, your derision will give way to neutrality first, and finally to approval. You must remember that this system has been carefully evolved by a number of first-class scholars in the past 40 years. Professor Gilbert Murray, the eminent classical translator, has for some years been president and, working with him, are men distinguished in science and letters. Among these I note the names of His Grace the late Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr. William Temple, D.Litt., D.D., LL.D.), Professor Daniel Jones, Sir Henry Coward, Mus.Doc., H. G. Wells, Professor Spearman, Pro-

fessor Sir Percy Nunn, and a number of others. Hence the humorist and the scoffer must needs pause before they launch their shafts. Already a number of pamphlets have been issued, and also a *Dictionary*, the work of Walter Ripman. A short sketch by H. G. Wells has also been issued. And there is a pamphlet showing the success of the experiment in 16 schools in Great Britain. The address of the secretary in Britain is Station Road, Wallsend-upon-Tyne, and the membership costs 1/- in English money.

Some Examples

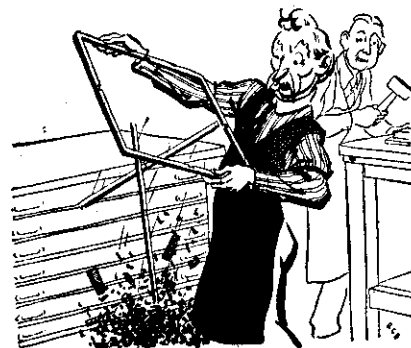
The system in brief is this. Short vowels, a, e, i, o, u, as in *bat*, *bet*, *bit*, *pot*, *but*. To form long vowels add *e*: *ae*, *ee*, *ie*, *oe*, *ue*; e.g., *baet*, *beet*, *fiet*, *noet*, *buety*, *graet*, *cheef*, *ried*, *roem*, *duek*, *laet*, *leed*, *mien*, *groe*, *tuen*. Other long vowels, *aa* as in *paast*, *kaaf*, *kaam*; *uu* as in *fuul* (= *fool*), *puul* (= *pool*), *muun*, *ruud*; *oo* as in *fool* (= *full*), *pool* (= *pull*), *poot* (= *put*).

If you sound *boot* (now to be spelt *buut*) you will see how it differs from *foot* in the vowel. *Foot* is to be spelt exactly as it now is, as it rhymes with *poot* (*put*).

So *au* as in *taut*; hence *ought* will be written *aut*. Note that *th* in *thin* differs from *th* in *than*, and hence it was necessary to use a double letter (a diagraph as it is called)—so *than* is written *dhan* and *other* is written *udher*; *sh* comes out in *vishus*, *oeshan*, *konshers*, *kondishon*; *zh* comes out in *plezher*, *vizhon*. Double *r* (*rr*) is retained after the short vowels *a*, *o*, and *u*, e.g., *karry*, *sorry*, *hurry*; but otherwise letters not sounded are not written. So we get *riter*, *lam*, *leter*, *frend*. *Anger* is *ang/ger*, *hanger* is not changed—pronounce them and see *ang/ger*, *hanger*; likewise *fin/ger*, *sing/er*.

Blows to Confidence

Young children when being introduced to sounds and reading, writing and spelling, love this sort of play, which to them is experimental. They must rely on their senses—their eyes and ears and then on their reasoning powers. But just imagine how their confidence in themselves, in their ears and eyes and reasoning powers is crushed by the absurdities of our spelling. Just look at these words—*sleep*, *keep*, *deep*, *weep*—all very simple in the long vowel with a double e. But wait! What follows *deep* and *keep*? This



"... The printers were the final fixers"