

Spelling Reform Anthology edited by Newell Tune

§13. Spelling and Literacy Problems

This section deals with problems caused by spelling in attempting to achieve literacy.

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[Spelling Reform Anthology §13.1 pp181-182 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1972 pp9-10 in the printed version]

1. The Consequences of Serious Reading Problems, by Harvie Barnard

For the Child, the School, and Society.

Inability to read at grade level becomes apparent to pupil and teacher sometime during the second grade, if not sooner. The child, tho not acutely aware of the deficiency, becomes uncomfortable, a little self-conscious, and in some cases may develop defensive or evasive mechanisms. For such pupils special aid is needed, additional teaching may help, and, if available, supplemental mechanical and electronic teaching aids might be truly beneficial. If a variety of teaching aids are not available to supplement normal teaching then the school principal and/or the school district may find it both desirable and necessary to invest in such audio-visual devices as the primary teacher or the reading specialist considers helpful. This added cost may not at this point be apparent, since a modest shifting of instructional funds may suffice.

A year or so later the effects of sub-grade reading become more acute for the poor reader. Loss of class status, loss of self-confidence, and fear of failure become apparent. Holding back the non-reader may be tried. Special classes may help. After school instruction could help. In general more work for all concerned seems indicated. A reading "specialist" may be employed and parents may be asked to give aid. In event of too many retentions, or special classes, or special teachers, the school district is going to be asked for more funds, altho inmost instances the impact is not apparent at this time because reading difficulties are frequently not recognized as such until the pupil has been floundering unhappily for two or more years, - often not until the 6th or 7th grade.

By the 4th or 5th grade, confusion and/or frustration symptoms are definitely apparent. Various failure syndromes are highly obvious and "behavior problems" have become established. Withdrawing tendencies are present and the child usually "hates" school. By now the non-readers must be held back, or skilled remedial reading instruction is a must. Psychologists may even be required to sort out the "unteachables" from those deemed able to respond to special teaching efforts. The school district must at this point "do something" and do it effectively, including the hiring of additional specialized personnel and equipment. Costs of instruction per pupil are now mounting noticeably. The eyebrows of the Board of Education will probably elevate a trifle. But what will they do about it?

During the 6th or 7th grades the non-readers, or those reading two or three years below grade level, do not adequately comprehend the textbooks provided for those grades and have become functional failures, even tho district policy may require that such pupils be "passed" on to the next higher grade. The learning process has virtually stopped for most of these people. Most of them have "quit," and some have become "hard core" trouble makers. At this point a few may become aware of the situation and of these a few may be helped by "special ed" classes or some form of intensive re-teaching. But for the majority of non-readers, it could be too late to change the trend. By now the administration is well aware that a certain percentage of those going into Junior High are functional non-readers and cannot maintain acceptable standards. Special ed. classrooms must be provided or normal classes may be burdened or demoralized by the presence of "bad actors" or classroom "bums." Initial evidences of minor delinquency are apparent and weekend classroom damage may be costing the district some minor repairs and repainting.

During the Junior Highschool period the non-reader has a strong urge to "skip" school or drop out. The principals, and of course, all the teachers are well aware of this and in most cases the parents are equally cognizant, altho usually unable to correct the situation. School attendance laws are the only curb to dropping out at this point.

At the Junior High level, counselors for the deficient readers will be recommending vocational programs and/or further special teaching in order to keep these people in the schools. The administration, now fully aware of the expense of re-teaching, additional staffing and initiating vocational programs, are concerned with the problem of additional financing. The drop-out problem is very acute and its relation to juvenile delinquency is obvious. These young dropouts cannot secure jobs. They become a menace to the community.

The non-reader cannot survive in high school. He flounders hopelessly for a year or two and finally leaves. He is defeated and discouraged. Academically he feels a total failure. He leaves a poor to bad record in the high school files and will have trouble reentering any academic program, especially if he has been suspended or expelled. If not too seriously delinquent, he may enlist in some branch of the armed forces. Here again he is handicapped by reading problems. The

applicant finds that he must read and execute forms, fill out applications, follow written instructions. Now, perhaps for the first time, he realizes the importance of reading - reading with comprehension and understanding.

If the unemployed dropout is unacceptable to the armed services or to a vocational school, he is now in a desperate situation - that of having delinquency virtually forced upon him. The need for companionship and some measure of support may result in a hasty marriage with all its responsibilities. Being unskilled and without a job, yet with parenthood staring him in the face, the need for income may now take a savage turn - toward criminality. He is pushed into a crucial choice - that of going "on relief," becoming a ward of the community, or, if pride prevents this, becoming a criminal "operator." In either case, he has now become a costly factor in our society, instead of a contributor to the economy. If imprisoned, the cost of maintaining him in a state or federally supported institution may run at least several thousands of dollars a year, continuing perhaps for many years. The cost of maintaining this same individual as a student (presumably living at home), would be on the order of \$900 a year.

There may be still a faint chance for a "recovery." If well counselled, and if the criminal attitude is not too firmly established, the non-reader will have available another chance. If in the armed services, he will be encouraged, if not required, to enter the "G.E.D." program, General Educational Development. Here, under usually favorable circumstances, he will be exposed to review and "retreading" courses in everything from elementary reading to high school science. Sometimes miracles do happen in these Service schools. Young men who have felt defeated ever since entering school may now realize, perhaps for the first time, that they are "getting a break," getting a new chance. For they now know, thru bitter personal experience, that they *must* get at least a basic education if they are to earn an honest living. And the fundamental of all basics is learning to read, and this means reading with understanding, with true visualization of what they are "reading."

The core of rehabilitation in confinement situations is, or should be, education. For the competent reader this means learning a skill or a "trade." For the non-reader or functional non-reader, this means beginning school all over again. But there is no other solution. The person must, in substance, start a new life, not only as to a new viewpoint but also as to the fundamental learning processes. Here again, whether in the army guardhouse, or in penal confinement, or in total freedom, the first step in the rehabilitation process will be the basic foundation for all subsequent training and progress, learning to **read**, learning to **decode**, learning to **visualize** from symbols, **understand the meaning** of the printed or written word.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §13.2 pp182-184 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1977 pp14, 15, 20, 1 in the printed version]

2. Illiteracy and the Navy, by Vice Admiral James D. Watkins*

*Chief of Naval Personnel, Washington D.C.

*A talk given at the San Diego, Ca, Chamber of Commerce, June 22, 1977.

It might seem strange to some of you, but the first thing I would like to talk about is the concern we see in many places today regarding the handicapped and the disabled. Recently, for example, the Civil Service Commission issued a strong statement directing various government agencies to do everything possible to employ the handicapped and disabled, and emphasized the need for an affirmative action plan to try to get rid of every obstacle standing in the way of such employment. Most people are aware that the Director of the Veterans Administration, who is a triple amputee himself, has been calling for vastly increased efforts to assist the handicapped and disabled, and everyone must know how the President of the United States feels about these issues - particularly if you have watched him on TV and have seen his words translated into sign language for the deaf.

I'm sure that everyone here shares these sentiments. Certainly I do and believe this kind of effort should get all the support we can give it.

On the other hand, there is another type of handicap that, until recently, received very little nationwide attention, even though it actually disables some 22% of our adult population. I am talking about the handicap of being unable to read. 22% means millions and millions of people. If you find this hard to believe, read the recent report of the U.S. Office of Education and amplified by a recent GAO report on illiteracy in the services. Fortunately the news media have begun publicizing this problem widely. You may have watched the same TV network stories I am familiar with, called "Trouble in the Classroom." When a high school graduate cannot read his own diploma, in English, and is reported to have had the reading ability of the average first grader on the day he was graduated from high school, we have real trouble.

But why am I, as Chief of Naval Personnel, talking about this particular handicap, except as a concerned citizen? Because it is extremely disturbing to me to know that there are young men and women deprived of the right to serve their country in uniform because they cannot meet even the minimal reading standards required. They are good people, not unlike the young man described on television who never learned to read past the first grade level, but says he was promoted every year until he was graduated because his behavior in the classroom was excellent.

You might legitimately ask why we can't take young people like this into the Navy, if we believe in employing the handicapped. The fact is that we do take in a certain number and we provide remedial reading programs at our recruit training centers for those who cannot read above the sixth grade level. I'll tell you a little bit more in a few minutes about our remedial reading effort and about other efforts we are making, but first let me tell you a story that illustrates very quickly the difficulties a poor reader can encounter in the Navy.

Our equipment requires routine maintenance by people who can read technical manuals, and follow precise maintenance steps. If this does not happen, the results can be disastrous and costly. Recently in one of our ships, where an engineman was rebuilding a diesel engine as part of a routine maintenance schedule, he could not read well, and was accomplishing the process by looking at the pictures in a technical manual. When he tried to install the cylinder liners, there was

no picture, so he installed them the way he thought they should be. The result was that he installed them upside down. It cost \$250,000 to repair the engine. A well meaning individual who cannot read can cause unnecessary and unwanted problems, to say nothing of the danger to his life and the life of his shipmates.

Another reason we have to refuse many young people who want to serve in Navy uniform is that experience has demonstrated that many of them can't even make it through basic or boot camp, and they have to leave disappointed, frustrated, and in many cases, embarrassed and humiliated.

One study of 23,000 recruits right here in San Diego gives the picture. 8½ thousand of these recruits read below the 10th grade level – that's 37%. 70% of the people who don't make it through boot camp come from this poor reading group.

Some of the recruits studied – some 8%, or almost 2,000 – could not even read at 6th grade level, and accounted for 35% of those who couldn't make it. We discovered, further, that in the extreme case in which the individual reads below 4th grade level, the likelihood of his not making it through boot camp is 64%. One of the graphs provided shows the relationship between reading level and boot camp attrition. The relationship, which shows that the better the reading grade level, the greater the chance of success in the Navy, is irrefutable.

The poor reader is confronted by still other problems. A study of desertion rates reveal some of the frustration they experience. Non-high-school graduates, so many of whom are almost automatically poor readers, represent less than 15% of the young people on their first tour of duty in the Navy, yet they account for 45% of the deserters during that first tour. I am aware that there are many factors involved in the desertion rate, such as job dissatisfaction, inability to advance, and so on, but an extremely important factor underlying these dissatisfiers and so many others is inability to cope with the demands of a job or to compete with others because of a poor educational background.

In mentioning advancement in the Navy, I should point out that we use a system that requires a sailor to study various manuals and take written exams in competition with his peers. If he or she can't read, the chances for promotion are sharply reduced.

What I am saying, then, is that, much as we would like to give the opportunity to thousands of young people who might like to come in to the Navy, but are handicapped and disabled in a very real way by not being able to read, in many ways we do them a serious disservice by accepting them. We raise their expectations to a level that we simply cannot meet in practice, so they are added to the growing numbers of our nation's youth who, like the boot camp drop-out, are discouraged and frustrated, in many cases embarrassed and humiliated. Sailors in such circumstances find undesirable means to break their service contracts, and are doing so at an increasing rate, with the damage that creates for them in the future.

Now let me go back to the question of what we in the Navy are trying to do about the problem.

I mentioned our remedial reading program for those who cannot read above the 6th grade level. This program is fairly successful insofar as it goes, but our resources are limited, and the number we can handle is very small. We have to depend largely on our own Navy people in uniform to do the teaching. That means pulling them from other critical jobs at sea and elsewhere. We do our best and the remedial reading effort does help a handful of young people below 6th grade reading level get through recruit training. That still leaves us with at least two major problems.

One: what of those many thousands who read between the 6th and 10th grade level? I mentioned previously that a large percentage of these never get through recruit training. The Navy Research and Development Center here in San Diego is trying to develop an effective program to integrate reading skill training with job skill training, in the hope that our Navy people will do better both in school and on the job. This is obviously a tricky thing to accomplish. That makes it even harder is that until there is a dramatic improvement in the reading ability of young people coming into the Navy, we will always be playing catch-up ball. Even that might be O.K. if we didn't have a mission to carry out at the same time - a mission that requires highly trained people - and requires them now!

The second major problem is that the training manuals used even in basic training range in reading difficulty from 10th to 12th grade reading levels. Our Navy advancement manuals range from a low of about the 8th grade level to the college level, with the median *above* the 12th grade level. The technical manuals furnished for us by contractors range between the 12th and 14th grade level. Because of this, and to try to solve this problem, we are being forced to write new manuals and translate existing manuals into lower reading levels. What a telling indictment of a system that must adjust through short term expedients to accommodate a long term ill of our most cherished resource? Moreover, such an accommodation turns out to be extremely costly - estimates average about \$100 per page, and the millions of pages are difficult if not impossible to rewrite because of the continuing explosion of new technology. In this regard there is a practical limit to the degree to which highly complicated equipments can be described in terms that are very simple to read.

Now I realize that we have to keep on trying. We in the Navy want to do our share, but I'm sure that everyone here recognizes what our priorities must be. The Congress of the United States did not establish the Navy for the purpose of teaching people to read. Furthermore, it is not until our young people have experienced a minimum of 17 years of training and education and other influences in civilian life that they enter the Navy. Trying to "cure" handicaps and disabilities at that age is an extremely difficult and time-consuming task, that we have neither the people, the money, nor the time to manage, if we are simultaneously going to carry out our mission of maintaining freedom of the seas and helping to preserve our freedom as a nation.

As Chief of Naval Personnel, I have the responsibility on behalf of the Chief of Naval Operations for seeing that the Navy has the men and women required to carry out the mission assigned. To do this, even in this era of relative peace, we must recruit and train some 100,000 persons a year in order to sustain a uniformed Navy work force almost identical in size to San Diego County's total civilian employment of over half a million. This is a tremendous task, and it is not getting any easier. In the early 1980's we will have far fewer available young men and women than we have today because of the reduced birth rate of the latter 1960's. But the problem is much more acute than the mere lack of numbers of people at the right age. Nationwide, for example, 6 million out of our 10.5 million men 17-21 years of age are *not* qualified for naval service because of mental or physical handicaps, or such factors as criminal records, and so on. Furthermore, studies carried out over the course of many years have revealed time after time that high school graduates are twice as likely to succeed in the Navy as are high school dropouts. So we try to recruit as high a percentage of high school graduates as we can get. Realistically, this reduces even further the number of young people available. For example, this year we have been shooting for 76% high school graduates, but over the long haul we must strive for 84% in order to maintain an acceptable and steady attrition rate.

But now we are finding more and more of even our high school graduates cannot read adequately, so the pool of truly qualified young men and women shrinks to an alarmingly low level. I have here in my hands transcripts of two high school graduates who aspired to service with the Navy, but failed. One was a 19 year old who entered the Navy in Jan. 1976 and was subsequently tested at

the 4.2 reading grade level. He lasted five weeks in remedial reading at boot camp, could not improve, and was discharged. Another was a 22 year old man who entered the Navy in Sept. 1976 and was later tested at the 3.3 reading grade level, lasted two weeks in remedial reading, could not improve, and was discharged. If declining trends continue, we have to ask how the Navy is going to carry out its assigned mission, and we very much fear that these trends are continuing and that they are reflected in other indications of educational achievement. For example, as you can see in the graphs at your table, the scholastic aptitude tests have experienced a drop in average scores since 1968.

Again, a major publisher of college text books is writing these books to 9th and 10th grade reading levels. If college students are having trouble reading material above the 10th, is it any wonder that our average recruit would have the same problem? And this in a day when there is a critical need to recruit and train young men and women to be able to learn how to master the most technically advanced weapons systems the world has ever known.

Why did I elect to speak to you here today about such an unusual topic as reading handicaps? Because you are businessmen and women and you can recognize very quickly that there is no business more important than the business of national defense. Without adequate defense against possible aggression, no other business is secure, be it the business of the marketplace, of education, of communication - the business of any institution or sector of our society. So I believe you have a right to know the dimensions of and problems that could, over the long haul, significantly weaken our ability to provide adequate military defense of our nation. And I believe at the same time, if you will permit me to say so, you have a serious obligation as do I to do whatever we possibly can to bring about a national effort *to prevent* the reading handicaps of which so many Americans are victims, and to help cure the disabilities with which millions of Americans are afflicted.

To ignore or to be indifferent to a national problem of this magnitude is bad business - morally bad, economically bad, militarily bad. It is morally bad because human beings are currently being denied opportunities they have a right to have and deserve. It is economically bad as is all waste of manpower - and we are currently wasting it on an enormous scale. It is militarily bad because its continuance could critically weaken our ability to defend our own country, to say nothing of our ability to help our friends.

I fully realize that I am not alone in experiencing this concern. I am encouraged by what I see as evidence of increasing concern on the part of parents, professional educators responsible for curriculum development, and classroom teachers who, in some situations at least, may have the toughest and most thankless job in the world. My encouragement is sustained by what appears to be a mounting awareness and disdain for the situation. One recent example, reported in the *Washington Post*, cited the case of the Chicago superintendent who held back half of his 8th grade class because they could not read better than 6th grade level. There are many more examples nationwide.

All this cries for establishment of specific statewide high school graduation standards.

I am further encouraged by the conviction that the people of the United States do not want a second class Navy, and to the degree that organizations such as yours alert them to the dimensions of the Problem, they will most certainly respond - forcibly, intelligently. That response will help guarantee that our Navy will remain what it is today, the number one navy of the world.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §13.3 pp184,185 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1979 pp18,19 in the printed version]

3. Which Reformed Spelling is the Easiest to Learn?, by Newell W. Tune

Before we begin to answer this question, we must ask: easier for whom? - an illiterate youngster, foreigner, or an adult already literate in our conventional spelling? A sensible answer would be different for each of these.

1. A youngster starting to learn must depend upon his spoken vocabulary. Hence, he would necessarily equate spelling with his sounds of speech. To the extent that all phonetic systems are completely phonetic, or nearly so, all such systems should be equally easy to learn. But the application of the learner's training into using his knowledge in writing is quite different according to the ease of writing the system. All diacritic marks become obstacles. Hence, we should avoid any diacritic marks not already established in conventional spelling, such as dots over *i* and *j*, crossed *t*. These we cannot avoid using because the learner must transfer his knowledge (training) to c.s. eventually in order to be able to write and read the many books already printed.

This brings up another obstacle or hurdle: the amount of deviation from conventional spelling of the system used in training (teaching) the beginner. This will affect the transition to conventional spelling. Hence, it is important that the I.L.M. (initial learning medium) be close enough to c.s. so the transition to c.s. is easy - the easier, the better - the harder, the less acceptable. It is amazing how many alphabetizers ignore this axiom in their reckless design of their complicated spelling systems.

2. With foreigners, there is a different problem. They are used to a different spelling system. If they are from a European country that uses Continental vowel sounds for the Roman letters, they have to forget their training and embark on a new system of vowel representation. For the teacher to teach them in a system that uses the Continental vowel representations would be a sad mistake because so few of English words use the Continental vowel symbolization; hence the transition would be almost impossible. Besides *all* foreigners do not use the Continental vowel representations in their native language. So to those who do not, you would not be doing them any help with c.v.r. So it would be better to start with a system that is easier to transition to conventional spelling. Probably this would be the same system that would be used as an I.L.M.

3. For literate adults, it is obvious that the least amount of deviation from c.s. is going to be the most acceptable to them. As Dr. Godfrey Dewey said in a letter to me, and later included in his book, *Relative Frequency of English Spellings*, "The principle of least deviation from T.O. needs no apology, but it must be tempered with common sense." What he meant by this is that in order to achieve a less strange appearance (to literate adults), a less altered, a less difficult transition, an alphabetizer must consider not only the most frequent spelling for each sound, but also the fact that the most frequently used symbol may also be the most frequently used symbol for another sound. For example, the most frequent symbol used for the z-sound is *s*. But obviously, the letter *s* must be used for the s-sound. Again, *oo*, although not the most frequent digraph for any sound, occurs with almost equal frequency for both of the vowel sounds in *book* and *boot*. A compilation of all words with these sounds shows (by common sense deduction) that *oo* should be given to the sound in *fool* (because *uu* is the complementary symbol for use) and *uu* used for the sound in *full*. Hence World English's use for the sounds of *good-food* as: *guud food*, rather than the old use in New

Spelling as: *good fuud*; or as in *full moon* (*W.E.=fuul moon*, and *N.S.=fool muun*), is certainly preferable. (See *S.P.B.* v. 3, no. 1, Mar. 1963, p. 18-19, and *S.P.B.* v. 4, no 1, Mar. 1964, P. 13-14).

And altho *ai* represents the sound of long-*a* in 70% of occurrences (of *ai*) in running text, it also represents the sound of short-*e* in 25% of occurrences, and the sound of long-*i* in only two words. But the most common symbol for long-*a* is single *a* (2140), the next, *a-e* (1918), and the third, *ay* (1109). Therefore, *ai* is not useful for either long-*a* or long-*i*. To use it at all would violate the principle of nearness to c.s. (or least alteration of spellings).

4. The least deviation from c. s. means different things to different alfabetees.

(a) To Dr. Axel Wijk it means that this principle is of the utmost importance - (Why? So literate adults can read it with very little trouble? - or what they might tolerate in a reformed spelling system?) - to the almost ignoring of the transition to c.s. For example, which of the 7 spellings for long-*a* should a riter use when he bears a new word and wants to spell it?

(b) To some other alfabetees (See *S.P.B.* v. 10, no. 1, Spr. 1970, p. 16-18) it means only eliminating the unnecessary silent letters in 884 words, plus the silent terminal *e* when it rongly indicates the previous vowel has the long sound (as in *have*, *are*) in about 700 words (339 in the 1000 commonest words), and the unnecessary silent *e* in the suffix *-ed* would add another 400 words, and the silent *o* in *ous* might add another 300 words. Total number of words simplified by omitting these silent letters may be 2300.

This sistem, obviously, is not intended as an I.L.M., but as a practical minimal change spelling reform that should overcome the public's resistance to change. It only requires 6 rules for its use. Here is an example of it in use: "Possibli this kind of reform wil satisfie no wun, being too drastic for sum and too unfonetic for uthertz. Houever, it haz several advantajez. Besidez leeving unchanjd more of the wurdz in runing text, it eliminates homofones. Wurdz having long vowelz can be spelt eether with vowel digrafs or bie folloeing the rule of silent terminal *e*. If the rulez ar folloed consistentli, it wil be regular and eezili lernt."

It woud be interesting to compare this latter sistem with Regularized Ingglish of Dr.Wijk to see which is: 1. easier to lern, and 2. which haz the greater number of unchanjd wurdz. Then to decide if eether fulfilz the chalenj of being realli easi to lern to the extent that improvements ar unlikli.

I would like to ask all alfabetees to carefully examine their motives in making a reformed sistem. Is it to help new lerners to read more easily, or to design the perfect spelling sistem for a permanent reform, or for self-aggrandizement or notoriety? Are you really interested in the spelling reform efforts of others in order to improve yours? Do you think your sistem can possibly be improved or are you satisfied that it is the best that can be devised? Would you still be interested in spelling reform if the government were to decide to select a sistem different from what you advocate?

[Spelling Reform Anthology §13.4 pp185,196 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin December 1961 p16 (7 deadly sins only) in the printed version]

4. The Seven Deadly Sins of Spelling Reformers, by Newell W. Tune.

1. Thinking you are the only one to have solved the problem of reforming our spelling.
2. Writing a book on spelling reform without getting a thoro knowledge of speech sounds as exemplified in the dictionary, and reading sufficient of the many books already written on the subject.
3. Thinking that your system of reform is the best, and in fact, the only one worth considering.
4. Using discarded Roman letters for new sound values totally unrelated to their conventional use.
5. Combining two recognizedly different sound values to be represented by one symbol, such as: *then-thin, full-fool, baron-bar, all-olive.*
6. Dividing the sound values into smaller segments than we conventionally use as units of sound values, as "*dzh*" for "*j*", "*tsh*" for "*ch*", "*ey*" for long-a, "*iy*" for long-e.
7. Trying to devise a phonetic alphabet as strange and unlike conventional spelling as possible.

Ten booby traps for spelling reformers, by Leo G. Davis

1. Dwelling at length on current irregularity, instead of future stability.
2. Dreaming of impossible perfection instead of practicality.
3. Worrying about minority pronunciations. (We can't serve two masters.)
4. Inventing new letters or using present letters in unorthodox manner.
5. Making every possible change, instead of just the necessary ones.
6. Worrying about consonant digraphs. (They never confuse anyone.)
7. Trying to neutralise or omit the unstressed vowels. (They are there even in hurried speech.)
8. Using a digraph to indicate a diphthong. (UE for the e-u and y-u phonemes.)
9. Offering different spellings for homonyms (contrary to fonetik simplicity).
10. Suggesting that adults change their personal spelling habits. (They won't.)

Some delinquencies of spelling reformers, by Fred Wingfield

1. Conceit regarding one's own skeme; prejudice agensst or no time for examination of other proposed reforms.
2. Failure to acquaint oneself with the science of fonetiks.
3. Hamstringing one's system by the requirement of new alfabet symbols.
4. In the fonetik skemes, lack of conformity to the rule: For each grapheme, one and only one phoneme.
5. Failure to comprehend that *all* the letters of the Roman alfabet are urgently needed.
6. Twisting the pronunciation to fit the system, instead of making the system conform to the pronunciation (e.g., the word "America").
7. Making skemes that require more letters that are used in conventional orthography, or whose letter economy is void.
8. Failure to realise a reconstruction of English spelling unavoidably must make a change in appearance; a "phonetic" system will inevitably "look strange". (Its about as logical to think one can go swimming without wetting the feet, as to believe that to read spelling which is honestly "phonetic" should not cause a drastic change in its appearance.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §13.5 pp185-187 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1980 pp14-16 in the printed version]

5. Toward a Spelling Reform, by Albert J. Mazurkiewicz, Ph.D.*

*Dept of Communication Sciences, Kean College, Union, N.J.

*A paper presented at the First Internat. Conf. on Reading and Spelling, Aug. 1975, at College of All Saints, London.

If the reader-to-be of English, whether he/she is a child, illiterate adult, or foreign language speaker, is of concern at all, the problems inherent in the task need analysis and correction. We now recognize that if children have difficulty in telling time based on the circular 12-hour, 60-minute clock, for example, that the substitution of the digital clock eliminates the complex learnings involved in this type of telling time, and telling time is learned as the child learns to recognize and use numbers. The same process of analysis and substitution of a simpler procedure is not always the case in learning to read, though reformed orthography procedures exist and are an immediate solution to the problem.

While transition to reading the complex spellings of English is accomplished with relative ease from a reformed orthography, the child taught using a reformed orthography has some of the same problems of developing efficiency in commanding the printed page at later levels as the child taught using conventional print since teachers often fail to carry on the instruction necessary for the child to decode and internalize to the point of automaticity the remainder of the complex spellings of English. Developing efficiency in reading conventional print needs continuing attention since we cannot expect the reader to be self-motivated to puzzle out the complex grapheme-phoneme correspondences of increasingly more difficult matter. In fact, research has shown [1] that few young adults will even use dictionaries to determine the pronunciation of a word since the procedure is an interference in the reading act. Research also shows that if a child needs to refer constantly to other sources for aid in decoding print, he turns away from the task, just because it is a task and also because it is task which is often unrewarding.

The analysis of the learning to read activity (and reading well) indicates that the orthography as conventionally printed is a major handicap.

The work of Downing and colleagues [2] on the use of i.t.a. has demonstrated conclusively that traditional orthography is a significant handicap to the child's task of learning to read. Soffiatti, [3], in his linguistic analysis of the language, demonstrated that traditional spelling was the primary cause of failure in learning to read. Makita [4], in a study of the extent of reading disability among Japanese children as compared with United States populations, demonstrated that the incidence of disability was about one-half of one percent as opposed to the average of twenty-five percent found in the U.S. and convincingly demonstrated that this difference could be attributed to the spellings of English. The phonemic form of Japanese, Romanji, was then compared with Pitman's i.t.a. to indicate that this reformed orthography compared favorably to Romanji and, as such, provided the basis for an attack on the problem.

Since the initial teaching alphabet in reading and writing instruction has been shown to be one viable alternative, why then a spelling reform? Like all alphabetic innovations of the past, gross misinformation, the pressure of the market place where large corporations with their huge staffs of representatives and investments of countless millions in conventional reading materials overwhelm the "opposition," insecure educational administrative staffs who are preservers, or believe they are

to be preservers, of the status quo and make administrative or public relation rather than educational decisions, parental concern that spelling might be negatively affected, etc. have combined to limit the employment of educationally sound alternatives and only a limited usage can be expected in the future.

Certainly spelling reform is not needed for those of us who are literate. But research has demonstrated that countless millions are barely literate, that millions of others read badly or, if able, read little, and that countless thousands of young children continue to suffer failure, ego-damage and frustration. Others continue to spell badly even after 12 or more years of education.

Additional research [1] examining another aspect of the development of literacy - learning to write (spell) the language - have demonstrated that children and young adults often choose to write a word they know how to spell rather than the word that first came to mind, rarely use a dictionary to check the spelling of a word ("since I cant find it because I don't know how it's spelled."), and suffer embarrassment because their spellings don't conform to the "accepted" ones.

Even the words "accepted spellings" indicate a problem since most children and adults are unaware that off-times their spellings are equally correct alternative spellings. Instruction on these is rarely, if ever given since teachers are as unaware of these alternatives as the children they teach and, if a choice is given, the more difficult of two alternatives is taught on the assumption that it is the "preferred" and therefore *the correct* spelling.

But conventional spelling is also racist and the *arbiter elegantiae* (supreme arbiter) of social class or status. There is a marked tendency to use the spellings a person writes as a measure of his literacy or social status: good spellers are associated with the well-educated upper class, poor spellers with the poorly-educated lower class. Rewards, in terms of employment, promotion, etc. are often related similarly for as Perrin and Smith [5] point out in their *Handbook on Current English*:

The man who writes with no misspelled words has prevented a first suspicion of the limits of his scholarship, or in the social world, of his general education and culture.

Recent Reform

Arguments against spelling reform abound in the literature, yet, as anyone familiar with the subject knows, each of these are errored on one or more bases and nearly all may be traced to sentiment. It is also true that enough attention to the peculiarities inherent in English spelling has been demonstrated or experienced so that one sample of 230 educators, business men, and secretaries [6] showed that 88% favor some type of spelling reform while another sample of almost 800 educators confirmed this finding [7], indicating a widespread current interest.

Responses such as that of a manager indicated that "In my high school graduating class, half of the class could hardly spell the easiest words," or of a teacher who stated that "Many times when I'm writing reports, I have to consistently refer to the dictionary to check spellings," or that of another teacher "the more phonetic the spelling, the easier it would be for children to succeed in spelling and related tasks," or still another "Modern spelling reform would prove an invaluable aid to better reading success by many who now find reading and related skills an impossible barrier," are illustrations of the felt need for spelling reform.

While the reformer has not been able to have much direct effect in recent years in producing change, it is notable that no research other than that cited above exists to support a change. Many reformers and alphabeteers exist but little evidence exists that these reformers have proceeded logically to marshal support. In spite of this lack, reform, slowly and inexorably, has taken place

with little or no outcry. Changes in spelling have occurred primarily in the realm of business and industry and these have been adopted by the public at large. *Yogurt*, popularized as a food by television commercials in the U.S., and spelled five different ways (all of which are equally correct) has been accepted as the standard spelling. In one study [8], a sample of 910 teachers and parents only vaguely recalled that yogurt and yoghurt were alternative spellings a few short years ago and none would replace the phonemic yogurt with any of the five previously used spellings. A group of psychologists when tested on the spelling of *donut* questioned whether there was another way of spelling it. When shown the spelling *doughnut*, individuals remarked "Oh yes, but we haven't used that for years; that's obsolete."

Oddly enough, the spelling of *draught*, mispronounced by many to rhyme with caught, for the game of checkers (draughts) is hardly recognized as the spelling for *draft* beer with the switch by beer manufacturers from the antique spelling to the phonemic *draft* only a few years ago. The wholesale abandonment of *ue* after *g* in epilog, analog, catalog, monolog, by millions and by publishers of catalogs, producers of analog computers, makers of television dramas, etc. is resisted by a relatively few. The American brand of catsup, pronounced /ketchup/, and alternatively and equally correctly spelled catchup, catsup, or ketchup, has been formalized as *ketchup* by industry. In fact, one study [9] of product names currently underway shows that over 300 different items have been respelled to represent their pronunciations more closely (e.g., *Snak-Pak*), are spelled to provide instant identification with the hope for or planned purpose of the product (Fab suggests fabulous, Duz - does everything, etc.), or show the most phonetic alternative of several available (ketchup). The use of the macron in Nodōz and Nestlē to indicate the pronunciation of the glided vowel is paralleled in corporate names: Apēco.

Resistance to spelling reform, identified by Lounsbury [10] as primarily based on sentiment, is often encouraged by managing editors of publishers whose style sheet or house manual indicates what spellings are acceptable in its publications. Equally correct alternative spellings as identified by Deighton [11] for 2000 words in four collegiate dictionaries are given short shift. *Catalogue* may still be foisted on children in spelling materials and workbooks, in readers and phonic programs, because editors believe that they are the final arbiters to keep the language "pure" and, if a choice is available, will apparently choose the more complex, the more unphonetic, the more irregular spelling.

The following is a sample of alternate spellings, both of which are correct:

antennas - antennae	gasolene - gasoline
aunty - auntie	gelatin - gelatine
buses - busses (for transportation)	glamor - glamour
practise - practice	defense - defence
busing - bussing (for transportation, not kissing)	instal - install
blond - blonde	license - licence
bluish - blueish	liquify - liquefy
brocoli - broccoli	beefs- beeves
brunet - Brunette	bran-new - brand-new
calory - calorie	cagy - cagey
cigaret - cigarette	develop - developpe
curst - cursed	droust - drought
drafty - draughty	pinocl - pinochle
	past - passed

While it is commonly reported that there is only one correct spelling for every word in the language, the above list is representative of some 2400 words having alternatively correct spellings as found

in various collegiate dictionaries. Although the belief that there is only one correct spelling has been supported by teachers in the spellings they accept, by the uniform usage to be observed in newspapers and magazines, resistance to such arbitrary behavior has also been noted. One publisher in its books has dropped the apostrophe in such words as *dont*, *wont*, *cant*; another allows its authors the freedom to spell *aids* as *aides* when referred to in instructional materials; another avoids teaching the so called "es rule after words ending in o" to indicate the plural spelling of *tomatos*, *zeros*, *potatos*, *tobaccos*, *nos*, *mottos*; newspapers generally use buses rather than *busses*, etc.

Oddly enough, teachers when informed that each spelling in a list similar to that above was correct [12] and asked what they would do as a result of this knowledge, were first surprised, indicated little knowledge of the availability of alternatives, and that they would modify their teaching behavior to include teaching "bright" children that there are equivalent spellings but would hold lesser able children to one spelling. When asked which spelling that would be, the uniform response was that which was shown in workbooks or spelling texts. The assumption that when the more phonetic, the more regularly spelled words found their way into lists or into spelling materials, then teachers would teach these spellings suggests one way to move spelling reform forward.

A replication of this study using parents, teachers and seventh and eighth grade children in one suburban community [8] indicated that only 4% of the population were aware of some of these alternatives, that responding to the questionnaire was a learning experience since most examined their dictionaries after completing the questionnaire and that parents often excused their spelling knowledge by pointing out that "I went to school some 20 or 30 years ago and spelling has changed."

The expectancy of change suggests a predisposition to accept change and reinforces the findings of Stern's study that spelling reform would be supported.

Direction for Change

It would certainly be incorrect for me to state "this is the way it should be" since no one individual's prejudices should dictate the direction for change. Rather we can rely on research and the documented views of many reformers in history to establish a commonality for direction. Rather than a reform of the orthography - if such it can be called since "unphonetic, irregular and illogical as it is, modern English spelling does not merit the name *orthography*, which is made up of two Greek words meaning 'correct writing'." [13] - it is my belief that a reform *in* orthography should be our aim.

If those words which do not consistently follow the consonant and vowel rules as established for reading instruction (Mazurkiewicz, 1976) were made to conform, learning to read and write would be vastly easier since no exceptions would exist and only 25 to 30 rules would be needed and readily mastered. We should move in the direction of an elimination of unnecessary silent letters and might start with those which were inserted based on false etymology (the *b* in *dumb* and *doubt*, for example), but not those which are morphophonemic (the *b* in *bomb*, *bombard*, the *g* in *sign-signal*); the elimination of the diacritic silent *e* (Mazurkiewicz, 1974) following *v*, *z*, etc. where the signal today is meaningless or redundant, the reduction of the number of alternative graphemes to represent the sounds of English, the addition of the diacritic *e* following vowels to provide digraphic representations; etc.

Since research has demonstrated that a moderate reform would be most acceptable at this time [7] by the largest number of people, if we care that children should not be subject to the risk of

failure and unnecessary frustration in learning to read, should not risk ego damage and being turned off from the adventure of education, we can start moderately by shifting to the use of alternative and equally correct spelled words which use the past tense morpheme *t* in such words as *curst*, *spelt*, etc., to those which are more phonemic, less complex, etc.

We should encourage more business and industries to utilize additional phonetic spellings and expect that television and other advertizing media will establish these as the accepted spellings since nearly all of a sample of 500 adults [14] indicated that many of the words they now write have been learned from these sources.

Whatever the rationale we choose to adopt, there is little doubt that support for a reform exists, that we can effectively use modern means of exploitation and that a reform is possible if we take the initiative to move one to the fore.

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[Spelling Reform Anthology §13.6 p188 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin October 1962 p24 in the printed version]

6. Overcoming the Difficulties of the Printed Word, by Sir Cyril Burt, F.B.A.*

*Sir Cyril Burt, F.B.A., Emeritus Prof. of Psychology, University of London.

Reading is by far the most important subject that the young child learns at school. It is also the most difficult to teach. English in its orthography is more erratic and irregular than any other contemporary language; that is the price we pay for its composite origin - a feature to which so much of its richness and flexibility is due. Moreover, in spite of all the work on eye-movements, speech-habits, brain-centres, and the like, we still do not know what goes on in the brain or mind of the practised reader, nor what are the actual processes by which the beginner first learns to gather meaning from the printed page. As a result the problem of the best 'reading method', as the training colleges call it, has been a scholastic battleground for generations - 'a field strewn with lost causes and littered with exploded ideas'. Any scientific investigation into the underlying problems, therefore, is to be heartily welcomed.

The experiments which Mr. Downing describes in this book are being conducted jointly by the Institute of Education of the University of London, and the National Foundation for Educational Research. Mr. Downing himself was selected as chief investigator because of his exceptional qualifications for this type of work. The particular aspect with which his present research is concerned is one that has evoked much discussion and many alternative proposals, but as yet has been subjected to practically no adequate investigation - namely, the way the English language is customarily printed. Mr. Downing's tentative solution is to substitute a new augmented alphabet, devised by Sir James Pitman; and part of the object of this book is to describe the alphabet and explain its extra merits.

There is, however, one question that his experimental scheme nearly always provokes: why all this elaboration - a hundred different schools, refresher courses for teachers, preliminary matching of control groups, and a formidable statistical analysis at the end? The answer is - the unexpected multiplicity of the factors involved.

To begin with, boys and girls have their oddities just as much as do words. Owing to the differences in their mental make-up and home backgrounds, different children approach the task of reading in very different ways. One child is harassed by specific difficulties which cause no trouble to another. This is a point that has been all too often overlooked in previous discussions and researches; and it is largely for this reason that they have so often proved inconclusive. Most of us realize that a child with an uncorrected defect of sight or hearing, with a low I.Q., or a weak mechanical memory, is badly handicapped. But the really important disabilities are far more elusive. Some youngsters, for example, do practically all their thinking in terms of visual pictures, and are extremely poor in both auditory and kinaesthetic imagery; teach them by a phonic method, and they fail completely; change to 'look-and-say', and many of them quickly catch up. Others have little or no visual imagery: they have to learn from what the teacher calls the 'sounds'. But are these sounds those heard in the mind's ear or those uttered, so to speak, by mental lips? These are some of the incidental problems to which previous investigators have paid little or no attention. Frequently, however, the difficulty is not intellectual, but emotional. The child's first attempts at reading may have been so persistently frustrated by some unrecognized obstruction - an ill-chosen method or an unsuitable type of reading material - that as a result he suffers a kind of mental block, and the very sight of print induces stage-fright.

But of all the innumerable influences, by far the most important is undoubtedly the teacher himself. A teacher who has a keen and earnest belief in the method he is trying out will nearly always

achieve good results; one who has no faith in it, or little interest in the problem, is almost bound to fail. Here, no doubt, is a partial explanation of the puzzling fact that, no matter how diverse the procedures used, nearly every enthusiastic investigator is able to report success with the particular method he himself is prepared to champion.

It is this plurality of intermingling factors which forms the real difficulty that besets almost every educational research of the type Mr. Downing is carrying out. It is this that has stultified most of the earlier investigations. An obvious expedient is to arrange, so far as is possible, for one factor only to vary at a time, and to keep the others constant. That is the plan Mr. Downing has adopted. And here lie the reasons for the numerous precautions which he has very wisely taken.

What will be the final outcome it would be rash to predict. Almost invariably in a scientific investigation, when one sets out to confirm or confute some plausible theory, the result is seldom the plain straightforward 'Yes' or 'No' that cross-examining counsel love to demand. Usually it appears that there are elements of truth in both the opposing views; and more often than not the most rewarding results are the discoveries made by the way. Fresh problems, quite unforeseen, nearly always emerge; new facts, quite unsuspected, are vividly brought to light. Thus, even supposing that these novel proposals turn out, on the whole, to be more effective than any of the earlier ones, it still would not follow that they are the best that could be devised. Some educational reformers - themselves frequently teachers of considerable experience - favour an alternative type of 'rational orthography' or 'systematized notation' such as the International Phonetic Alphabet, the Modified Spelling advocated by the British Simplified Spelling Society, or the 'Regularized English' proposed by Dr. Axel Wijk. Many of the criticisms which the proposals have already elicited will suggest points deserving special attention. Are the new composite characters, like $\int h$ for *sh* and η for *ng*, really easier than the traditional digraphs? Is the system equally helpful to the bright, the dull, and those of average ability? Is the child to continue using the new alphabet and the modified spelling when he himself starts writing? If so, will not this new notation prevent him from mastering the conventional orthography when he comes to write letters or compositions of his own? And, as he changes to the ordinary textbook, or tries to read books that he finds at home or in the public library, will he not have to unlearn this artificial method before he can understand the traditional style? Finally at what age should the transition be made, and what is the best method of carrying it out?

Most of the critics base their conclusions on *a priori* arguments rather than on systematically planned experiments; yet few will be satisfied until their claims also have been put to a practical test. Here therefore is the teacher's chance. The sceptic should be as eager as the enthusiastic advocate to make an actual trial. Even if from all these investigations nothing of any obvious practical value should after all emerge, nevertheless, if scientifically conducted, they will at least throw fresh light on the mental processes of the young learner. And the encouraging results already achieved by Mr. Downing are sufficient to show that a series of inquiries planned along these lines are well worth while.

Science is essentially progressive. Each new theory, when duly verified, marks an advance on the last; but it is never final. Medicine and surgery have made astonishing strides during the last half-century, largely owing to the way in which practising physicians and surgeons have themselves undertaken first-hand research. Teaching might similarly become increasingly efficient if teachers themselves would also engage or assist in educational research. Here then, thanks to the generosity of private and public benefactors, is a magnificent chance to take part in one valuable investigation. May we hope that, not only psychologists and educationists, but also teachers, school inspectors, and school doctors will lend a helping hand, and that both parents and education officials will accord their ready support.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §13.7 pp189,190 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin, Spring 1976 p2,3 in the printed version]

[It is not possible to show the letters which were handwritten in 1. Decoding. They are described. In the table, asterisks indicate letters which are joined in ita characters.]

7. The Confusions of Traditional Orthography in Learning to Read – and How They Can be Removed, by Sir James Pitman, K.B.E. *

* London, England.

The Confusions

What are the confusions present in T.O. and what is their cumulative effect upon the learner?

A double accident of history has contributed to the great confusions of the English orthography. First was the attempt to represent English alphabetically with a 2,000 year-old alphabet - perhaps adequate for the Latin tongue, but lacking characters for at least 17 sounds of the English tongue - and second, the inevitable failure 600 years ago to spell systematically the 40 sounds of English with only 23 effective letters (*c*, *q* and *x* are redundant), and the failure to spell alphabetically even with those 23.

We who are literate have become so conditioned to the shortcomings of the means by which what is spoken and listened to in English is thus confusingly represented for reading and writing, that we nearly all have found it virtually impossible to analyse those causes of confusion and of difficulty which faced us when we were learning - and even to realise that there had been any difficulties at all.

The confusions in T.O. - as the initial learning medium - come in three categories: two in *decoding* (reading) and one in *encoding* (writing).

1. Decoding (Reading)

The multitude of variations in the shapes of virtually all the 26 letters require the child to learn well over 100 symbols, including multilateral forms such as *Th, T^h, th, ^hh*, etc. For instance, there are three variations of *a* (*A, a, a*); three of *b* (*B, b, ^bb*); only one of *c*; two of *d* (*D, d*); three of *e* (*E, e, ^Ee*); four of *f* (*F, f, ^Ff, ^ff*); and corresponding variations in the digraphs such as *ch* and *th* (*CH, Ch, ^{ch}ch*), (*TH, Th, thth, ^hth*).

The effect of these variations of "characters" in relation to "letters" and of the further variations of digraphs (inevitable for those 17 sounds which lack letters in the Roman alphabet) has been to cause a labyrinthine confusion in decoding (reading).

The confusions in this first category were commented upon by the Bullock Committee who said: "Letter outline may convey very little to a child unless it has been invested with some kind of special significance . . . many teachers think this aspect of reading requires little attention. This sometimes leads to their assuming mistakenly that there is something wrong with the child if he happens to have difficulty in learning to recognize letters" (para. 6.7). They also point out: "Encounter with such variations is inevitable, because of the wide range of printed materials to which children are exposed . . . they increase the total quantity to be learned and add to the burdens of the slow-learning child an extra dimension of difficulty that he could well do without (para. 6.10).

2. *Decoding* (Reading)

The second category of confusion lies in the instability of value attached to every one of such 26 "letters" with their well over 100 variations in shape.

There is a total of 173 differing values in sound for only 26 letters - an average of 6.7 different sound values for each of the 26 letters and their many variants. For instance, the a, A or a is not stable, as in the number-value of 1. Indeed, we need think only of words such as *at*, *fat* (*father*), *bat* (*bather*), *hat* (*what*), *shall* (*all*), *man*, (*many*), and *wagon* (*postage*).

Here again the confusions in this category were indicated by the Bullock Committee who pointed out the necessity of using digraphs and even larger groups of letters (e.g. the *ough* in *borough*) to represent the phonemes of English. "Of much greater importance in this matter of establishing relationships between letters and sounds is the fact that there is no simple correspondence between the 26 letters and the 44 phonemes," and they gave "some idea of the ways in which written English falls short of (the) alphabetic ideal" by demonstrating how the letter *o* takes on 8 different values in the words "one, home, comes, women, of, or, to, do" (para. 6.18).

These two categories, acting confusingly together, make decoding a most difficult exercise - and at the beginning of learning, when simplicity and success are so outstandingly important.

3. *Encoding* (Spelling in writing)

The third category of confusion lies in the variety of different spellings for each of the 40 sounds of English. For instance, there are wide variations in the spellings of the sound of *a* as in *baby*. There is a total of 42, using combinations of *a*, *e*, *f*, *g*, *h*, *i*, *o*, *r*, *t*, *u*, and *y* - eleven different letters and their 32 variant characters. Some of the most common and useful words of the language - *baby*, *save* (but *have*), *rain*, *straight*, *may*, *played*, *great*, *eight* (but *height*) and *they* - are most confusing in their spellings. The task of spelling is made unnecessarily very difficult indeed, and learners are therefore inhibited from even attempting to write words which they habitually speak because they do not know how to spell them.

The Bullock Committee instanced, as an example of this third category of confusion, the multiple spellings in common words of the sound *ie*, as in *die*: "a single phoneme (*ie*) is spelled in 12 different ways, and indeed other spellings could be added if less common words were included, e.g. 'indict'" (para. 6.18). They also pointed out later: "we have already noted the bewildering complexity of the English spelling system, and it is self-evident that a simplification of the relationship between sound and spellings must make it easier for a child to make progress in the early stages. If there are fewer items to be learned this alone must reduce the time required, and if there are fewer ambiguities there will be less confusion. All this is amply confirmed by research" (para. 7.27).

Removal of the Confusions

The removal of all three categories of confusion - by the use of i.t.a. as the *first* learning medium - has been shown to help all learners, of all ages, all over the English-speaking world. Some 80 high-ranking researches and now millions of children and not a few adults, testify to what the Bullock Committee quoted, with approval, from the Schools Council Report "*i.t.a.: An Independent Evaluation*",

"There is no evidence whatsoever for the belief that the best way to learn to read in traditional orthography is to learn to read *in* traditional orthography. It would appear rather that the best way to learn to read in traditional orthography is to learn in the initial teaching alphabet" (page 234-5 of the Schools Council Report and para. 7.27 of Bullock).

That "best way" covers two classes of learner. For those who would anyhow succeed in learning, it reduces most significantly the time needed to acquire the ability to read; while for many of those who would otherwise have failed, it brings success. It is not, of course, a panacea, any more than any of the other lowerings and removal of obstacles to success can possibly guarantee success. If poor eyesight, poor hearing or absences due to ill-health are obstacles to reading success, the provision of spectacles, hearing aids or classes in hospital could never guarantee success but they, like i.t.a., help by removing obvious handicaps. Only some children suffer from poor eyesight, but all suffer from the confusions of T.O. and no less need, and are entitled to, the benefits of a learning medium as simple as 1, 2, 3.

There is no reason why learning to read and write words in letters need be all that more difficult to learn than reading and writing words in figures. After all, the great majority of illiterates are able to read and write numbers when expressed in figures but not when expressed in letters. *Eighty-one* and *two hundred and eighty-four* are illegible to them whereas *81* and *84* are read, written and comprehended easily. We can hardly wonder at the contrast, seeing that *eight*, as the spelling for the sound of *8* is at least as confusing as *one* for the sound *wun*. And it is no less confusing that there should be a *wo* in *two* and an *ou* in *four*. The wonder is not that so many children fail to learn to read and write in letters but rather that so many succeed.

The Transition

The results of research and the testimony of tens of thousands of teachers confirm that the transition from the simpler medium of i.t.a. to T.O. is an easy and natural development for all who can read with understanding. This fact was endorsed by the Bullock Committee who said: "Certainly the co-existence of two writing systems during the introductory and transitional period does not seem to be a handicap. This observation coincides with the judgement of the Schools Council Report that the difference between the alphabet used in school and that used outside does not present a significant problem" (para. 7.27). They added: "Children learn quite quickly how to spell in i.t.a., and they then have access to almost (why only 'almost?') "every word in their spoken vocabulary. The value of this for language experience activities is obvious." Referring to the research with i.t.a., the Committee added. "the i.t.a. pupils remain superior in T.O. reading and spelling even after five years at school, i.e. well beyond the transition stage" (para. 7.29).

Why i.t.a. and T.O. are Easily Interchanged

24 of the characters of T.O. have been retained *unchanged* and with their most common values when appearing in T.O. The table below shows how closely all the additional characters for the essential 17 sounds, which lack characters, resemble characters and spellings which are used elsewhere in T.O. - as shown in the words illustrating them and in the T.O. spellings of other words too.

How can it be that new characters may be provided for those 17 sounds of English which lack a discrete character in T.O., and how closely do they resemble characters used elsewhere in T.O., to represent those sounds?

Table 1

Vowels	Consonants
1. a arm (18)	12. th thurth (11)
2. æ æroplæn (42)	13. th north (7)
3. au autum (23)	14. sh northern (3)
4. ee eel (40)	15. sh ship (13)
5. æ toe (37)	16. 3 a3uer (8)
6. ω man (41)	17. ŋ lon, longest (7)
7. ω gwd (11)	
8. ie die (34)	
9. ou out (13)	
10. oi oil (12)	
11. ue due (28)	

(The figures in brackets represent the number of different other spellings for that sound which are present in T.O.)

15 of the new characters resemble the digraphs used in lower case letters for these sounds. The two others (Nos. 1 and 16) are the characters actually used in T.O. when written in the cursive, rather than in the lower case letters.

These 17, with the 24 retentions of the existing characters - a, b, c, etc. (with q and x discarded as redundant) - make 41 characters, one more than is essential. The supererogatory character (k) has been retained in order to make the transition even easier - and on statistical grounds ck is a most frequent T.O. spelling for the sound of /k/ as, of course, is k as well as c and cc.

There are three other supererogatory characters which justify their choice on the grounds also of conserving the patterns of T.O. For instance, the addition of the character *w* obviates the use of *hw* which, though alphabetically systematic for many, would cause difficulties in learning particularly to those who pronounce only the *w*. It also greatly facilitates the transition for all. The other two supererogatory characters are *z* and *r*. The sound /z/ is very frequent in English but the character *x* is seldom used to represent it, the character *s* being overwhelmingly used in T.O. The character *r* is introduced for an equally good reason. As in the case of *k* the use of *r* as well as *r* causes no difficulty to the learning reader or writer.

Thus system takes the place of lack of system, and invariability the place of variability. All the confusions are eliminated while the shapes and spellings substituted resemble sufficiently closely what is found elsewhere in T.O. to afford immediate legibility by those who have read only T.O.

A few last words - in i.t.a.

this is printed in the initial teaching alphabet, the purpose of which is not, as might be supposed, to reform our spelling, but to improve the learning of reading. It is intended that when the beginner is fluent in this medium he should be confident of reading in the traditional alphabet.

if you have read as far as this, the new medium will have proved to you several points, the most important of which is that you, at any rate, have easily made the change.

No wonder the Bullock Committee commented: "Though some of the characters in . . . i.t.a. are unfamiliar, one has little difficulty in reading it . . . After one or two more paragraphs of the same kind the reader would be handling the text with scarcely any hesitation. By the same token, it is argued that the child who develops fluency in i.t.a. can transfer readily enough to T.O." (para. 7.28).

We in education, as much as in other fields, cannot expect to make progress unless we are ready to think afresh. i.t.a. clearly provides the means of removing the many confusions which T.O. presents to the beginner. It is surely up to us all now to take advantage of what i.t.a. has to offer and thus make learning to read that much more easy and effortless in the future.

Many teachers have long realised that it has become most unfair to the helpless child to submit him to all these unnecessary difficulties inherent in T.O. Will not other infant teachers, no less devoted to the welfare of their children, give a new and fair deal to those helpless ones?

[Spelling Reform Anthology §13.8 pp191,192,196 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1975 pp11,12,16 in the printed version]

8. Illiteracy: Is English Spelling a Significant Factor?, by Marjorie Chaplin*

* C/o S.S.S., London, England.

* A paper presented at the First International Conference of the Simplified Spelling Society, at College of All Saints, London.

According to a pamphlet published by the British Association of Settlements in May, 1974 [\[1\]](#), there are at least two million 'functionally illiterate' adults in England and Wales. This term is used to describe those who can read a little, but whose attainment is so low that in practice it is more or less useless to them. This is a scandal in the Britain of today.

In my opinion, the irrationality of the English spelling system is an important factor, among a great number, contributing to the high level of reading failure and illiteracy in English-speaking countries. I am very concerned at the lack of recognition of this fact in educational circles.

Just what are the causes of reading backwardness?

Almost all educationists, social workers and others agree on a number of major causes of reading retardation.

- a) Social causes: bad housing, overcrowding, lack of child care facilities where mothers are out at work;
- b) educational causes: large classes in First schools, changes of school, changes of teacher, absence from school, late discovery of reading failure, and insufficient remedial help after discovery;
- c) causes related to the family situation: over-mothering, leading to late development of independence, over-anxious parents or lack of parental interest, lack of time for talking in the home, leading to speech retardation; and emotional disturbance due to tensions in the home, broken families, and so on;
- d) secondary to all these causes, there is a child's loss of confidence in his ability to learn to read, because he has fallen behind others of his own age, or even behind a younger brother or sister.

While there is a considerable degree of agreement that all these factors play a part in reading failure, other theories are more controversial.

Some claim that a child may have an inborn weakness as regards visual memory for shapes, or an accident of birth in the form of 'cross-laterality,' such as left-handedness but right eye dominance; some children's tendency to reverse letters or words, mirror fashion, is also widely regarded as a cause of reading retardation.

Shortcomings in the methods of teaching reading and writing in the schools of today and of the recent past are also blamed for reading failure.

Finally, the nature of our English spelling is blamed, and although at present the number of those who consider it would be worth while to reform our spelling seems to be small, there are thousands who would agree that learning to read in the English language is made much more difficult by its irregular spelling.

Experience In Teaching Retarded Readers

Having taught in an Open Air School for delicate children, and a School for Partially-sighted Boys, my last 14 years were at a Remedial Reading Centre. In consultation with the educational psychologist, the schools selected children to attend the Centre three times a week, the rest of school hours being spent in their normal school classes.

Before selection all were given Reading Age and I.Q. tests. No child with a so-called IQ of less than 80 was admitted, and in practice very few had an IQ below 90. (I say 'so-called IQ' because I am among those who have reservations as to exactly what an IQ test establishes.) Most of the time that I worked at the Remedial Centre, I was working with a colleague who, like myself, was completely convinced of the necessity of teaching by the phonic method. The children came to us in small groups of five or six, so that we were able to make considerable use of games, to give practice in recognition of digraphs, and in word-building. We agreed to pool our ideas for games and picture-clues, and gradually we developed what was virtually a systematic, programmed course in reading by phonics. We also built up a wide range of simple books to read, including the earlier books in a number of Infants reading schemes.

Children in any one group were usually of similar age and had a similar level of reading attainment. In other respects their problems might be very varied, but experience showed that, in spite of this, almost all of them made an immediate and very positive response to the learning of phonics. Over my entire period at the Centre, the number who resisted the phonic approach, or who failed to benefit by it, was so small that those particular children stand out in my mind as exceptions.

Some experts may be horrified to learn that I made no use of preliminary diagnostic tests. I did not worry as to whether a child had crossed laterality, nor whether their visual, oral or spatial abilities were the more developed. Neither was a new group, on arrival, invited to do painting or clay-modelling to acclimatise them. Such activities were left until the last 15 or 20 minutes of the session. I used to plunge straight in, and say to them, 'You are coming here so that I can help you to be good readers. I know you think reading is difficult. But I am going to teach you a very easy way. I am going to teach you the sounds of all the letters, and then teach you how to join the sounds to make words.'

I immediately set them to work matching up sets of letter cards with picture cards - a for apple, b for bat and ball, etc. Yes, indeed - 'out of the Ark,' as many would say! But it worked. Boys of 11 or 12 made no protest because this was something they deeply wanted to know about.

A few children did know the sounds of some letters on arrival; a smaller number could sound *th*, *sh*, *ch*. But in all my experience at the Centre, so far as I remember, not one child knew the sounds represented by vowel digraphs, apart possibly from *ee*.

As soon as a few letter sounds were firmly established by games, further types of games were played to give practice in 'building' words, (or blending, as it is sometimes called). The time children took to develop the knack of blending sounds into words varied greatly. This was their first, and most important, hurdle in learning to read. However many lessons had to be given in acquiring this skill, I never gave up. Once learned, this is the key to the reading of any alphabetical language in future life.

I can instance a boy and a girl aged about 9 years who, it seemed, never could learn to 'build.' I arranged to have them together for a few lessons, without the rest of the group, and one day I raced them against one another. Holding up a single short word on a card, I said, 'See who can call out this word first.' The idea of a race worked a miracle; they both discovered that they could read the words. Afterwards I realized that they both had a reason for wanting to stay at the Centre as long as possible.

What amazed both of us who were working at this Centre was the discovery that none of the children who came to us had been taught how to sound digraphs, although we had been told that teachers were using a combination of the visual and phonic approach. Then one day an incident opened our eyes to one possible cause of this contradiction.

We had a visit from two nuns from a Catholic school which had children attending the Centre. They said that these children had told them about the sounds they were learning, and they had come to learn about them. My appreciation of the professional humility of those two nuns, both fully trained teachers, will always stay with me.

What this event brought to light was that numbers of the teachers themselves did not consciously know the sounds represented by digraphs. If they had ever known this, they had forgotten about it. This would explain why so many teachers, while claiming to teach phonics, actually only drew the attention of the children to a handful of phonic aids, and left them to find out the digraphs for themselves.

To return to the retarded readers at the Centre, there was no doubt whatever about the enthusiasm of their response to this enlightening field of knowledge. For to these non-reading children, the fact that letters meant sounds and sounds could be joined together to make words was light at the end of a long tunnel - it was sight to the blind.

Children who had been apathetic towards school and books awoke to life and applied themselves to excel in the word games, and the race to learn the 'two-letter sounds.' Most of the games had an element of chance in them which prevented anyone from being regularly defeated.

Sometimes a child would voice his appreciation of our kind of teaching in a way which summed up the reactions of the majority. One small boy aged about 9 or 10 said to me, "At school the teachers just say to us, 'Go on, then, read it!' But you learns us how to read."

An older boy, in the top class of primary school, physically tall and well built, who had been so humiliated by his poor reading, said to me when he was leaving the Centre, 'You know, Miss, I still read more slowly than the other boys, but when they can't read a difficult long word, they come to

me to read it for them.' What better testimonial to the phonic approach could one have?

Some Thoughts on Learning to Read

In voicing criticism of the lack of systematic teaching of reading and writing, I am not ranging myself with the authors of the so-called Black Papers. I am enthusiastic about the general pattern of the modern approach in education as practised in the best of our state schools. But I am sure that systematic teaching of fundamental skills still has a place. It is certainly found necessary in many fields, so why not in relation to reading and writing, without which education cannot be carried out?

I would suggest that current procedures in teaching reading have taken such a hold in this country because it is almost impossible to teach an unsystematic spelling system systematically. The usual line of argument is that since efficient reading involves the recognition of thousands & thousands of words on sight, the habit of recognition of whole words should be encouraged from the start. This sounds good as a theory, but it neglects one important fact - that to memorise the patterns of 10,000 and more whole-words is tremendously difficult. It can only be achieved after a prodigious amount of reading, sufficient to encounter each of the 10,000 words 12, 15, or more times, as only repetition will ram them home for most people. Success does not simply depend on visual memory, but on having the interest, the opportunity and the time to read and read and read. For the modern child, TV and a wealth of other pursuits leave little time for reading. Thousands of children may take out library books, but there are probably many thousands more who do not.

Even more difficult than learning to read is learning to spell. Gone are the days when the bad speller was the exception among high school pupils and university students. Nowadays the good speller is a rarity. This is not due solely to modern methods of teaching reading, but rather more, probably, to the fact that today's teachers are not willing to devote precious school time to the learning of spelling lists and the giving of dictation. Since learning the idiosyncracies of the English orthography has little educational value, it does not take place, and spelling has become permissive.

The correct traditional spelling is losing its usefulness and its hold. And along with correct spelling, clear, legible handwriting seems to be on the decline also. In the days of typewriters, this may not matter so much, but I believe it would still be worth while for children to be shown how to form letters when they first begin to write. The retarded readers whom I taught also had the most rudimentary idea of how to form letters. I used to watch some of them as they wrote, and I discovered that to write a small *a* they might go round and round as if they were going to draw a snail, and would always draw an upright stroke first, and then add the curved stroke. In other words, they did not progress from left to right, but pure chance decided at which end of a letter they would start. Strokes were often made upwards instead of downwards. The result of teaching themselves to write was that they probably never learned to write fluently, and they lacked the kinaesthetic sensation of writing *b* as a sensation differing from that of writing *d*. Such writing confusion could help to reinforce the usual confusion among very little children over *b* and *d*.

So much for the criticism of the teaching of reading in our schools. Present methods do succeed in the vast majority of cases, and it is only those who, for one or other of the reasons I listed at the beginning, seem to suffer badly from the lack of systematic teaching.

Any criticism of our schools or our teachers must be balanced by a recognition of the enormous problems they have to cope with. The most urgent change needed is to reduce the size of classes in First Schools, so that children can receive far more individual attention in the decisive early years. Simple arithmetic can show us that even if a class is no larger than 30, and many still are, each child can only receive two minutes of the teacher's time in one hour, and only about ten minutes in the whole day. How can a teacher hear each child read daily in these circumstances, with all the other matters that have to be attended to?

Would a reform of our spelling make much difference?

If we compare the time it takes an English child to learn to read an adequate vocabulary in his own language with how long it takes an adult to learn to read a foreign language such as Italian, German, even Russian, in the sense of decoding the printed word, we can begin to realise the enormous amount of everyone's time that is wasted in the teaching and learning of English spelling.

I have indicated that retarded readers can rapidly learn to decode English words, but because our English spelling is so irregular, there can rarely be an entirely happy ending for anyone who is late in learning to read.

A boy came to our Remedial Centre at the age of about 10½ in his last year in Primary School, unable to read a single word. The school had thought him to be unintelligent until an IQ test showed that he was of normal intelligence. He set to work with excellent application to learn phonics. Although he only attended the Centre two or three times a week, after two and a half school terms he had completely mastered the reading of any word which could be read phonetically. But he still could not remember the common, irregularly spelt words. Clearly, these would only be learnt in the course of the following years, as he met with them, over and over again, in the course of reading.

Because such a high proportion of words could not be read phonetically, a limit was set on the attainment that could be reached within ten months. On the other hand, if our spelling were reformed so that *all* words were spelt according to a regular system, reasonably phonetic in character, anyone, child or adult, could become completely literate, able to spell correctly as well as to read, within a few months. Compare this with the years it now takes.

When we consider the misery caused by illiteracy, and the danger of children who are failing in school taking to vandalism or petty crime, and the many other advantages of a reformed spelling, such as saving of time spent on looking up words in the dictionary in offices, apart from the educational benefits, I believe we should all begin to take this question really seriously.

[1] *A Right to Read. Action for a Literate Britain*. Pub, by The British Association of Settlements. 20p. London, England, May, 1974.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §13.9 pp193-196 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1980 pp.4-7 in the printed version]

9. The Cultural Impediments of English Orthography, by Vic Paulsen, San Francisco, Ca.

Communication amongst human beings involves at least two people: one who transmits the information, and another who receives it. *Written* communication involves a *third* element, which is interposed between the two human elements: a *writing system*, thru which the information is conveyed.

Writing systems are of two general kinds:

- (1) picture-writing, which uses ideographs, and
- (2) sound-writing, which uses syllabaries or alphabets.

Ideographs are simplified pictures with informational content. They have actual meaning. But syllabaries and alphabets are designed to represent speech-sounds only, and they are not intended to represent anything else. In China, for example, a common system of word-signs which is largely *ideographic* provides communication amongst people of different regions who cannot otherwise communicate because their spoken languages are different. But in the western world, where *alphabetic* writing is the custom, all three elements in the chain of communication must be geared to the *same language*. Both the writer and the reader must understand that spoken language, and the writing system must be designed for it. To the extent that any of the elements departs from these qualifications, communication fails.

The problem in the English-speaking world today is that altho the two *human* elements, the writer and the reader, both speak the same language, which is Modern English, the *third* element, the writing system, was not designed for that language. It has been shaped a bit, here and there, in the direction of Modern English, but the fact is that its spelling is based primarily on another language, Middle English, which hasn't been spoken in at least 400 years, and is no longer understood. So, we have a bottleneck in communication.

From the point of view of a technician, this problem is easily solved. All one needs to do is to design a writing, system specifically for Modern English, so that all three elements in the chain of communication can function in harmony. We know very well that in those parts of the world where such systems operate, literacy is easily achieved. Learning to read in one day is not unheard of.

But the design of a new writing system is only a partial solution. The major obstacle that confronts the orthographic reformer is the existing system itself, which, with all its scandalous lack of utility, happens to be an *investiture* that seems to defy displacement.

During the last 30 years or so, literacy in the English-speaking world has been declining at an alarming rate. It's not hard to guess why. During the rapid development of electronics in the past 40 years, *speech*, for the first time in the entire course of history, *has become a mass medium*. The people, having discovered those electronic channels thru which they can receive information in their own language, are now circumventing the outdated writing system which has been the bottleneck in mass communication. And having alienated themselves from it, they have become less able and less willing to cope with its irrational complexities.

In an attempt to correct this situation, the Federal Government of the United States initiated its "Decade of the '70's" program, in which "The Right to Read" was to become a reality. [\[1\]](#) During

that ten-year period, which is now ending, both State and Federal governments have poured massive sums into programs designed to eradicate illiteracy, not by re-designing the outdated writing system, but by attempting to shape the minds of human beings into conformity with the status quo. And what has this extravagant program achieved? Nothing! The drift to illiteracy continues as before, *except* that it now has reached the proportions of a crisis. For example, the United States Navy now complains that from 40 to 50% of today's recruits can't read the instruction manuals. The Navy is plainly worried about the future. [2] And they are not alone. But how do the educators explain all this? Their typical response is: "Well, this is a difficult problem! We must rise to meet the challenge, re-dedicate ourselves, learn to work together, involve the parents, etc." [3]

Now, before we start examining this peculiar human reluctance to do something about conventional spelling, let's just briefly review the origins and the nature of alphabetic writing, so we know exactly what we are talking about.

Alphabetic writing seems to have begun sometime prior to 1,000 B.C. in the eastern Mediterranean area. It was acquired and perfected by the Greeks, then adopted by the Romans, who spread it thruout their civilizations. The principles were these: Each significant speech sound (phoneme) was represented by an individual symbol, and these symbols were written from left to right in the same sequence in which the sounds would be heard if the information were spoken. Diphthongs were represented *analytically*, that is, *each* of the *two phonemes* of which the diphthong was composed was represented by its own symbol, so that the phonetic constitution of the diphthong was clearly indicated; and those symbols were also written from left to right in the same sequence in which the sounds would be heard if the information were spoken. The *reader*, by scanning the line from left to right, "sounding" the symbols one by one, could reproduce, in speech, the information intended by the writer. That's what alphabetic writing is all about, and for its first thousand years or so in Europe it was done, for the most part, with capital letters and without any word-spacing. [4]

Along about the 7th Century a very important refinement was introduced. Groups of letters representing whole words were separated from each other by spaces, and this practice was combined with the use of letter styles, some of which had descenders or ascenders. [5] This gave a more or less characteristic outline to particular word-groups, making for easier whole-word recognition, and thus speeding up the decoding process.

It was not until *after* this development that vernacular writing evolved in Britain and in Europe, where the official language of record and of learning had been Latin. Vernacular writing was simply an adaptation of the Latin alphabet to the vernacular. But the new languages had some sounds that were not represented in the Latin alphabet, so the practice developed of using digraphs and other combinations of Latin letters to represent these sounds. But digraphs *don't scan*, and the only reason they could be used at all was that word-spacing had come into use. And so began a departure from alphabetic principles that fostered the strange notion that word-groups might be regarded as basic units, the spellings of which might be memorized if not scannable, or that might be identified more or less as logograms. Now, a few digraphs in the orthography of a language that has remained fairly stable is no great problem. But in the case of English, which has undergone enormous pronunciation changes which have not been accommodated in the spellings, the relationship between the speech and the writing has simply departed from the reality of alphabetic procedures.

The succession of influences that produced linguistic turmoil in England prior to the 18th Century and the subsequent orthographic chaos of which we are the inheritor, already has been documented ad infinitum, but let's just use one word as a sample of what happened: "knave." This is the Middle English word pronounced "kna-veh" (be sure to pronounce the "k" - that's what it's

there for) . . . two open syllables, each containing one single vowel sound. And, as you can see, the spelling was a perfect specimen of classical alphabetic principles. Using symbols for the phonetic values for which they were intended, it scans from left to right, symbol by symbol, to reproduce the spoken word intended by the writer. But in *Modern English*, the language we speak, there is no knah-veh. That word has become one *closed syllable* containing a *diphthong*. But how would anybody know that? We are still spelling it k-n-a-v-e, which, in alphabetic terms, is a departure from reality. According to classical alphabetic procedure, which requires that diphthongs be represented analytically, the correct modern spelling would be: "neiv."

So how does a teacher explain the spelling k-n-a-v-e to a child? One way might be this: "Children, be sure to spell this word correctly. It begins with a "k", but this is a silent "k". It must be there, but we don't pronounce it. As we know, the letter "a" has many pronunciations, but we never know which one until we know what the other letters in the word are. In this case, the last letter is an "e". We don't pronounce this either, but be sure to include it in the spelling because this one is the *magic* "e" that tells us that the letter "a" is pronounced like the "a" in "able". Remember that rule, but remember too that rules have exceptions, and in this case, if the "kn" at the beginning of the word were replaced by an "h", this would tell us that the magic "e" wasn't magic anymore, and that the "a" would then be pronounced like the "a" in "hat". But above all, be sure to include the final "e" in the spelling, even if it is not magic, and even if it is not pronounced, because if you don't, the spelling won't be correct. Now is this clear to everyone?"

If the teacher were in a prophetic mood, the speech might continue like this: "Now I hope that all of you will try very hard, and that by the time you will have graduated, after eight years in this school, that most of you will have learned to read. . . a little. But some of you, even many of you, will have difficulties. Some of you will try, but just not be able to get it. Others will just sit and cry. Some will just stare out the window, and have a tight feeling in the stomach. But don't worry about it. The school psychologist will make a lot of tests, and ask you a lot of questions about your family, and might even interview your parents to find out what their problem is. The psychologist might discover that you have a learning disability, or perhaps a brain disfunction of some special kind, possibly dyslexia, or even that you are suffering from brain damage!

Some of you will become disciplinary problems. You will become hyperactive. You will run and jump and squirm and fight! Anything to avoid learning to read. For you, we have a little pill. Not a drug, really. . . just a pill. This will quiet you down and keep you from becoming a problem in the classroom. Of course, you might come back after dark and break all the windows, maybe even set the building on fire, in which case you will have to deal with the police. But this might not stop you. You might become incorrigible, and end up in a life of crime, which is what happens to many illiterates.

And there is something else I must tell you. Girls learn to read more easily than boys. You see there is quite a difference between boys and girls. But don't worry about it. We can send you to a Remedial Reading Clinic, where they will try to correct your problem.

"Finally, children, I would like to say that this task can be much easier for all of us if only you will try to remember that, after all, Reading is Fun!"

Conventional English spelling is commonly spoken of as "crazy" or "insane", but these are general terms that don't take us anywhere. A more particular and more useful description might be "*pathogenic*", that is, "disease causing"; "disease" in this case meaning mental disorder. The evidence, when viewed in proper perspective, seems to justify this one. Let's find out:

The tools a society shapes for its use are *reflexive* cultural entities. As the tools are used, the

society that produced them is, in turn, shaped by them, may become dependent on them, even enslaved by them. Examples: television, automobiles, writing systems. The more widely used the tool, the more thoroughly it influences the society. And in the English-speaking world, where the writing system has - in alphabetic terms - become irrational, it has produced irrational mental processes in the society. Let's see how this has come about:

In the first place, the teaching of reading and writing in any society, whatever the language or the writing system, involves the enshrinement of the writing system as a standard of reference on which the teaching is based. This tends to identify the writing system with the particular language, as if the two were one and the same thing. This illusion has inspired a popular misuse of terms, some of which have found their way into dictionaries, thus reinforcing the illusion. For example: words such as "language", "vowel", "diphthong", "digraph", "English", "literacy", the terms "short vowel", "long vowel", and such statements as "Reading is Fundamental", and "Back to Basics!" All of these formerly had specific meanings based on the assumption that the writing represented the sounds of the language. But as the pronunciation of the language changed while the spellings remained the same, a distortion occurred in the meanings, some of the terms expanding to include multiple meanings. The result of this is that any discussion of the relationship between speech and writing tends to become futile because the terms mean different things to different people. Thus, any consideration of orthographic reform tends to be unappreciated.

Another peculiar psychological disability has come about with the phasing out of *acoustic* in favor of *visual* methods of decoding, namely: an actual incapacity to decode alphabetic writing acoustically. This has arisen from an accumulation of influences. Prior to the introduction of word-spacing, the custom seems clearly to have been that of reading aloud and listening to one's own voice to get the meaning. [6] After the introduction of word-spacing, secondary *visual* associations in the form of whole-word patterns came into being. The continuous contact with these secondary visual patterns that came about with the introduction of printing and the consequent proliferation of reading material, tended to cause a substitution of the visual for the acoustic. Also, certain non-alphabetic innovations such as the so-called etymological spellings contributed to the declining acoustic reliability. And in more recent times, the "look-and-say" method of teaching reading completed the job of producing a total dependence on visual word identification - to the extent that such identification is possible. Experience shows that people who have been conditioned to this visual process may be incapable of decoding a scannable alphabetic system, even if they have learned the phonetic values of the symbols and are capable of reconstituting the speech intended by the writer. Altho they may read the words aloud correctly, so that anyone within hearing distance can understand the message, they themselves are not listening to what they are saying because while they are saying it their attention is riveted to the visual image, which is where they expect to find the meaning.

Fortunately, this affliction is easily overcome, but the afflicted people don't know this, and when someone suggests a reform of English spelling that involves a restoration of alphabetic principles, they are seized with apprehension, and nothing gets thru to them. These are the people who say "making sounds is not reading" without realizing that they are only describing their own affliction.

But simple lack of knowledge concerning the nature of literacy does not adequately explain the single-minded, unbudging tenacity with which the English-speaking world clings to its outdated writing system. This phenomenon resembles the behavior of an individual suffering from a neurosis, who defends himself against any suggestion that he might have a personal problem. Even knowledgeable analysts in the education field who have shown the writing system to be the main source of our reading difficulties, will then usually propose some special way of teaching it, but seem unable to perceive the possibility of changing it. Somehow, they will manage to find an explanation, an apology, or a rationale, to show that *change* is either unwise or impossible. [7]

This rigid, "blank-wall" attitude is pretty strong evidence that what we are dealing with here is a mental disorder. In psychiatry, behavior is considered normal when it is determined by processes that are predominately conscious, and therefore deliberative. But behavior is considered neurotic when the determining processes are *unconscious*, and therefore not subject to deliberation. [8] But a *collective* mental disorder involving a whole society is not readily identified. If an *individual* should become psychotic in an otherwise healthy society, his behavior is easily noticed because it is different. But if a whole society becomes psychotic, nobody notices it because it is the norm.

Another difficulty in recognizing collective mental disorders has to do with terminology. Individual mental disorders are dealt with clinically by psychiatrists, who have evolved clinical terms to describe them. But mental disorders of societal proportions are not treated clinically, and if they are described at all, it is by anthropologists or historians or sociologists. They may speak of "cultural tag", or perhaps "the decline and fall of," etc., but they don't identify the affliction for what it really is: a mental disorder of a particular kind.

But there is another - and perhaps the strongest - piece of evidence to identify as a mental disorder the fixation for an outdated writing system, and that is the way in which such fixations have commonly been dispersed. Of the instances of orthographic reform that have occurred in this century, those of the Portuguese, the Russian, the Turkish, and the Chinese, have followed in the wake of violent social upheaval. They are the collective counterparts of "abreaction", a psycho-therapeutic process by means of which the pathological complexes of individuals are dispersed. [9]

A certain amount of evidence has now been presented to show that we are dealing with an outdated orthography that has been enshrined as a standard, but which, in terms of alphabetic principles, has become irrational; and which, by virtue of its being a reflexive cultural entity, has produced in the society itself a pathological fixation which is interfering with the need of the society to be literate.

So, how do we get out of this mess?

It has been pointed out that individual mental disorders are dealt with clinically by psychiatrists, but that collective mental disorders are not. The cure of an afflicted *individual* can begin only when he himself reaches the conclusion that he has a problem that needs being solved. Until this attitude is taken nothing can be done for him. But in the case of a collective mental disorder, such as the fixation of the whole society for conventional English spelling, we are dealing with a collective psyche comprising many disparate elements and groups of elements in an organizational structure the *attitude* of which is a resolution of the complex vector relationships amongst the elements.

Since the orthographic reformer himself happens to be one of the elements of this structure, he can work from within, using appropriate strategy, to expedite the required change of attitude. The possibility of this is not unthinkable. A mood for change has been expressing itself in the western world since the end of World War II, and this iconoclastic dynamic is looking for targets. At the same time, the political and educational leaderships, having failed to produce literacy by the traditional methods they have espoused, are more vulnerable to criticism than even before.

But it doesn't make much sense to attempt to destroy an existing system without having first evolved some superior alternatives. What is needed, it seems to me, is some large-scale comprehensive tests of writing systems designed for Modern English. Some initiative in this direction was taken at the First International Conference in 1975, but it needs to be pursued more vigorously. And to encourage interest in this whole area, we might urge universities to institute courses in "Orthographies of the Western World". Something along these lines is being considered

at a university in Canada.

It was mentioned earlier that many of the terms that would normally be used to discuss this situation have lost their specificity, so that communication has become ineffective. We must change this. For example: The word "orthography", from the Greek, meaning "correct writing", has come to mean any method of spelling, including conventional English spelling, and I have used it in that way in the writing of this paper. But the fact is that conventional English spelling is not correct at all. It has, in fact, become irrational and pathogenic. But we don't have any one specific word to describe this kind of writing. So, let's coin one. How about "pathography"? From the Greek. Literally, "sick writing". Defined as follows:

1. Any form of writing characterized by disorderly, non-alphabetic use of alphabetic symbols.
2. Conventional English spelling.

The use of the term "pathography" will not by itself exercise any immediate magic, but its continuous use, particularly in connection with legal initiatives, will emphasize the pathological nature of conventional spelling, and will gradually move into proper perspective a host of unreal concepts. For example:

1. "dyslexia", "reading disability", "minimal brain damage", "hyperactive" - are all concepts, the etiology of which has been sought *in the child*, his cultural heritage, his parents, his diet, his family environment, etc. But with pathography a factor to be considered, it might very well turn out that all these so-called afflictions are nothing more than normal human defenses against a pathological influence. And the way this can be determined is by comparative tests of writing systems.

2. "comparative reading scores". These are widely regarded as absolute determinants of the teaching and/or the learning of literacy. But since we know that the same identical pathography is built right into all the tests, the results may be nothing more than the aggregate reactions to a pathological influence.

3. "sex differences in reading". It is said among educators that boys have "more difficulty learning to read" than do girls. But this notion does not take pathography into account. Once we do consider it, our new perspective gives us an entirely different interpretation. We can see now that it is the boys who tend to rise up in rebellion against any attempt to condition them to an irrational, pathogenic pattern, while the girls are more likely to go along with it. In other words, what we actually have here is not a "difficulty in learning to read", but a normal, healthy, masculine outrage against the rape of reason. The attempt, by whatever means, to suppress or overcome the male reaction against pathography is clearly a case of sex discrimination.

During this era of social upheaval to which we all are witness, the courts have been busy overturning old concepts, but they haven't yet got around to considering pathography because, so far as I know, it hasn't yet been in any court proceeding. But the legislative process is gradually evolving the bases for this. In addition to the anti-trust laws which have been around for some time, we are witnessing an accelerating legislative interest in sex discrimination, environmental protection, consumer fraud, and public health. If, at this stage, pathography is not yet thought of as an evil monopoly existing in spite of the anti-trust laws, it certainly constitutes manmade environmental pollution, and it seems clearly to be an instrument of sex discrimination. And when its pathological nature is legally established, the propagation of it will certainly be subject to the laws that safeguard the public health and the rights of the consumer.

So much for the attack on pathography. Assuming that by the time this has been carried out we

have evolved a superior writing system, how then do we manage to establish it as the new standard, replacing the old? All of the strategies I have heard about are based on the assumption that people must be made to change life-long habits, either by persuasion or mandate, either gradually or all at once. But why should it be necessary to confront an obstacle, when one may just as easily circumvent it? It seems to me that, contemporaneous with the attack on pathography, demands should be made for the bi-literate presentation of all vital public information, with the old writing system and the new, side by side. This is not unreasonable, and is only one step beyond what we already do on a word-for-word basis in the dictionaries of the English-speaking world. This arrangement

- (1) makes the new system available to those who wish to use it,
- (2) compares the merits of the two systems,
- (3) provides instruction in the form of a cross-reference for those curious about the new system,
- and (4) continues the old for those who choose to live out their lives without changing their habits.

"In the end, the better system will survive.[\[10\]](#)

Pathography: n. (Gr. *pathos* + *graphein*. Literally, sick writing).

1. Any form of writing characterized by disorderly, non-alphabetic use of alphabetic symbols.
2. Conventional English spelling.

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9. Vic Paulsen. IMPROVED ORTHOGRAPHY, 1971, TORSKRIPT PUB., San Francisco, Ca. See pages 41-44.
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[Spelling Reform Anthology §13.10 pp197-205,180 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1965 pp2-11]

10. The Two Englishes, by William Barkley, M.A.*

Being an Account of some of the Differences between the Spoken and Written English Languages.

*William Barkley, M. A, (honors Latin, English) has been for nearly 40 years chief Parliamentary reporter and editorial writer, for the London Daily Express.

*Pub. by Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1941.

I seek to interest you in a number of topics in which the interests and sympathies of all thoughtful men are already deeply enlisted, but my hope is to illustrate them from a new angle. I will give these topics such head-lines amid *The United Nation; The Future of our Foreign Trade; The Machine of Imperial Government; [1] The Education of our Children*. This last is fundamental to all, for everything depends on the education of the rising generation who are going to rise under a staggering burden of debt, for one thing, and who must be equipped with the most efficient tools to enable them to work out their salvation.

Education of our Children

This latter is a topic for a whole booklet. Everything hinges on this when we come to look ahead and size up the opportunities as well as the savage necessities which will govern the period of reconstruction in the world when we have rid it of the Nazi tyranny. In that world the prizes will go to the nations and to the individuals who are alert and efficient. We shall have little room for yokels. The shepherd must be a man who is in touch with the latest scientific research on sheep-rearing, adding this to his own store of native and traditional knowledge. For this sort of purpose - for quickness of mind in the field, the mine, or the factory - our educational system is the worst possible introduction. It is far too bookish. It is far too much devoted to reading and writing. These are accomplishments which if possible we should achieve at the ages of ten or eleven in our children so that we might then segregate them; separating those who seem disposed to follow a literary or a professional career from the great numbers who will go into manual work for which they should be provided with vocational training, accompanied to be sure with ever wider reading.

That is enough in a general way on those four topics - the united nation; the future of our foreign trade; the machine of Imperial Government; the education of our children. These topics are to be regarded as so many beads which it is hoped to string together in an argument; and the string or thread which is to unite and make a necklace of them is the theme of language.

Language

I take language to be, of all, the most powerful influence on the mind and the life of man. Looking round and about, I see *no other single influence* which at all compares in potency with language; not environment, of which indeed language forms a large part; not geographical position or diet or anything else to which scientists turn when they seek to explore the various destinies of different nations. It is language which is foremost in making and distinguishing one nation from another.

I think I can prove that statement to some extent by saying that the English-speaking nations are marked for their alertness, their practical good sense and their progressiveness quite irrespective of their residence. Whatever continent they settle in - whether here at home, in America, in Africa or in Australia - wherever English is spoken, you find people who are to a very high degree civilized, alert and progressive. I think the English-speaking peoples are far more logical and intelligent than any of the inhabitants of the European Continent, and I hope you will agree with me there, otherwise I am getting into bad company. But if I am right in my argument, I must be able to

show to you that the English language differs fundamentally from all other European languages, otherwise I could not argue that it is language which makes the English-speaking nations so distinguished.

I think I can prove that very easily. We enjoy in the English-spoken language the simplest grammatical structure which has ever been used in a major language by the lips of man. Of syntax, we have practically none. Of grammar so little that our grammarians, ashamed that we have so little, are frequently driven in self-esteem to inventing it. You will see pieces of English grammar in school books which are pure invention, imposed because our grammarians seem to think that English speech should correspond to Latin or Continental usage. But the whole thing is different. The first difference between English and the European languages is the extreme simplicity of the endings of words, verbs and nouns. These are reduced to a minimum of practical speech and yet where distinction is required, they are absolutely distinguished. We add *s* to form the plural of nouns. What is more, we pronounce the *s*. In French, they add *s* but they frequently do not pronounce it. The *s* in French at the end of a word is only pronounced if by accident it is followed by another word beginning with a vowel. In the same way, our verbs are conjugated on a system so logical and yet so simple that we are easily capable of expressing subtleties of meaning which are beyond the compass even of the elaborate verbal system of ancient Greek. At every turn we have the continuative tense: *I am speaking, I should have spoken, I should have been speaking*, In what language on the lips of man will you anywhere else find distinctions so simple and yet so expressive?

But that is the least of it. What makes for fundamental simplicity in the spoken English language above all is the fact that we in English are completely clear of a very odd Continental conception. We have no sex in the English nouns. Yet sex is universal in all the Continental languages. The languages of the Continent are sex-ridden. As the lady novelist might say, sex rears its ugly head at every turn in every Continental language, be it Greek, Latin, French, German or Russian. This is one of the queerest things in the history of mankind, and yet it is so accepted that I have rarely seen any comment made on it. To our English minds it is completely baffling. I am perfectly well aware that the grammarians do not call it sex. They call it gender. They even try to pretend that we have gender in the English language. They say that the word *boy* is masculine. This is transparent and arrant nonsense. It is the boy that is masculine, not the word *boy*. Then they say that most of our words are 'neuter.' That too is absurd. Our words are so far removed from any conception of grammatical sex or gender that the association just does not arise.

Here is a table. In French, that table is female. Yes, a Frenchman refers to that table as *she* or *her*, just as we by way of a joke or out of sentiment might refer to a ship or a motor-car as *she*. But it is no joke with the Frenchman. It is a matter of hard and invariable rule that a Frenchman shall refer to a table at all times and on all occasions in precisely the same terms as he would refer to a woman or to his wife. *She stands on the floor; I strike her with my fist*, (What a way to treat a lady!)

A witty woman once said to me, "I could understand a table being female in France if it were capable of producing a nest of little tables. But that is a job for a carpenter in France as in England."

This sex-distinction in all the Continental languages does not proceed on any recognizable basis of logic or thought. A table is female. So is a window. So is a door. But the ceiling - the floor - in French these are males. Is it not odd? But it goes much further than this. In French a sentinel is a female. He is a soldier but he is a woman - *la sentinelle*. On all occasions a French sentinel is spoken of in exactly the same terms as a woman. You say he is a *bonne sentinelle* just as you would say she is a *bonne femme*. And I am told that French is a logical language! Why do we so

belittle ourselves? Surely the English is alone the logical language which has got rid of this queer sex complex.

I know very little German, but I know that this sex business is even worse in German. There they have not only male and female words but unfortunately little neuter words. As in French, so in German, when a German adjective accompanies a German noun, its behaviour is entirely different, as you may imagine, according as it goes along with a male noun, a female noun, or one of the little neuters. Take the German for the definite article, the. In the nominative case alone it takes three different forms according as it accompanies a male, a female, or a little neuter. It is respectively *der*, *die* and *das*. In the German language, a spoon is male, a fork is female, and a knife is neuter. Before a German child can grammatically eat at table, he has to learn to say *der* spoon but *die* fork and *das* knife. And every adjective that he may apply to any one of those nouns or to any other noun has to change in the same way according to a very complicated and elaborate set of rules of grammatical agreement. Is it not beyond our simple understanding? As for the Russians, I do not know their language, but I am told that not only their nouns but their verbs are also male and female. Is not this at heart the reason why most of us believe that all the inhabitants of the Continent are slightly cuckoo? Is not the further sex affliction of the Russian language in the matter of its verbs one of the reasons for its difficulty of learning?

In short, the basis of my standpoint, the foundation of my remarks, is simply this in one sentence: The grammatical simplicity of the spoken English is the secret of England's greatness. There you are. That is what I am getting at. I don't think I have ever heard that before, but I want to state it with ever-increasing conviction. And I emphasize it again: *The grammatical simplicity of the spoken English language is the secret of England's greatness.*

It was not always so, you know. Our old mother tongue, the Anglo-Saxon language, was as complicated in its grammar as any other European language - quite enough complications to delight the heart of a grammarian. Its verbs were very elaborate. Its nouns had several cases, of which alone we have retained the invaluable possessive case. And in our old language, nouns were also distinguished by their gender or sex.

Walter W. Skeat writes: "One of the greatest gains of modern English is the abandonment of grammatical gender, so that we no longer have to burden our memories with the difference of usage due to this source. In old English, a bear, fish, ghost, hound and wolf were masculine; a crow and fly feminine; and a child, maiden and wife, being apparently things of small significance, were all neuter."

How then did we come to be rid of all this complication? How did we acquire such boons and blessings of simplicity over the inhabitants of all the other Continental nations cursed by their grammatical subtleties? It is one of the strangest stories of the human race. I doubt if there is a parallel to it in all mankind's long story.

The explanation for the simplicity of the grammar of the English language is simply the Norman Conquest. For 300 years after the Norman Conquest our language went underground, This language which later was to be the dominant language of the whole globe, disappeared from polite society for 300 years, During all that period it deserted the courts, it was never heard in the Palace or in the great dining halls of the Norman nobles; it disappeared from the council-chamber and from the institution resembling Parliament. The language of Government and of society was Norman French. And where was English? It was down in the servants' halls or out in the fields or in the workshops - it was serving, working, tending the flocks, tilling the land, making the tools and the weapons. In that long term of servitude, the English language was purified of its grammatical complications. It was reduced in this crucible of slavery and Norman domination to a tongue which

served the purpose and did the duty only of practical men. True, it retained in its words the flavour of sweetness. It was to be the language of the poets. But I am speaking of its grammar. And in its grammar, the English language emerged at last into the sunlight, out of the Norman Conquest, in that stark and pure simplicity which is the awe and mystery of all foreigners. It is quite impossible to over estimate the advantage which this simplicity of the spoken language has conferred on the English-speaking peoples, resulting as it did from the enforced subjugation of the Normans.

The brutal Norman set his foot here in the year 1066. It was not until the year 1362 that English was used for the first time by the chancellor in delivering a King's Speech opening a session of Parliament. It was only in that same year 1362 - three centuries all but four years after the Conquest - that English superseded French in the law courts. Until that year, justice for Englishmen was purveyed to them in a foreign language. Only then, in 1362, was an Act passed authorizing the use of English in the law courts, the Act taking the form of an appeal to the King for the use of English in the law courts, "owing to the French language being now much unknown," says its preamble.

These dates are very striking. Norman Conquest 1066; English language re-emerges 1362; Shakespeare born 1564. Five centuries between the Conquest and Shakespeare, and the English language submerged, suppressed, practically unwritten and barred from court and palace for three of these five centuries; English the official language of the country for only two centuries before the infant Shakespeare prattled in it.

The Conquest destroyed English education. Today we automatically regard our language as both the main subject and the chief medium of all our elementary education. But for these three centuries, in fact from 1066 to the year 1385, not only was our language not taught in schools; English was not used in schools. From these dark ages we owe this knowledge to a queer manuscript written by a Cornishman known as John of Trevisa, who was employed in 1385 as a librarian or secretarial tutor to the Lord Berkeley of his day.

His Lordship had a desire to read the earlier chroniclers, whose monkish work was for the most part in Latin. So secretary John translated them for him, in particular the chronicle of Higden, who wrote in the previous century.

For the benefit of the Berkeleys, John embodied a few of his own observations in his manuscript translations. And it is from him that we learn that Latin and French were until his day the languages of the schools, and that education for English children consisted of translating from Latin into French. We in turn, have to translate John's words because they are written in Old English. But, to Modernize him: "The English people" - says John of Trevisa, writing in 1385 - "speak their birth-tongue badly for two reasons: One is because children in school against the usage and manner of all other nations are compelled to leave their own language and to construe their lessons in French, and have done so ever since the Normans came first to England. Also gentlemen's children are taught to speak French from the time they are rocked in the cradle; and country folk likening themselves to the gentlemen, try with great diligence to speak French, in order to be held in higher esteem. This predilection for French was common before the first pestilence of 1349 but was afterwards somewhat changed. For John Cornwall, a master of grammar, changed the mode of teaching in his grammar school and substituted English for French construing; and Richard Pencrich learnt this kind of teaching from him and other men from Pencrich; so that now in 1385 in all the grammar-schools of England the children leave French and construe and learn in English."

So when we look back and cast the accounts of the Norman Conquest, we observe that it was due to it that our speech, our spoken language, has come down to us in a form simplified and purified in the blood and agony of serfdom.

How did this all come about? Well, previously I told you of the gender of some things in the Old Anglo-Saxon. In French today, the moon is a female and the sun is male. In German, as if to demonstrate that the Rhine is an eternal frontier in men's minds, the moon is a male and the sun is female. Now the English language, deriving from the same Gothic source as German, used to agree in this with the German. In Anglo-Saxon the moon was masculine and the sun was feminine. So absurd was this gender in Anglo-Saxon proceeding on no discernible basis of logic in our old language any more than in any other, that it was impossible to reconcile the genders of many things in the two languages. Consequently, the English, rather than be confused on the gender of many things, gradually came to call things they were not sure of by the neuter gender. Because this was so much easier than remembering which, all things gradually acquired the neuter gender.

But the gods were jealous of their Englishmen. For him alone of all men to have the key to simple speaking-it was too great a boon. So with the boon, the gods sent a curse. It, too, has the same historical origin. For during the 300 years after the Norman Conquest, the English language, when it was written, was written largely by Frenchmen. Now they wrote their French language on quite different principles from the way in which the English wrote their Anglo-Saxon. So that what the Frenchmen did was to write many words of their own system into the English language, with the result that the written language was confused and confounded to its very roots. Out of this evil marriage there emerged another language, not simple and logical like the spoken English, but illogical, inconceivably complicated, based upon no recognizable principle of logic, no rule or regulation, a matter of accident and harsh convention which can only be grasped by memorizing - an entirely different language from the spoken English tongue, namely the written English language. Never was a nation so shamefully treated as in this ill-written form of our simple speech,

One-half of the written language is spelled on Anglo-Saxon principles and the other half on Latin-French principles. As the Normans and the French wars and later intercourse with France and Italy continually supplied new words of Latin origin for use here at home, these words too were adopted into the language, sometimes on the native principles, sometimes on the Latin principles. Then our grammarians in the sixteenth century, *men of besotted ignorance*, set to work to impose here and there what they imagined to be the classical form. In addition, pronunciation underwent changes. The result is that today we have a written language which bears little or no resemblance to the spoken tongue, which is a patchwork of misplaced erudition and of besotted ignorance, a spelling system based upon no system, a *conglomeration of illogical confusion which makes us the laughing stock of all foreigners* and which inflicts never-ending torture upon ourselves.

We are often told that to systematize our spelling would destroy the origin of our words. There is some little justification for this view, but most of it is silly patter repeated parrot-wise by succeeding generations of obstructionists who have never really examined the question. To begin with, it affects only the Latin keyboard of our double-keyboard English speech. It pays no regard to the native words in which there is no attempt to spell according to the language brought here by the original Angles. This original language is an older language than the German. It is so much nearer than German to the paternal Gothic that the closest students of English in the last century were Germans, who found in English a great deal from which German derived.

The classical tradition has meant for centuries, and still too often means, that only the Latin-French side of our language is regarded as being of good and noble ancestry and this branch of linguistics was always studied in our schools and colleges to the total exclusion of Anglo-Saxon and Gothic until under the influence of Ellis and Skeat, these native studies made progress only seventy years ago. So to begin with, our present spelling does nothing at all for the native and original side of our language, the old English. "Queen," for example, in Anglo-Saxon was spelled *cwen*, the *q* coming

in only with the Norman conqueror. But those who defend the existing spelling on the ground of etymology, should object on the same grounds to the disappearance of *cwen*.

As for the Latin or classical side of the language, a great deal of the spelling reveals merely a bastard erudition. Take such words as *debt* and *doubt*. I say we should spell them *det* and *dout*. Up rise the protesters with shouts of "Vandal!" exclaiming that I am destroying the derivation of the word *debt* from the Latin word *debitum*. But it is not so. The English word *debt* reached us not from Latin but from French - from the French word *dette*. If you say that the word *dette* derives in turn from the Latin *debitum*, I retort: Why should we put a *b* in it when the French do not? Why should we be more Latin than the French? This *b* was inserted in *debt* by a sixteenth-century grammarian anxious to show off his pretended knowledge.

If I were to say we should respell the Lord's prayer in the form: "Forgiv us our dets as we forgiv our deterz," some people would accuse me almost of blasphemy. If I were to advocate writing: "Giv us our daily *bred*" there might be cries of horror. But the Lord's prayer was not used in the present written form of the English language. If you wish to see how it was written in the early sixteenth century, here is the passage from Mathew in the great Coverdale Bible of 1535:

"O oure father which art in heaven, halowed be thy name, thy kyngdome come, thy wyll be fulfilled vpon earth as it is in heaven. Geue vs this daye oure dayly bred. And forgeue vs oure *dettes* as we also forgeue oure *dettors*."

It is clear therefore that I have the authority of Holy Writ if I declare that we should spell *debt* without a *b*; should spell *bred* instead of *bread*. And in the Wycliffe Bible of 1360, we find *leed(e)* instead of *lead*; *heven* instead of *heaven*, and I might add, that Wycliffe spelled *Crist* and not *Christ*.

This bastard erudition of our present spelling is capable of such wide illustration that, at the risk of getting things out of proportion, I will proceed some steps further.

The word *reign* is of course unpronounceable and never was pronounced. The *g* was imported to demonstrate the knowledge of a sixteenth century grammarian who knew that it is from the Latin word *regnare*. Every time we write our National Anthem we pay that tribute to Caesar. It happens that this spelling serves to distinguish the word from *rain*, so for the moment we will let it be. But we have the word *foren*, an old word derived from the Latin *foris*, meaning abroad or out of doors. Ha! cried the sixteenth century grammarian: "*Foren*? That is far too simple. Our children might learn it too easily. Clearly *foren* means territory over which our King does not reign; so it shall be spelled *foreign*." Then we have the old word *soveran*, derived from the Latin *soveranus*, meaning the boss or fuehrer of the day, spelled *soveran* by Milton. But the grammarian cried: "*Soveran*? Too easy. Obviously, a *soveran* is one who reigns over us, so it shall be spelled *sovereign*." Was there ever such mumbo-jumbo?

The word *delite* (Latin *delitium*) is spelled *delight* because the grammarian confused it with *light* (compare the German *licht*). But indeed these *gh*'s are sprinkled meaninglessly in the language. *Haughty* should be *hauty* - it is French, like *hauteur*. Look at *sprightly*. We have a word *sprite* which is a contraction of *spirit*. But when we want to describe a spirited fellow like a *sprite*, we do not spell it *spritely*, but *sprightly*. 'Why? *Arraign* never had a *g* till a fool put it in there. It is an old word *arraisner*. The *c* is kept in *scissors* to demonstrate the great wisdom of a grammarian who relates it to the Latin word *scindere* (which they pronounced *skindarey*). Thereafter he sprinkled *c*'s liberally to put a cutting edge on *scythe*, which in Anglo-Saxon is *sythe*, and to sharpen *scimitar*. The word *scent* is originally *sent*, since it is nothing more than one of the senses - the sense of smell. The only explanation I can offer is that the grammarian, living before the days of plumbing, had his

nostrils assailed by a *sent* which he could cut with a *scythe* or *scimitar*, or a pair of *scissors*, so he put a cutting edge on *sent* as well by spelling it *scent*.

There is misspelling in a whole range of words which have a *t* in Latin. The Latin *auctor* was respelled *author*, although it was pronounced *autor*, as it still is in Ireland. Bad spelling has of course frequently caused an alteration in pronunciation due to our bookish habits.

But to return to the spelling of Greek and Latin *t* as *th*; that is why you get *th* in *Thomas* but never in *Tom*. Some inept people have been misled to pronounce the *th* in *Anthony*, which is from *Antonius*, but nobody writes or pronounces it short as anything but *Tony*. In the same way *Tamesis* became *Thames*, but nobody mispronounces it, 'What, nobody?' I am told that, in Connecticut there is a River Thames, named in honour of ours, which the good people of Connecticut pronounce as they spell, with a *th* as in *thick*, and to rhyme with *flames*. You see pronunciation sometimes tries to follow the spelling.

A whole booklet could be made of these absurdities. There never should be an *s* in *island*, it is a confusion with the *s* in *isle*, which is justified as deriving from the Latin *insula*; if so, why not spell it *insle*? Most people do not realize how deep these blunders go. And many people think that our spelling chaos is a mere matter of such grotesqueries as *enough*, *plough*, *though*, *thought*, etc. But these crazy spellings are not the most troublesome. What causes trouble is the ingrained duplicity and confusion in our spelling. Not a letter can be trusted, as you can see from pairs of words, the first that come in my mind by way of illustration:

love, move; move, rove; anger, danger; lie, chief; chief, leaf; leaf, head; head, red; nasty, hasty; ague, rogue; toe, shoe; eight, height; account, accent; liar, familiar; grower, flower; rally, ally; brilliant, defiant; though, thought; should, shoulder; do, no; know, now; knowledge, college; and on through the night, knight, nite.

In the face of thousands of such examples, I lose patience with those who blatantly say that spelling never gave them a moment's thought. This literary litter in our heads is the product of months and years of concentration. Any spelling book gives you 5000 words commonly mis-spelt. Yet there is no need for a spelling book in Italy. There is no spelling book in Germany. Who can tell how far these people are advancing at our expense because of their freedom from such complications in days when the written word assumes ever greater importance? The foreigners cannot shake off their chains of grammar, which retards them, but which we are fortunately freed. No structural change occurs nowadays in the grammar of a language. But we who are so largely free of grammatical complications can easily shake off the spelling chains which afflict us. It is perfectly feasible because, if for no other reason, it was done at one time or another in Germany, France, Holland, Sweden and Norway. Spain established the Academy which purified its spelling a century and a half ago. Most modern countries inherited jumbles and blunders almost as bad as ours, but they have removed the litter.

It is this spelling problem which is at the root of much distrust of our present educational methods. The question did not really matter until seventy years ago when education became compulsory and universal. Until that era there were two classes in the nation and the distinction between them was accepted as an act of God. There was the literate class and the illiterate class. Do you imagine that the sailors of Nelson were troubled with this spelling problem? No. Or the soldiers of Wellington? No. For the simple reason that they were never subjected to compulsory education. This written form of the English language, grotesque as it is, served well enough when English literature was an affair of the literati and not of the common people, an affair of the polite salon of the 18th century, the circle of Dr. Johnson. In fact, *for them*, this spelling had a *great advantage*. It kept the working man and the working boy in the humble station to which God had called him. It stopped

the working boy from setting his dirty boot on their carpet. But all this was changed last century when the educational reformers got in their work.

I think the greatest of them all was Isaac Pitman. When he started his active career about 1850 he found the poor utterly illiterate and steeped in ignorance. Education then, says Trevelyan, was at a lower ebb than at any time in England since the reign of King Alfred. He saw at once that the difficulty of teaching them lay in the absurd written form of the language. So at the age of 25 as an educational reformer he invented a system of phonetic writing which is now called shorthand. It happens to be a speedy system. But that is partly accidental. What Pitman set out to do was to provide a *logical and easily written form for the English language* which would make *its written form as simple as its spoken form*, and spread the benefits of reading and culture through all the masses. His whole long life was devoted to education and to the simplification of the written language. When his shorthand did not catch on universally, he turned to the modification of the existing Roman alphabet and laboured all his life courageously and honestly in the simplification of English writing as the quickest and best method of abolishing illiteracy. But all his ideas were too complicated for general use. He spent forty years inventing new letters of the alphabet. At the close of his life he confessed that he had worked on wrong lines and that reformers should proceed on *the basis of the existing alphabet*. Now in only recent days a combination of these letters has been recommended by scholars, which to my mind fills the bill and enables this great reform to begin.

Because great and important this reform will be. Have no doubt of that: It is the necessary complement of the decision taken in 1870 to make education universal and compulsory. Indeed, Pitman was right. Reform of the written language was really a condition precedent to the adoption of universal education. We have no right to inflict on all our children, of all classes and environments and backgrounds. an elaborate system of alphabetic notation developed in semi-feudal times, corrupted by successive generations of blundering printers and exhibitionist pedants, and only to be acquired in part - never completely - by a labour comparable with that to which Chinese mandarins devote some twenty years of their lives.

So when our grandfathers in 1870 decreed that education should be universal and when the Tory Government in 1892 decided that it should be free, they did not open the door to the working boy. They only unlocked the door. It is still a heavy door and annually even in peace-time, when the routine of schooling is not disturbed by bombs and requisitioning of school property, many scores of thousands of our children never really pass through that door because it is jammed by the spelling-book of Dr. Johnson.

It is convenient rather than accurate to blame the celebrated doctor. In truth the spellings had become stereotyped or frozen in the hundred years preceding the publication of his dictionary. But that dictionary was until the middle of last century accepted as canon law, inviolable, sacred, unerring and unalterable, to a degree which is a high tribute to the Great Bear's force of character if it be but little recommendation of his or his admirers' sense of exact scholarship. It was Johnson who explained that *sirloin* is so called because a joint was knighted by an English king in good humour. But we know that *sirloin* is merely French *surlogne* - the upper part of the loin. In his dictionary he defined the pastern (which is the instep) as the knee of a horse; when questioned by a doubting lady how he came to do that, he replied: "Ignorance, madam, pure ignorance. So we find him respelling the word *ake* as *ache*, believing it to be from the Greek word *achos*; whereas it is Anglo-Saxon, and properly spelled with a *k* - a spelling which he denounced as primitive and only adopted by versifiers for the sake of rhyme.

The truth, of course, is that Johnson was widely read in the classics but that he and all other scholars until the middle of last century *were in utter ignorance of the Anglo-Saxon and Old English*

manuscripts mouldering in the University libraries, so ignorant that the childish fabrications of Thomas Chatterton imposed on them all. But his dictionary had immense weight in maintaining the style of spelling which he accepted for the most part without question and indeed with positive approval. His dictionary was the basis of elementary teaching throughout last century. An abridgement of it was the handbook of the spelling-bees which sprang up in the eighties and nineties to enable the illiterate parents to keep pace with the newfangled system under which all their children without exception were compelled at school to learn their letters.

When I first wrote ten years ago on this subject of spelling, I thought I had made an irritating gibe by saying that the English and the Chinese alone of all the nations, with the partial exception of the French, write for the eye and not for the ear. I had pictured the English stung to action at being likened to the Chinese. Perhaps I under estimated the value of the work which the Chinese are performing, under their feudal war-lords, in the cause of democracy. Possibly I misjudged my fellow countrymen in thinking that they would seek to alter a habit which, carried out to a greater degree, has perpetuated deeper ignorance in the vast territories of the former Tartar Dynasties. Whatever be the reason, when I advocated that we should cease to write like Chinamen, it was regarded as a joke, and some of my friends in Fleet Street doubted my intelligence.

But now I find it is no jest at all. It is an accepted fact that we alone of all Western peoples conform to the Chinese practice of writing word-pictures instead of sound-images. The difference is that whereas it takes a Chinese student seven years to learn the mere rudiments of his spelling - thus securing a *vested interest* in literacy - it takes our children eighteen months or two years to acquire an imperfect working knowledge of an art which could easily be achieved in three months if it were on a systematic basis. The further difference is that whereas the Chinaman draws a different picture for almost every word, we are content to represent the forty sounds of the English language by a variation of only 600 combinations of letters. So we have not gone quite all the way with the Chinese, although we have followed them faithfully some distance along the path of literary exclusiveness. The proof of this resemblance will be found in a remarkable passage of Dr. Johnson's *Tour of the Western Islands*. In the course of that journey, he arrived in Edinburgh and took occasion to visit a "philosophical curiosity which no other city has to show." This was a school for the deaf and dumb kept by Mr. Braidwood, a pioneer in this branch of welfare work. Dr. Johnson observes:

"It will readily be supposed by those that consider this subject, that Mr. Braidwood's scholars spell accurately. Orthography is vitiated, among such as learn first to speak and then to write, by imperfect notions of the relation between letters and vocal utterances. But to those students *every character is of equal* importance. For letters are to them not symbols of names but of things. When they write *they do not represent a sound but delineate a form.*"

There you have the root of the whole matter. "The deaf and dumb spell English accurately because when they write, they do not represent a sound."

With this passage the learned doctor concludes his account of his tour. I may picture him pondering at that conclusion, raising the mighty pen to add a final note, but shrinking from straining too far the allegiance of his devoted readers, "Dare I?" we may imagine him soliloquising. "My conscience urges me forward; my good sense holds me back." For the conclusion which I imagine that he itched to pen was simply this: "For the easy and proper assimilation of the words in my Dictionary, it would be advantageous for the whole nation to become deaf and dumb."

For my part, I bemoan the fact that events so frequently do not occur in their proper order or relationship. The Germans have burned the house in London in which Dr. Johnson compiled his dictionary. Now I would keep the house as a monument to that robust character and trenchant

writer; but I would burn his Dictionary.

It is surely a very odd thing that amid the vast changes of life and opinion which have occurred since the Doctor's day, this question of the written language has never once been the subject of Government inquiry. Odd surely that, amid so much that is shifting, this spelling rock and obstruction should alone remain unmoved and immutable. It is futile to calculate the time and money which this petrified practice has consumed. If a million children attend our schools, then in learning to spell in every decade a million children waste a million years. Yet see what has happened in the interim. When Johnson's biographer Boswell was once in London, he received word that his wife was dying at Auchinleck in Ayrshire. He went home with his sons post-haste. That is to say, he took a light coach and changed to fresh horses every ten or fifteen miles from London to Auchinleck. He accomplished the journey in 64 and $\frac{1}{4}$ hours. That may be taken as a record speed in the 18th century for a journey which was performed in the reverse direction just before the war in one hour by the pilot of a Hurricane. With all this enormous change and development of communication, is it not odd that the written language - the vehicle of intellectual communication - should alone undergo no change and should not even once be subjected to the scrutiny of a Government inquiry?

Is it not odd that we have made no inquiry to see if our spelling cannot be brought more into conformity with modern requirements ever since the days of Dr. Johnson who petrified and stereotyped the spelling and who most vigorously in the pages of Boswell defends the system under which the House of Commons was then hand-picked by the House of Lords?

Now I have in this booklet more elbow-room to develop and to illustrate this strenuous argument than I had in the pamphlet called "Fulmination" which I circulated to many Members of Parliament, public officials and journalists last November. But it must be understood that the point of departure of this booklet and of that pamphlet are one and the same, namely that the disruption of a large part of our elementary schooling by the activities of the war, if we do not systematize the spelling of our language, must result either in the most illiterate generation or - if at the end of the war we drop other studies to concentrate on spelling - the most generally ignorant generation of school children which we have seen since the universal spelling-book was instituted in the year 1870. A reform necessary and desirable in itself is rendered urgent and inevitable by the compelling march of events, if we are to do our best by the new generation. This point of view has proved a happy venture in placing at my disposal a novel cross-section of political opinion on this question.

Several members of both parties have written me plain letters of support and encouragement. From Lord Beaverbrook most generous of men, this:

"My dear Bill,

"You and I come from a reforming race. We are never content to leave the shortcomings of our neighbors alone. Up into our pulpits we climb in our black Genevan gowns and bang the Bible for righteousness' sake. That is why we are so useful in an easy-going community. Now with this reform I ought to be most sympathetic. I should be your first disciple. I cannot spell at all. I ask (Malcom) Thomson to tell me. Thomson cannot spell, either. And so I have anticipated you. I have a simplified spelling of my own. This propaganda of yours is most effective. It will certainly make an impression. And I admire the earnestness and energy with which you pursue your objective. You deserve success. And, I hope you get what you deserve."

Now if success should not be achieved, what I foresee is a complete breakdown of our educational system. For this reason, that in many parts of the country the children are either not learning or are not being taught to spell any more. Now that puts me in a dilemma in my argument, because what

I have been saying is that we spend needlessly in each decade a twelve months' expenditure on education, say £120,000,000, on the teaching of spelling. But if spelling is not taught, then just the same we spend £120,000,000 a year and the result is widespread illiteracy. Numbers of my correspondents assure me that teachers no longer spend any time on this subject. This confirms the view that spelling is rapidly deteriorating, except among literary hacks (among whom Johnson included the compilers of dictionaries), shorthand typists, and compositors, for all of whom spelling is a stock in trade. One explanation is offered to me by Mr. Buchan, a *Daily Express* compositor, who points out that infants are taught today to read and write by phonetic sounds. On this phonetic basis of reading our board of Education then imposes a non-phonetic style of spelling. Clearly Dr. Johnson was more logical than the Board of Education in his enthusiasm for the orthographic proficiency of the deaf and dumb.

In confirmation of the fact of deterioration, I quote a letter from Mr. Malcolm McCorquodale, the Conservative Member, director of one of the largest printing firms in the country: "I assert as a printer that the modern highly educated 15 year-old apprentice compositor (and we take only the best) spells as badly as if not worse than his father did when he came into the trade at ten or twelve years old 30 years ago. So I wish you well with your campaign."

How long are we going to spend public money in vast sums for such poor results? All I will add on this educational aspect is a comment from Mr. B. J. Tams, head of the Engineering Department L.C.C. Paddington Technical Inst. that *he could teach mechanical science twice as fast to apprentices if they could properly read and write in their own language*. I do not blame the boys entirely. Certainly they could learn better if they applied themselves. All credit to those who study hard and succeed. But for the most part they do not learn. It is too difficult. We cannot change the boys; but we can change the spelling, and so we should, since our effort must be to put no unnecessary obstruction in the way of learning, to smooth the path and make easy the road. Nor do I think any Member of Parliament, responsible for our vast outlay on education, could hear with any satisfaction the recent appeal of Sir Archibald Sinclair for recruits to his Air Cadet Corps: "It does not matter if you can't do sums or write English."

From Mr. Amery I received this note: "Everything except habit is in favour of simplified spelling, and some day perhaps even habit will be overcome. Meanwhile I am not sure that for foreigners, Basic English is not even more immediately helpful, though of course the two could be combined."

Mr. Amery's words go to the root of the matter. Habit; that is the stumbling block; and I am bound to admit that I see no partial cure which would break the habit gently. The problem does not admit of a partial solution, since to respell any word requires a systematic basis and the adoption of system *in part* is a self-contradiction. The appearance of a few new and more logical spellings is merely an eyesore in the morass of our unsystematic style.

A number of people think that our dialects would cause a difficulty. I think that is a mistaken view. The existence of dialects does not prevent agreement on the present style of writing. Indeed, the only compelling necessity for a standardized spelling at all is fundamentally the need to get things printed - to supply a standardized Author's and Printer's Guide. Otherwise, there would be chaos in the composing rooms. If we were aiming at a phonetic spelling of the language in the scientific sense, with a complete notation for every sound, then you would get dialectic difficulties. But except for one difficulty which I foresee with Scotsmen in the representation of the vowel preceding the letter *r*, I predict no dialectic difficulty at all, and none that cannot be surmounted in a scheme which proposes only a reasonable approximation of the sound to the spelling.

While I feel competent to destroy any of the arguments which these critics have advanced against me, I have long had doubts over one difficulty which none of them has raised. This is the question

of homonyms; that is to say, words which in the new spelling would be spelled alike, although today they have different meanings for different spellings. Words of the type: would-wood, wear-ware, plain-plane, and so forth. I calculate that there are 300 pairs of words of that nature in which the distinction would vanish. The spelling reformers dismiss the question with the statement that the context will always make the meaning clear. And it is easy to see that this would be true when the two words are different parts of speech, as a noun and verb or adverb, such as the case of would-wood. But we have an instinctive knowledge of these differences and we guard against confusion. *Bay* is half a dozen different words. Suppose we write: "I hear the dog barking at the chestnut coloured horse beside the laurel-tree on the edge of the inlet of the sea." In theory we might write: "I hear the dog baying at the bay beside the bay on the edge of the bay." But we instinctively avoid that sort of thing. Sometime these homonyms have precisely opposite meanings. You may be sailing on a ship and remark to a fellow passenger: "This ship is fast." Then you run on a sandbank and you say: "This ship is fast." *Fast* can mean either speedy or stationary, and the only clue to your meaning would seem to be the expression on your face. But instinctively for *fast* in the sense of stationary, what you would say would be: *stuck fast* or *fast aground*.

If we add to the number of homophones people will be required to write with a little more care. But good writing should be a reflection of good speech; and since none of these written distinctions is conveyed in speech, we shall get on very well with a few more of them. However, at the same time there will be another larger group of words called homographs because they are spelt the same but pronounced differently, in which the meaning will then become clear. These homographs such as *read*, pronounced both *reed* and *red*, will be spelt differently - as they are pronounced. So the advantages of having the distinction in the latter will far outweigh the loss of distinction in the former.

At present if the child asked "Why must I write c-o-u-g-h for k-o-f?" the teacher's only reply is: "Learn it, child, and don't ask embarrassing questions; it is the English language." *The damage done to the child's mind*, the destruction of its powers of reasoning and its hope of any sensible answers to such questions, is something we cannot calculate but must deeply deplore. And, if the child were told to put a *w* in *two* and asked: "Why, when I do not pronounce it?" The teacher replies: "Because that is a word which you might confuse with *too*, and for numbers, we must have separate symbols. You sound the *w* in *twin* and in *twice*; your ancestors used to sound it in *two* also; and in Scotland to this day you hear it so pronounced." Do you imagine the child is satisfied?

Now you may recall that I began by giving you four topics which I described as beads, and that I went on to say I would find a thread on which to string them. Well, there you have the thread - *the language*, the value of the spoken language, *its immense impetus to British achievement*, the curse of the written language, *its immense handicap on the natural talents of our people*. What I ask is that you should provide our simply spoken language with a simply written form. So now very briefly, let me string my beads on that thread.

First, the **United Nation**. Adopt a simply written form of the language and you will abolish illiteracy almost overnight. You cannot do this in any other country because of the grammatical complications of the languages. But you can do it here. Any child who is not perfect in reading and writing at the age of ten under a simplified spelling system would be either mentally deficient or totally unsuited for a literary education. Who will deny that if you do this you will at once make an immense contribution to the unity and sense of community of the nation? My spelling-book tells me in its introduction that I will spell much more easily if I know Greek, Latin, and French. Three more languages to learn in order to know how to spell one language. It ought to add if I also know the blunders which our ignorant grammarians made in their reading of these languages and transcribing into English.

If a boy stays in public school or a secondary school until he is 17 or 18 he will be well versed in spelling and will probably have some knowledge of these other languages. But if a boy leaves school at 14 for the mine or the workshop, what chance has he of retaining the spelling he learned, unsupported in his case with a knowledge of foreign languages? What right have we to ask of the vast mass of the young people of this country, who will never learn a word of any foreign language, that they should write a form of their own native language which requires a knowledge of others? This is what divides the nation into classes, more than money or birth by itself; literacy and illiteracy, the distinction between the letter-free and the letter-bound. This is what results in hardly ever seeing a working man in the House of Commons. That may be all very well. But with a proper spelling, in a clever country like ours and with a grammatically simple language like ours, it should be perfectly feasible for a man to toil at the coal face, and never to see pen or paper for months, and yet immediately and without difficulty set pen to paper and read and write. That is what I want to see. When that is here you will get a new basis of unity and understanding in the nation. That is how you will abolish the last of the class barriers, this illiteracy, which dates really from the exclusive era of the 18th century when such a doctrine as I am enunciating now would have had me clapped in jail right away as a dangerous revolutionary who suggested that Jack should be as good as his master. I want Jack to be given the opportunity to show he is as good as his master provided he has the stuff in him. I don't want Jack any more to be manacled with this letter-handicap or tripped up with this letter-impediment. It is only in modern times that the written language has assumed such importance in comparison with the spoken language, and in modern times we should give it a modern streamlined dress. You do not think it a virtue in a modern Ford motorcar that it should show in its design the rudiments of the original model of 1904. Why then should we preserve in the vivid living English language written memorials to the dead languages of the Greeks and the Romans? That is the Stonehenge Age of communication. Let's have a bit of modern streamlining in our written language. Let us have, not the rudiments of the earliest model or the model-T, but a new model ABC.

So much for that bead on the string. Consider now the next, **The Future of our Foreign Trade**. What enormous advantages we are rejecting in this matter of language. All over the world foreigners in normal times are stretching out their hands to us and we are rejecting their advances. I do not speak of the last ten years as normal, and of course in the modern age the restriction which every Government in self-defence places on the trade of its nationals prevents trade following the flag or the language as simply as it once did, But none would deny that a widespread knowledge abroad of our English speech would tend vigorously to the assimilation of British ideas of life, and would establish free of cost countless ambassadors of goodwill and commercial travellers of understanding. Here is a quotation which will amaze you:

"The idea of establishing an international language which is to be commonly known and used, by the side of the native tongues is coming more and more to the front. It cannot be denied that such a language would be highly profitable to the whole human race. What tends to separate nations more than anything else is the ignorance of one another, which fosters suspicion, fear, hatred - and war. For more than a hundred years there has been no war between Britain and the United States. The common language has been the guardian of peace... No language has a better claim than English, which is spoken by more than 200,000,000 people and is the administrative language of 500,000,000. It is already the chief language of the sea and commerce. It is taught in practically all the secondary schools in most civilized countries, and for this reason, is already the common property of the whole world ... For a simplicity of grammar and a cosmopolitan vocabulary, English has no rival. It is the easiest language for the greatest number of people ... But English is handicapped by its antiquated spelling, which is rather *a disguise than a guide to the pronunciation*."

These are not the words of an Englishman but of a Swede, Prof. R. E. Zachrisson, who ten years

ago carried out the most striking series of experiments with a simplified form of the written English language which he called *Anglic*. No person to whom English is the native tongue ever did more for it than did this Swede. To his students at the University of Upsala he gave a course of 20 lessons of 1½ hours each in his simply spelled English. The following reports appeared in the Swedish newspapers: "All the pupils had gained a knowledge of English which was actually startling to a hearer who knew what a short time they had been learning the language." "The proficiency of the pupils was amazing. Their pronunciation was excellent, the translations brilliant, and they were able to converse without any difficulty with their teacher." "To be able after 20 lessons to read, pronounce, translate and converse in English with considerable fluency - the result was indeed amazing."

It may be, if the professor had been allowed to continue his labours in peace, we should now be hearing that Swedish children learn *faster than our own to read and write the English language*. But Prof. Zachrisson died, leaving however to all students of English not only the memory of his enthusiasm but a scholarly plan to which the new proposals in England are on some points indebted. But we should remember that it was our Prof. Daniel Jones, of London University, who advised and instructed Prof. Zachrisson, and I may add that anyone turning to page 312 of the *Transactions of the Philological Society* for the year 1881 will see there three-quarters of the system which became *Anglic*. But this illustration from Sweden is the best demonstration I could want to prove to ourselves that the foreign interest in English is very great and that to foreigners, a reformed spelling would be quite valuable.

The Machine of Imperial Government. English being the language of administration through India and the far-flung many-tongued colonies, I cannot think that you, Mr. Member of Parliament, you who are the real ruler and dispenser of fate in these vast territories, will for ever tolerate the affliction of your subjects (under the King) in the matter of spelling the language of their rulers. The place of English in Colonial and Indian schools is a subject on which educationists hold strong and divergent views. But all agree that the vernaculars must have their place and all admit to the value of a knowledge of English. A decisive feature common to the whole Empire is the overwhelming desire of these native fellow-subjects to learn the English language.

In the African Colonies the policy is now becoming clearly defined and is thus described by Lord Hailey in his *African Survey* -

"The vernacular must be used in the first stages of elementary education. English is regarded as a necessity, in all intermediate, secondary and technical schools, and as it is a necessity in these, its inculcation must commence in the higher standards of the elementary schools... An important factor is the desire of the Africans themselves to learn English, which desire is in many cases the incentive to seek education. A knowledge of English is of commercial value. Again, there is the natural desire of the African to learn a language which is that of his rulers. The scarcity of general literature in the vernaculars is not without its influence in this direction among a people to whom reading is a new-found pleasure." (page 1257).

Our scholars labour incessantly to provide a phonetic script for the native vernaculars of Africa. The job has been done completely for Swahili, the major East African dialect. There is no spelling-book in Swahili. The symbols used to write that language have their plain and pre-determined sounds. The only trouble is that when the native, by the white man's magic, has learned to read Swahili, he finds that he has no literature in it worth reading. It is surely odd that the white man should perform for the negro and for the native language this magic which he declines to work for his own children and for his own language. Moreover, the time comes when the native demands to be taught not Swahili but English. "He has a desire to learn the language of his rulers." Picture him at his task.

He is setting out to learn a foreign language and the spelling-book that (English) language contains a list of 5000 words commonly misspelt by Englishmen who use it every day of their lives. If they can't learn to spell English what a prodigious job it must appear to the native. Further, the introduction to the English spelling-book lays down that nothing but *prolonged memory work* will enable the Englishman to spell his own language, but that a knowledge of Greek, Latin and French will to a considerable degree, reduce that labour. It is obvious, for an example, that a good knowledge of Latin will save you slipping on "acquit" and "aquatic," just as a knowledge of both Greek and Latin will keep you correct on say, "extra" and "ecstasy." Therefore it follows that when a native African sets out to learn to read and write the language of his rulers, he has to acquire an art in which his rulers are apt to slip up 5000 times and in which a prior knowledge of Greek, Latin, and French is said to be an asset.

Is it fair, Mr. ruling Member of Parliament? Is that the best you can do in the discharge of your duties to these subjects? Is that the way to treat the piccaninnies of the Banyoro and the Banyankole? I have read in a Colonial Office publication that at the present rate of progress of education in Africa, illiteracy will be abolished in 600 years. No basis was provided for this interesting calculation.

Now it is not proposed that every African native should become a perfectly accomplished litterateur. On the other hand, I do not think that anyone would get up in the House of Commons nowadays and declare that education is bad for the African native. That being granted, the authorities lay down that English should begin in the elementary classes along with the vernacular and that English is a necessity in all further education. So we proceed to try to educate them in the English language. I have not been able to collect statistics of the result in relation to our own colonies in Africa. But I have before me the report of the former inspector of negro schools in the Union of South Africa. He is Mr. C. T. Loram, a South African, now Prof. of Education at Yale Univ., U.S.A., and his book, *The Education of the South African Native* (Longmans, Green & Co.), is an authoritative work, although it is 20 years old. In the spelling examination for these negro children only 50% was required for a pass. In Standard One out of 395 children, 162 were failed; in Standard Two out of 254 children, 109 were failed; in Standard Three out of 257 children, 135 were failed; and so on through all the standards of the schools which he surveys. Mr. Loram laments with some bitterness "the very heavy mortality caused by English spelling," and he appeals for a more enlightened system of examinations. But why not a more enlightened system of spelling? It is true to say that the methods of examination may be more enlightened today and that, as I am also told by correspondents in England, spelling is not such a fetish as it once was. That argument only means that spelling is not taught. *Why then do we perpetuate a style of spelling which is of no conceivable value unless it is taught and which proves far too difficult when it is taught?* And if this is bad for us here in England, how much *more of an obstacle* is it not to our Colonial development?

With these words I leave the Empire and look homeward.

The Education of our Children. This is the last bead on my string - the education of our children here at home in our own schools. No one will doubt that the language is here of paramount importance because the written language is at one and the same time the main subject and the chief medium of our educational system. It follows that anything we can do to simplify its acquisition will permit us to make progress in education by leaps and bounds, by geometric progression, because with systematic spelling children will attain at an earlier age mastery of an easier medium. They will therefore be spared time from needless studies and that time newly available will be spent in acquiring knowledge in an easier way.

The prospects offered by this reform really cannot be exaggerated once the cumulative benefit is

appreciated. It will be found that reform of the written language is the key to reform of the curriculum. I read an article by a well-known educationist, Mr. Scarr, pleading that more time should be given in schools to the formation of character. I say to him: "Here is your time - the time wasted in learning spelling." I read that Mr. Lockwood, the Headmaster of Gainsborough Grammar School, was anxious to improve the speech of his schoolboys. I wrote to him saying: "Simplify the written language and at once you will find time to improve speech and find a great ally in the systematic spelling as a general guide to better pronunciation." For spelling is both reading and writing - it is two of the three R's, and the foundation of all future learning.

Some people write to me saying that it is a good thing that the children are escaping school, that there is far too much book learning in schools in any case, and that country interests will do more real educational good to the children than they ever gained cooped up in a school-room. This is symptomatic of the widespread distrust of our educational methods, and it has this justification that, much of the time from which children are now playing truant would have been misspent on a barren orthography. Whereas if you systematise the written form of the language, you will open up opportunities of pleasant school-day activities; you will turn out children who are better instructed in all that they learn today and who in addition can roam the countryside on nature studies, can do a bit of gardening with a teacher of gardening or sewing with a sewing teacher, speak better, read better and regard their school days as a happy preliminary to a working life and not merely a period of isolated gloom which is often so depressing that a child's first conscious effort on leaving school is an endeavour to forget everything that he learned in it.

On this present school-time problem, I am warned by a voice of authority, high in the councils of the nation, which voice desires to remain anonymous. The voice says that the project of simplified spelling should stand or fall on its merits as a long-term project irrespective of whether or not it would be a good thing for the children now of school age. With that voice I agree. I have advocated this reform for many years before the war as essential and desirable in itself. The arguments in this little booklet illustrate how wide and universal the case can be made. But I will not therefore omit to say that in its application to our present children of school age, the case finds still another vindication in that here alone by this reform can we offer any palliative at all of the damage that has been done by fire-bomb and by bomb-fear. Here alone can you recover for this generation, as you can provide in new additional time for all other generations, at least one year of the child's school life.

And why should we not make it easier for the child? Will anyone give me any justification for putting stumbling blocks in the infant's path? Sir Patrick Dollan has called my attention to the views of Mr. Winston Churchill on this question of language. Mr. Churchill says that he would make all boys learn English and then he would let the clever boys learn Latin as an honour and Greek as a treat. But, says Mr. Churchill, "the only thing I would whip them for is not learning English. I would whip them hard for that." The purpose of this booklet is to show how the children of the world could learn rather more English with rather less whipping.

There; I have done. My four little beads are on my thread - the united nation, the foreign trade, the machine of Imperial government, the vitalising of our school curricula - all strung together on this topic of language. To complete my necklace all I want is a knot, and here at hand is just what I require. Very happy am I to rescue from illmerited obscurity a powerful demand for an inquiry to be held into this subject. Gentlemen, take the shoes from off your feet, for you are about to tread on holy ground. Hear the counsel of Mr. Gladstone:

"There is much that might be done with advantage in the reform of spelling as to the English language; but the main thing is that whatever may be proposed should be proposed with the weight of great authority to back it. The best plan if proposed without such a backing will in

my opinion only tend to promote confusion. I should advise those who are interested - and very justly interested in this question - to busy themselves not so much with considering what should be done as with considering in what way opinion can be brought to bear on the matter, and some organ framed to inquire what should be proposed. It is not in my power to offer to give any time under the present circumstances to the undertaking which I recommend, and in which I should gladly have found myself able to join."

That is what Mr. Gladstone said in 1874. The scholars did not take his advice. They perversely went ahead considering what should be done. And what immense developments of exact linguistic knowledge there have since been - all the labours of Ellis, Skeat, Sweet, Sir James Murray, (*Philological Society Dictionary*), right down to the Gilbert Murray and Daniel Jones still happily with us. Now again this movement presses for an inquiry, fortified now, for the first time in its long history, with definite and adequate proposals. As an example of the scheme of systematised spelling recommended as a basis of inquiry, I cannot deny myself the pleasure of repeating the words of W. Gladstone, and seeing whether in what Lord Elton and I would call a "utilitarian" garb there falls to be extracted one grain of sense which has been overlooked in the original. Here is what W. Gladstone says in the 1941 model -

Thaer iz much that miet be dun with advantej in the reform ov speling az to the Ingglish lauggweij; but the maen thing iz that whotever mae be propoezd shood be propoezd *with the waet ov graet authorrity to bak it*. The best plan if propoezd *without such a baking* wil in mie opinyon oenly tend to promoet konfuezhon. I shood adviez thoez huu ar interested - and very justly interested in this kweschon - to bizey themselvz not soe much with konsidering whot shood be dun az with konsidering in whot wae opinyon kan be braut to baer on the mater, and sum organ fraemd to inkwier whot shood be propoezd. It iz not in mie pouer to ofer to giv eny tiem under the prazent surkumstanzes to the undertaeking which I rekomend, and in which I shood gladly hav found mieself abl to join.

[1] *The discussion of these three topics will be omitted from the introduction for the sake of brevity.*