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the simplified spelling society

Founded 1908

Working for planned change in English spelling for the benefit of learners and users everywhere

newsletter January 1997

Editor: Allan Campbell, Publisher: Cornell Kimball

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1. This issue

This is the last issue to appear as the *Simplified Spelling Society Newsletter*. From November, the title will be *simpl spelling*. Proposed by the editor, this was accepted by the committee in March. More later.

This issue is also the last that Cornell Kimball will have a part in putting together as publisher. Originally, he undertook to help with only last December's issue, and we appreciate his decision to stay on until now. We thank him for his invaluable help in getting the Newsletter going again. He intends to pursue his work for the cause in the area outlined in his December article.

Address changes. Members are asked to notify Jean Hutchins, membership secretary, of any address changes, particularly e-mail address, even if temporary.

Deadline. The deadline for copy for the November issue is 1 October. If you have something for publication, please send it as soon as it's ready.

40 years ago in Spelling Reform history. A debate ensued on the *Letters* pages of the American National Education Association's *Journal* discussing whether their *Journal* should use *thru*, *tho* and *thoro*.



[Joe Little: see [Journal 29](#), [Newsletters](#), [Media](#)]

2. How can we outsmart Murphy?

What inhibits newspapers from simplifying more spellings?

Joe Little asks a New York copy chief.

How are U/we going to simplify English spelling? Not what, nor why, but How? How will it occur? Is it doable? What's the plan? What or who would hinder it? How can hindrances be neutralized? How can Murphy's Law be vetoed or nullified?

These were a few of the questions in the back of my head as I requested and received an interview with Len Valenti, copy chief of the *New York Daily News*.

Why the *Daily News*? For one thing, the *Daily News*' texts have simple spellings like *cigaret* and *employe*. For another, its headlines are marked by spellings like *sez* and *duz*. And the Daily News' home office is nearby!

I wanted a hundred logistical questions answered, such as: Why are U doing this? When did it start? Who started it? Are U in charge of such matters? What other simple spellings do U use? Have there been other such spellings that have fallen into disuse, and why aren't they used any more? What/who would stand in the way of additional simpler spellings?

Valenti admitted that 'teacher wrath' is the big roadblock to maintaining and expanding a paper's body of simpler spellings. The way to offset such opposition might involve well-timed supporting calls, taxes or e-mails from local teachers or parents — not to speak of school board reps, PTA chairs or teacher union heads. In other words, a thoughtful support fax, letter, e-mail or call will tend to offset the typical reactionary letter or call.

He was indifferent to the *Chicago Tribune*'s simplifications of many years ago — he also told of restoring the o to subpoena as a gift to a retiring reporter trend who had long objected to the use of the shortened word — and expressed disinterest in my tiny overtures concerning additional simplifications, but did suggest that the similarly-styled *Star Ledger* of Trenton, New Jersey, might be a place to peddle such spellings.

Tho I thanked him for the tip, I'm more thankful that he confirmed what I know but hate to admit: It is crucial that we befriend, then later use, key (often local) special interest folks to support in-use simple spelling.

Joe Little: American Literacy Council, Web: www.americanliteracy.com

<p>"Lack of money is no obstacle. Lack of an idea is an obstacle. " — Ken Hakuta</p>
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3. This 'n' that from here 'n' there

Spelling should be pensioned off

Spanish children may be dancing with joy but a proposal by Gabriel Garcia Márquez, the Nobel laureate, to do away with spelling has caused consternation in the hallowed halls of the Royal Academy of Spain.

"Spelling should be pensioned off," the author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* recommended. "It terrorizes human beings from birth."

The illustrious members of the Royal Academy, which has acted as both protector of the Spanish language and arbiter of orthographic acceptability for the past two centuries, reacted with scorn. "It would make Spanish like English, a language with no rules," Luis Goytisolo, author and academy member, complained.

Señor Garcia Márquez said a first step towards getting rid of spelling should include the banishing of two letters. He suggested axing silent H, and merging B with V, which are pronounced more or less the same.

Were his proposals to win acceptance, Spanish greetings would never be the same. *¡Hola!* would be *¡Ola!* and *¡Bienvenido!* (welcome) would be either *¡Bienbenido!* or *¡Vienvenido!*

Senor Garcia Márquez made his call before King Juan Carlos of Spain and an audience of academics at the International Congress of the Spanish Language in Mexico. His ideas pleased some Latin Americans.

"Spelling is used to oppress people," Rasúl Avila, a Mexican linguist, enthused.
— *The Times*, London.

Rate own skills highly

Most Australians believe their literacy and numeracy skills are good or excellent, with younger people rating their skills higher than other age groups rate theirs. The self-rating lowers not only with age, but also with being outside the labor force or having lower educational qualifications, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Aspects of Literacy survey, released in May.

More women than men rate their reading and writing skills as excellent, but this is reversed when rating mathematical skills. A quarter say they can converse in another language.
— *The Australian* and *Sydney Daily Telegraph*

Gifted Memberships

An idea worth emulating! Just after joining the Society last December, Tom Zurinkas, of Cologne, New Jersey, gave memberships in the Society to two others as Christmas gifts.

Posts on spelling, literacy

Chris Gledhill, a new committee member, receives many posts by e-mail from the Linguist List. A few concern orthography and literacy. If you would like the latter e-mailed to you, contact Chris.

4. At the AGM and committee

Little joy from task force

- Chris Jolly and Chris Upward had represented the Society at the Literary Task Force conference. It had been interesting and impressive, with useful contacts made, but the chair, Professor Michael Barber, had since said the task force did not see recommending spelling change as its role. A reply has been drafted.
- Gwenllian Thorstad, research director, reported she was still following up funding for a charitable trust to support her spelling research and locating suitable schools for the research.
- Allan Campbell spoke on 'Promote — or perish', urging the Society to get out among the people. The speech generated discussion, and suggestions of advertising in newspapers. A proposal from Cornell Kimball for advertising in selected educational publications was tabled.
- Jean Hutchins reported membership was 108, but only 47 were paid up for 1997.
- Committee meeting dates were set for Saturdays: 19 July, 18 October 1997, 17 January, 18 April 1998 (with AGM).
- Allan Campbell, who was appointed to the committee on what he saw as a trial basis for overseas members, asked they be able to participate more fully in electing officers or promoting ideas. Written nominations, circulated before the AGM, and proxy voting might be necessary.
- *Personal View No. 4* was held over. Chris Jolly said he hoped there would be some publication soon.

Note: Due to tight space, the credits for the Newsletter itself got squeezed out of the March issue. It is added here that Cornell Kimball was also the publisher for that issue.

[Allan Campbell: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Spell4Literacy](#)]

5. Editorial

Strength in unity

My recent visit to England and Scotland, primarily to attend the Society's AGM, was a major event for me.

I have visited there before, but I have never before in a lifetime of wanting some modernization of English spelling been in the company of a roomful of people holding a similar goal.

As I expected, there was a variety of views held on the campaign. But we all agreed on the need for change.

I, for one, am encouraged by being with like-minded people. After a mere year in the Society I have already raised my energy and activity levels for the cause in ways I would have balked at two years ago. Back then I did not know of the Society or that others were aiming for the same goal as I was.

We can all draw strength from each other. Let us offer support where we can; let us put forward our own ideas when we think they are valid and deserve discussion and backing, but be willing to drop or amend them if they prove to be unworkable; and let us be strong in our resolve to retain unity in spite of differences.

On my way home I was fortunate to visit Soweto in South Africa and see changes being made slowly as a result of one successful campaign. A leader of that struggle, Nelson Mandela, wrote in his book *Long Walk to Freedom* there are times when one's individual views must be subordinated to the cause. He's well qualified to preach that message. We should heed it.

— *Allan Campbell*

[Jean Wilkinson: see [Newsletters](#)]

6. What one member has been doing

'We try to laf, but it hurts the students'

Jean Wilkinson, US

I'm a retired teacher who has taut remedial reading and English as a second language. I've bruised my nose many times bumping into the anomalies of English orthografy, and I've watched my students take their bumps too. We try to laf them off, lafing basicly at the archaic orthografy, but I know it's hurting the students.

I'm only a grass root, with no background in etymology or much history. I've been collecting orthografical anomalies as long as I can remember. I can recall taking *though*, *through*, and *thought* by the throat and extinguishing them once and for all.

I taut 4th and 5th grades in the '50s, and remedial reading by fonics in the mid-'60s. I thot no one else was updating orthografy, so I invented an alfabet using no unvoiced consonants but using a 'whisper mark' instead, such as V, ♯ (for f). I suggested single letters for digrafs, such as θ from Greek for voiceless 'th'. Got a foneticly consistent alfabet still using only 25 or 26 letters, including diacritics such as the whisper mark. Well, it was fun....

The Oregonian newspaper — largest circulation in Oregon — published me once under *In my opinion*, using my own fonetic spelling. The editor's typist said to him afterwards: "Don't you EVER do that to me again!"

Support? I don't get any. I just do it because it has to be done. Of course, SSS publications are a delight and most helpful.

I send 50 to 80 Christmas cards a year. I send my observations in them — including a series beginning 'Daddy, how do you spell...' Four of my respondents have replied affirmatively, two negatively, and the rest have never referred to my spelling or filosofy at all.

I also write to public figures. I recently wrote to George Will on the decision that newscasters say *government*. He is an influential molder of US thot, as a writer for *Newsweek* magazine, syndicated news analyst, and regular ABC network *This Week* program interviewer.

[For a follow-up newspaper letter, see below — Ed.]

Just before President Clinton met with President Yeltsin in Finland in March I wrote to him suggesting he might take the opportunity to listen to some 8-year-old Finns read. I pointed out young Finnish readers are among the best in the world. I've heard they can correctly read words not in their vocabulary.

I also said a group of American researchers went there in the 1980s to compare their remedial readers with ours. To get enuf Finnish remedials to constitute a comparable group they had to go to an institution for the developmentally disabled!

Encouragement from Cornell Kimball has led me to reward myself with a rare visit to the library where I was introduced to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. An hour or so reading small print brot forth more papers.

I'm now collecting minimal pairs that pull the rug from under young readers. Like *recite/recipe* and *slaughter/laughter*. If readers know any more, I'd like to hear them.

7. February 28 1997 Dear Op. Ed. [Opinion and Editorials]:

Did you, too, hear on TV in January that the word "government" will henceforth be pronounced "goverment" by newscasters? Because "government" is now considered stilted. I wondered how long it would be before "February" became "Febuary." The month changed, and "Febuary" was already there!

My response was: "Will the spellings be changed to match?" I have heard nothing.

I weep. Already a good half of our words don't match their spellings to their pronunciations. English writing is well strewn with silent letters. (14th century English contained NO silent letters!)

We know the average American kid isn't keeping afloat in the international competition for achievement. Then why don't we lower our water level to that of the other nations? Their spellings are more regular. Their kids can touch bottom. Instead (I can't comprehend this) we've just made our own water deeper! If we add contemporary pronunciations without removing letters we've just made silent, we're helping drown our kids!

I myself prefer the "n" in "government." We have not yet lost the word "govern." So I'm going to continue to say "government." But I wouldn't cry over losing the first "r" in "February." It comes from "Februa," an ancient Roman festival of purification. "Februa" is long gone. Who will mourn it? "Febuary's" etymology would remain unchanged, for anyone who wants to trace it.

Dare we choose not to follow the dictionary? No problem! One of the best-kept secrets around is that the dictionary is following us!

President Clinton's inaugural address urges us to be "shapers of events, not observers." He said our enemy is inaction. He said, "Give people the tools they need to shape their lives." The English language is a very basic tool.

I've already begun to write "Febuary." Want to join me?
Most sincerely, *Jean Wilkinson*

8. Letters

Open-minded, enthusiastic, rebellious — and influential

The Society needs members. Students are ideal, open-minded, enthusiastic, rebellious, and likely to be influential in a few years.

I propose an electronic membership, open to students or anyone else at a cost of £1 a year. With this membership one would receive a few printed pamphlets and a big, bright badge with a sassy slogan — possibly 'Rite Ryt!' Students love unique badges and one like this would draw a lot of attention.

Teachers would be shocked and question the badge at first, but when the cause was explained to them they would (or ought to) welcome the participation of a student in so intellectual a pursuit. Other students would think the badge was cool, and at £1 for membership they'd join to get one.

The present \$20 fee covers mainly the cost of printing and mailing the Journal. But if we just posted the Journal on the web page, electronic members could read it there or download it and print out the articles they liked, all at no cost. The £1 a year would cover the expense of badges and pamphlets, so the new members would cost nothing.

Students are often poor, but the one thing they do have, at least in America, is nearly universal access to the Internet.

I think this plan could greatly increase our membership at practically no cost. I'd welcome comments, and proposals for even cooler badge designs.

Alan Mole, US

Carnegie's birthplace

Andrew Carnegie's birthplace is in this town, Dunfermline. Apart from a few snippets that have appeared in previous Newsletters very few people, including the locally based Carnegie Trust, seem to know about his involvement with spelling reform.

Even a letter to my local paper produced no response, and no mention is made in the two biographies I've read. If any member can help, I'd appreciate it.

George Anderson Scotland

[Carnegie was a founding member in 1906 of the Simplified Spelling Board in the US. He gave \$283,000 to the board over 14 years, but left no money in his will for spelling reform. — Ed.]

'Notional' pronunciation

My first step forward would be (with the 'American' spellings, too) single consonants after schwa, e.g., *aprove, apear, assess, assist, atack, efect, abbreviate*, etc.

If that's not enuf *then break, great, steak, woud, coud, shoud, or wuod, cuod, shuod, guod, buok*; or single final consonant: *spel, wil, shal, dol, hul* (unless rounding then: *fall, roll, pull*).

In *Lango* (Language ov English Origin), Tony Alexander and I are exploring other features of English as a world language, such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. We have examined the idea of 'notional' pronunciation, ie, as a model for spellings which are neutral between speech communities.

Robert Craig, England

'The future common language of humanity'

I teach English in a university in central Java and have only become interested in spelling reform during the past two years.

It is true that spelling reform will help those who are lower achievers in school, and hence to an extent in society, to do better, but this is not the major reason for reform. I have slowly been coming to understand just how vast a population in Asia are potential English users. Two and a half billion people here use, or could use, English as a *lingua franca* of this whole region. In Indonesia, English is extremely common, as in the Philippines, Malaysia, India, and the Pacific. Almost everyone knows at least a few words and most of the educated know a lot more and are more or less articulate in it.

Written English is valuable in getting access to world news. It is a powerful weapon against oppression here. The situation is probably comparable to that prevailing in England in the Middle

Ages with respect to Norman French, or medieval Europe general with respect to Latin. The potential is enormous, to the extent that if it is realized, then the populations of England and North America will become minorities in the English-speaking world. The only other language with this scope is Spanish but it comes second as far as I can tell in this contest, especially when one considers the widespread use of English in Europe and Africa.

I remember once sitting in a youth hostel in Norway in the early '80s with about five other travelers. We were all speaking English and I wondered why, seeing that none of them spoke it as a first language, or even in some cases very fluently. All of the others knew several languages but only English was common to all of them. That is the world situation in microcosm.

Spelling reform is about the future common language of humanity. The one thing that could scuttle this and leave us all groping for a century or more is the extraordinary irrationality of English spelling. Perhaps it is because the English-speaking world has always been able to export its dissidents and has never had to undergo the sort of political reform that other countries have experienced, nor cognate spelling reform.

My students here have to learn two languages when they study English: spoken English (difficult enuf when one's base language uses continental vowels, for instance) and written English, and then they have somehow to correlate the two. Not a happy situation. I hope to start a course next semester using simplified spelling as a bridge between these systems. If it takes, it should be a boon.

(Dr) Peter Gilet, Indonesia

Homographs and homophones could be a problem

Why the fuss in SSS publications about *donut*? This spelling implies that *dough* will be spelled *do*, a homograph of the present verb *do*.

I think we should avoid homographs between present and reformed spellings. Reason: Not everybody will be able to, or care to, adopt the new spelling. I have noticed this in Portugal and France when they reformed spellings.

The old and the new systems must run side by side. In reformed spelling *do* could become *doo*, but I have known an American who suggested this spelling for *due*. British *do* and American *due* are homophones.

English has a larger number of homophones than European languages that have reformed. This will create problems if we base reform on pronunciation. This is why I have suggested reform, to begin with, shall be based on the idea of making reading more consistent. The usual reform idea is to make writing more consistent. The reform for reading will thus keep more than one way of spelling the same sounds as we now have, but will alter as in the case of *are/ care* or *give/ hive*, etc, where the spelling is misleading.

Harry Cookson, Portugal

We welcome letters

Letters are welcome. Please keep them as short as possible: we prefer you, rather than we, decide what is important. If possible, submit by e-mail, but normal post is acceptable.

Letters will be edited to conform to Newsletter spelling style except where other spelling is pertinent.

Allan Campbell, New Zealand

[Cornell Kimball: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

9. One person's search for spelling reform organizations Cornell Kimball, US

In the March Newsletter, Steve Bett noted how much easier it has been to find spelling-related information via the World Wide Web since 1995. This article recounts a search for reform groups using a series of other means.

I began looking for organizations promoting spelling reform about three years ago. Had I started today, I would've used a search engine. As it was I didn't have a computer then (and as noted, the Web was not as easily searchable), and the steps I took began in library aisles.

I had known for a number of years about the foundings of the Simplified Spelling Board and the Simplified Spelling Society, and about the breadth of their campaigns in the early decades of this century. However, I knew nothing of current spelling reform activities.

In mid-1994, I began researching this subject further, navigating the shelves of libraries. Again, the items that I found only mentioned the SSS in the early 20th century.

In one book, *Death By Spelling* by David Grambs (Harper & Row, 1989, New York), the author named a couple of groups promoting spelling reform in the United States. One was the Typographic Council for Spelling Reform. There was no mention of what city they were in; I tried telephone directories for every boro in New York City and every district in Washington, D.C., but found nothing.

The other organization that Grambs mentioned was Better Education thru Simplified Spelling. And for this group, he noted what city they were in: Detroit.

I got the Detroit phone book on microfiche, and found an address and phone number for Better Education thru Simplified Spelling (BEtSS). I sent a letter to that address, but it was returned and rubber-stamped 'Insufficient Address'.

The phone directory listed only street addresses, as is common, but not suite numbers, etc. And as it turned out, the building that BEtSS was in had more than 25 floors.

I called the telephone number, but all I got was a series of high-pitched electronic noises. I figured perhaps I had reached a fax machine, so I faxed a note to that phone number. That did the trick, and I was then in touch with BEtSS.

Around the middle of 1995, I was perusing the Oxford Companion to the English Language, and learned about present-day activities of the SSS. (Up to that point, I had known only of the early-century work.)

I located a book which listed British organizations and societies and it noted a Simplified Spelling Society, giving an address of in London. I sent a letter to that address in August, but never heard anything.

Later that year, I bought David Crystal's *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, which has a information. One section in the back has addresses of several language, related groups, among them the SSS. The address listed there is I sent a letter to that number, and that being a good address — Bob Brown's at the time — I had now found the Simplified Spelling Society.

Because of my association with the SSS, I am now in touch with another group supporting reform, the American Literacy Council (sister organization of the SSS, and progeny of the reform Simplified Spelling Board and the affiliated Spelling Reform Association).

In turn, I have also learned about the Typographic Council for Spelling Reform, which I had earlier been unable to find. That organization operated during the 1970s and 1980s, and one of its founders and directors was Edward Rondthaler, who is now president of the American Literacy Council.

10. Officers, Trustees and Committee Members

President: Professor Don Scragg

Vice Presidents: Lord Simon of Glaisdale, Professor John Wells, Dr Valerie Yule

Chairman: Chris Jolly

Vice-Chairman, Media Relations Officer: Leo Chapman

Editor-in-Chief & Literature Secretary: Chris Upward

Membership Secretary: Mrs Jean Hutchins

Meetings Secretary: Nick Atkinson

Treasurer: Alun Bye

Research Director: Dr Gwenllian Thorstad

Committee members: Tony Burns, Paul Fletcher, Revd Nick Kerr, Allan Campbell

Dr Christopher Gledhill, Gerald Palmer

Trustees: Stanley Gibbs, Revd Nicholas Kerr, Professor Don Scragg

Next committee meeting

The next meeting of the committee is at 10.30am on Saturday 19 July. Any member is welcome to attend.

Following meeting is 18 October.

Slick slogans sought to promote the cause

Allan Campbell

Among the suggestions I made to the AGM was that we needed to get out among the people and get ourselves and the cause known.

Part of my 'presentation' was my wearing a t-shirt, of amateurish design limited by the expertise and technology I had available. Inscribed on a balloon background (to give a bit of color and shape) was the slogan: "'Enuf' is enuf, but 'enough' is too much!" Underneath was the SSS logo.

I also showed a template of the badge designed by Alan Mole (see letter).

One t-shirt, one badge, or one bumper sticker is not going to change the perception the public may have of us, but many could. And maybe those students Alan mentions in his letter would be interested in wearing such creations if they were available.

Spelling must be capable of spawning many clever slogans that could grace t-shirt, badge, or bumper. If you can think of any, let's have them. We will publish them in the Newsletter so members can use them if they like them.

Slogans should be short and pithy. The front of a t-shirt or sweater should have a shorter one than the back — following pedestrians have more time to read than those approaching you. (My slogan above may be a trifle long.)

They can exemplify improvements ("Through' is thru!") or discuss the problem in a sentence, best put in some form of improved spelling; eg, "Th problm is spelng, not spelsr"; "Wy stik with stuk spelng?"

So, put on your thinking cap and let's have your creative ideas. Sorry, no prizes other than the satisfaction of knowing you're helping to promote a truly noble cause.

[Steve Bett: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

11. Internet corner

Older services

Steve Bett, US

Let's take a quick look at some of the older Internet services: FTP, newsgroups (Usenet) and automated mailing lists (listservers).

FTP (file transfer protocol) is an old and still very useful method for sending files over 65Kb in size. E-mail servers have trouble handling files over 65Kb, the equivalent to about 12 pages of text or one large graphic. E-mail attachments often have to be compressed and encrypted. There is no guarantee that the person receiving the attachment will be able to read or view it.

FTP avoids this problem. Computers that make files available by FTP are called FTP sites or FTP servers. FTP sites are used for uploading and downloading files.

A few years ago, FTP required users to type commands like 'get' to download files and 'put' to send or upload files. Most new FTP programs have 'point and click' graphical interfaces. The latest browsers have the same capabilities.

Any browser can be used to access FTP sites. With your browser, check out what is available at the URL <http://www.freebsd.org/doc/handbook/mirrors-ftp.html>

With Netscape Gold you can also upload or send files to the FTP server. A file server is a PC with a huge hard disk to store data files and application programs. All the PCs connected or networked to the file server are called clients.

Public discussion groups (Use-net newsgroups and automated mailing lists): Usenet is all about sharing opinions, sharing expertise, and engaging in debate. These discussions are called Usenet news. Usenet news comprises thousands of discussion groups, called newsgroups. Each newsgroup has a specific topic which is usually reflected in the title, e.g., <http://alt-usage-english.org/> , <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/sci.lang> .

There are no newsgroups that are specifically spelling focused but the subject does crop up from time to time in these two groups, giving members who are on-line a chance to exercise their powers of persuasion. Usenet news is also a searchable source, which means that you can tap into a discussion that began three years ago. The Usenet info center is located at <http://www.usenet.org.uk/usenet-information.html>

Automated mailing lists provide a slightly different type of discussion group. You subscribe to a list by sending a structured e-mail message to a particular list server. A program on the server will automatically answer your mail. All the members on the list will receive copies of any mail message that is sent to the listserv.

If the mailing list is small (under 50), as in the case of the SSS mailing list, there is no need to automate. Anyone wishing to participate in the simplified spelling discussion group can send a note to me at

In any discussion group you can keep quiet (called lurking), send mail to an individual, or send mail to the group. Discussion groups are a great place to ask questions because someone on the list will have time to give you a well reasoned response.

Before you ask a question however, it is always a good idea to visit the group's FAQ. The FAQ provides answers to the frequently asked questions which would otherwise clutter up the discussion and annoy the veterans.

If you have any questions about how to connect to the Internet, obtain an e-mail account, or join a particular discussion group, please contact me.

Tale-Peace

Its awl write!

Eye have a spelling chequer
Witch came with my PC
And plainly marques fore my revue
Mistakes I mite knot sea.
I've run this poem threw it;
I'm shore your pleased too no
Its letter perfect in it's weigh:
My chequer tolled me sew.