

ARTICLE IV.

REFORMING OUR ENGLISH.

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THE first part of the London Philological Society's Dictionary has appeared, and all who speak English may take comfort in the fact. A dictionary of English, upon historical principles, which should properly show the origin, growth, changing use, and present worth of the words we use, would cost such enormous labor in the preparation, and call for so varied talents in the editing, that for many years we have looked at Littré and Grimm with more envy than hope. Even the announcement that the Philological Society had undertaken the task gave us dreams rather than solid expectations of what might come; and it needed the bodily presence of this first part, with the imprint of the Clarendon press upon it, to give the full assurance that we are at last to have something like adequate means of studying our mother tongue.

It is a satisfaction, too, to know that it is brought about by the voluntary co-operation of scholars and readers all over the world. The incomprehensible total of three millions and more of quotations and excerpts, which have been gathered as the material for the editors, is the fruit of the unpaid labor of love of a whole army of volunteer assistants. To receive these references, systematize them, and guide the labor so as to save duplication and waste of work, was the task of a corps of experts, who in their turn have reported their progress to the smaller circle of sub-editors surrounding Professor Murray, the editor-in-chief. Nothing short of self-devotion of this kind could make the enterprise a success, and the publication of this first portion of the great work may without exaggeration be said to mark an epoch in English literature.

Nothing is further from my purpose, however, than a formal review of the new dictionary. My much more modest wish is to give some reasons justifying the assertion that the work marks an epoch in the history of the language. These reasons are, as it seems to me, such as might naturally occur to all who claim to be reasonably well educated, and who have given any thought to the question — What ought to be the future historical progress of written and spoken English in view of its historical past? Every century of the past six, since modern English has taken its place among the languages of the earth, has witnessed changes in the manner both of writing and of speaking it. The proofs of these changes rise now before us with their dates attached. Others will certainly take place in the future. What shall they be? Shall we try intelligently and with common effort to control them, with some clear aim and purpose, or shall we merely drift? The epoch, as I hope, will be opened by the development of such an intelligent purpose, for the formation of which the new dictionary will at once be the stimulus, and furnish the material which is a necessary condition for its growth.

I happened to be one of the first in this country to be interested in Isaac Pitman's attempted reform of English writing and spelling, through the system of phonetics which he introduced in England in 1843. I think it was in 1845 that I procured copies of the little manuals published in New York by Andrews and Boyle, and set myself, with the enthusiasm of a new convert, to learning both the phonographic short-hand and the phonotypic method of printing. Since that day phonography has acquired a solid position as the only philosophic short-hand writing, and the only system by which anything like real verbatim reporting is successfully done. Phonotypy has maintained a dubious existence, its use being confined to a rather small circle of hopeful people who try to have faith that it will yet supersede our inconsistent and anomalous way of presenting our mother tongue to the eye. I have never lost my admiration for the beauti-

ful completeness of Pitman's system, and I believe that it has been and will continue to be a useful help in understanding the structure of our words and in learning a good and clear pronunciation of them ; but I have lost much of my youthful confidence that its scientific symmetry and beauty are a guaranty that it will one day supersede our apparently absurd and arbitrary way of spelling. Nay, as I have grown older I have (perhaps with the natural conservatism of advancing years) given more weight to the arguments in favor of preserving historical forms of words, and have seen reason to apply the proverb 'make haste slowly' to reforms which meddle seriously with the shape of a language in which a wonderful and classic literature has found expression, now some five hundred years.

My boyish impatience with incongruity and absence of system has not turned to content with the condition of things ; for I believe as firmly as then that both our spelling and our pronunciation need reform. I have rather changed in some measure my idea of the scope and aim of the reform required ; have, perhaps, made it more radical in some respects, whilst accepting a slower progress, and a longer road to reach the end.

Pitman's phonetic system may properly be treated as the type of all spelling reforms, because it proposed to make thorough work, with no halting or compromise. Ever since Queen Elizabeth's time there have been strong and sometimes very prominent and influential advocates urging the reduction of English spelling to some rule. As early as 1569 one John Harte published "An orthographie conteyning the due order and reason how to write or painte th' image of manne's voice, moste like to the life or nature." Franklin argued for a phonetic method in his telling, practical way. But Pitman by a happy combination of a correct analysis of the sounds of the language with a simple series of geometric characters, united the vocal elements with the briefest possible representation of them, making the shortest of short-hands ; and by establishing it successfully in use among the

important class of stenographers, has given his system the only real chance to live which any attempt at the spelling reform has thus far seemed to secure. His phonetic printing has had no such practical assistance, and is probably examined by few except those who have already been stirred to revolt against an orthography which has nothing *orthos* about it, but which is, at first sight, as far from any line, plummet, or rule as it well can be.

What I propose to do, may be divided thus: first to notice very briefly some of the most serious faults of our spelling and printing; next, to show how thoroughly the phonetic method would deal with these, on the assumption that there is an attainable right standard of pronunciation; then to inquire whether any such standard is now attainable, and if not, what reforms in spoken language ought to precede the fixing of the written speech.

The anomalies of our spelling are so numerous, and lie so on the surface that it is almost superfluous to give examples of them. What with silent vowels and queer combinations of consonants, it is hard to imagine any arrangement of letters too absurd to be matched by examples in actual use. I think that it was in the Introduction of Benn Pitman's manual of Phonography that the word *scissors* was taken as a specimen, and it was said that by using combinations of letters, every one of which is used in standard English to represent the sound given to it, *scissors* might be spelled *schieissourrhce*. This, however, is better fun than argument, except as it tends to stimulate one's attention by a striking group of absurdities culled from many words and united in one.

To approach the matter more soberly, let us begin with the vowels, and compare their use in English with that of other European languages. In all of these the vowels *a*, *e*, and *i*, are found to have two principal sounds each, one heard in open and the other in closed syllables, i.e. syllables which end with the vowel and those which are closed or 'stopped' by a consonant. These sounds are essentially the same in

all the continental languages, and the vowels have therefore nearly the same vocal expression in all. When we turn to the English, however, we find that the *a* when accented in an open syllable, has the sound of continental long *é*, the *e* has the sound of long *i*, and the *i* has the sound of the diphthong *ai* or *ei*. The Anglo-Saxon and the French, out of which English grew, had neither of them any such sounds for these letters, and our pronunciation is a mere corruption. It is also unnatural, and therefore unphilosophical. The long sound which is related to *a* in *mat*, is not the *a* in *mate*, but in *father*. So the *e* in *met* is not properly lengthened into the *e* in *mete*, but to the long French *e* in *tête*, or what we call long *a*. In like manner the *i* in *mit* is not the short sound of *i* in *mile*, but of the long continental *i* pronounced as our long *e*. This is easily demonstrated by experiment. If we pronounce the long sounds of English *a* and *e* and then 'stop' them by cutting off the sound, keeping the organs in the same position, we find we have a series of sounds corresponding to those of the continental letters, but not to ours. The series is really *á* — *ǎ*, *ā* — *ǣ*, *ē* — *ī*, and this alone is the natural order and connection. The diphthongs are in equal disorder. No reason can be given for representing the long sound of *ē* by *ei* in *receive*, and *ie* in *believe*, nor for using the last diphthong to represent the short sound of *i* as in *sieve*. By this I do not mean that the origin of the usage cannot be historically traced, for in many instances it can; but that no reason can be given that is based upon any *principles* of orthography. When we come to such combinations as the *ough*, with its various sounds in *plough*, *rough*, *though*, *cough*, *through*, we do not wonder that a foreigner is ready to go distracted with the arbitrary jumble of spelling and pronunciation.

In our use of the consonants we are not so singular in our inconsistencies as in regard to the vowels; for it is a natural law of all language that when used by illiterate people as a mother tongue, the consonants first suffer, and words are clipped by dropping them, or by interchanging one for

another. An illiterate people is in some respects like a baby learning to talk. It *mumbles* its words, and catches at easy resemblances, with a weakness for the easily pronounced *m*'s and *p*'s and *t*'s and *l*'s, avoiding the sounds which require a sort of expertness in managing the vocal organs. All languages give plenty of examples of this, but it is very nicely illustrated by the French, which as it is the direct lineal descendant of the colloquial Latin, shows us plainly how this infantile speech of a nation has by successive steps and under natural and regular laws given rise to a new tongue. An amusing as well as instructive example is seen in the name of the French town *Autun* which is the clipped and 'nicked' remnant of the ancient name *Augusto-dunum*, 'imperial stronghold,' reduced at last to the leading syllables of the two parts of the compound named *Au-dun*, the *d*, again, for easy utterance being softened to the *t*. The following list, however, selected from longer ones in Brachet's *Grammaire Historique*, shows how regularly the principle has been applied to the common words of the language. It might be extended indefinitely.

focus = feu	décima = dime	Angustus = août
directus = droit	pórticus = porche	confidéncia = confiance
ángelus = ange	bonitátem = bonté	delicátus = délié
bláspemum = blâme	comitátus = comté	denudátus = dénué
débitum = dette	separáre = sevrer	ligáre = lier

I must not omit to say in passing that this tendency to seek easy forms of speech relates chiefly to the consonants, and that it is consistent with a wonderful persistence in the vowel sounds, especially the accented ones. This gives a phase in the history of language quite as important in its way as this changeability which has been spoken of, and to which I shall have occasion to recur again. All I wish to do now, is to say that the peculiar history of the English tongue reveals a case of uncommon and almost violent interference with the normal methods of growth and change, and has resulted in a condition of things perhaps unprecedented among civilized nations. Our modes of spelling are,

on this account, more amorphous and unsystematic than will be found elsewhere.

Recognizing this fact, Mr. Isaac Pitman argued that nothing but thorough work could be satisfactory, and that a radical reform stood a better chance of success than partial cure, such as Webster had attempted in the early editions of his dictionary. Pitman assumed that a general agreement of authorities could be found which would settle the pronunciation of words; but even this was not necessary in his system, for he intended that the actual pronunciation of the writer should be indicated by his spelling, and printers would then, as now, follow some dictionary as their standard. The foundation of the phonetic method was a careful analysis of all the recognized sounds of the language, and the representation of each of these by a separate and invariable character. In the word *through* we have seven letters, but we have only three sounds, *th-r-δ*. Pitman demanded that but three characters should be used. The phonetic spelling of a word, therefore, would be only the slow pronunciation of it, separating the different sounds. Writing or printing it would be putting the character in the place of each sound. Of course all alphabetical writing as distinguished from hieroglyphics must be theoretically like this, but in practice it is unfortunately very far from it.

The analysis of the sounds of the language shows that we have somewhere from thirty-six to forty or forty-two elementary sounds. The estimates of the number vary if we include diphthongs as elementary sounds, or treat some of the obscurer ones as distinct. Pitman adopted thirty-eight characters, of which twelve were vowels, and two were diphthongs. This leaves twenty-four for consonants against twenty-one in our common alphabet. The difference is made by the substitution of simple characters for our digraphs *ch*, *th*, (*q*) *sh*, *ng*, and in giving a character to the sound of *zh* in vision. The letter *c* is dropped, *k* and *s* having its two sounds, though a similar character is adopted to represent the sound *ch* in *each*.

A good deal may be said for and against the adoption of characters in Pitman's phonotypy. He had the help of Mr. Ellis and some of the first philologists of the time in determining his choice; but it is an open question whether he might not as well have adopted all the common characters, distinguishing them by diacritic marks, as is done at the bottom of the pages of the dictionaries. Into this I must not go now. It has an importance of its own, from more than one standpoint.

The beauties of the system are to be seen at a glance. First, the teaching to spell with it consists in dividing a word into its component sounds, and uttering them separately. Simple as this seems, to do it readily requires both thought and practice. It is an art, but a fundamental and necessary art, in mastering the power of accurate speech. Second, the teaching to write with it consists in learning to make the characters and then representing the one sound by its one character, always and invariably. It allows no character to be made which is not sounded in the word.

No one can analyze the sounds of a word till he has learned to pronounce it accurately and clearly. To hosts of people it is a veiled question whether the first syllable of *perfect* is *per* or *pur*, and whether the *t* at its end is really uttered. The phonetic system leaves no room for such doubts. It insists that you shall solve them as you meet them, and if you are true to its principles, that you shall teach your tongue to do this at once trippingly and delicately. You must decide whether you will say *nāt-yur* or *na-cher*, and cannot postpone it, for you must write it one way or the other, and cannot take refuge in a conventional form that may mean either. This would undoubtedly be a constant stimulant to inquiry and would put educated people upon a thoroughness of discussion which has not been common. In discussing shades of sound, the vocal organs themselves would be trained in expression, the ear in discrimination, and speech would gain in distinctness of articulation and delicacy of coloring. Instead of spending the best years of school-life in mastering

the arbitrary order of letters that convey little idea of a word's sound, the child would be correcting his errors of pronunciation in the very work of analyzing the words he reads, and transfer the endless drudgery of the spelling-book to practical training of tongue and ear in a smooth and elegant utterance of pure English. I need hardly say, therefore, that the use of the phonetic system in the teaching of the language should have a hearty and unabated adhesion; but when we approach the question of substituting it for our printed speech I find myself making a distinction, and incline to the slower course which I hinted at in beginning, even at the expense of apparent inconsistency. This inclination is based upon considerations pertaining to the history of our language, and a discussion of it includes that of the last of the three questions I proposed, namely, whether reforms in the spoken language ought not to precede the permanent fixing of the written speech. The tendency of the phonetic system (I will not say its necessary result) is to take the approved standard of pronunciation of the day, and crystallize it in printed and written forms of words which shall exactly represent and leave no room for ambiguity or doubt about it, if you have once learned to articulate the elementary sounds which the characters denote. Uniformity is so strong in its appeal to our intellectual favor, that I cannot doubt that the general use of such a system would strongly tend to perpetuate any errors or imperfections in our present speech. Are we quite sure that we ought not to aim at changes in speech as much as in spelling? May there not be good reasons why speech ought to approach the time-honored forms of printed words, as well as in favor of making the words more like our speech? It seems to me that each side of this proposition is partly right, and that in some respects it will be better to know more of what our speech is made of and what it is, before committing ourselves fully to a method of representing it which itself may soon need to be changed.

Look a moment at the mere matter of usage in pronuncia-

tion. We say the standard is the general custom of polite and educated people; which comes to nearly the same thing as saying that the king's English is the court English, for fashions of the tongue as of the garb are likely to take their law from the centre of social activity and the heights of social rank. Yet we need to look back but a little way to find that fashion changes in the one as really, if not as rapidly, as in the other. I myself can recall acquaintances, "gentlemen of the old school," who insisted upon sticking to the fashionable pronunciation of George the Fourth's time, in such words as *gould*, *laylock*, *obleeged*, *chaney*, *tay*, etc. The change is one in which the spelling has gradually drawn the pronunciation away from its older form,—a change which is accelerated by the imperfect education of common schools, where the teachers are almost necessarily but half educated themselves. I used to tease a teacher friend of mine by calling it "school-marm English," and the epithet, if taken kindly, has its meaning and use.

There is another class of words which were pronounced, little more than a century ago by the best English society, as only an uneducated Irishman now speaks them. *Ease*, *please*, *season*, *reason*, *treason*, are all of this class, so are *feature*, *eagle*, *eager*; and what we call the Irish brogue, and laugh at as such, was the original pronunciation of words received from the French and keeping the French sound, *aise*, *plaisir*, *saison*, *raison*, *aigle*, etc. For our present mode of speaking the words, not a scintilla of *reason* can be given, for we neither follow the sound of our own spelling nor that of the language from which we took the words. It is upon this pronunciation of *reason* that Shakespeare makes Falstaff pun in Henry IV. (Part 1, act 1, sc. 3) "If reasons were plenty as blackberries, I would give no man a reason upon compulsion."

Yet we treat the Irishman's mode of speaking with amused contempt, saying to ourselves, "The poor fellow don't know how to speak English," when in fact he has the better of us in every possible view of the case except that of momentary

and transient fashion. In truth, nine tenths of our pluming ourselves in such matters on our superior accuracy, is exactly on a par with that of the youngster of five or six who said to his little sister, "You shouldn't say *ebedient*, Lucy, it is *abedient*."

It is almost wholly within our own day that real progress has been made in the study of the origin and growth of English. It may be said that until Dr. Mahn's revision of Webster, in the last edition of that work, there was not a respectable etymological dictionary of the English language. The older editions of Webster, and all editions of Johnson, Richardson, and the rest abound in the most fanciful and absurd derivations of words. Professor Skeat of Cambridge University, says in the preface of his new Etymological Dictionary, that "the study of phonetics as applied to early English pronunciation by Mr. Ellis and Mr. Sweet, and carefully carried out by nearly all students of early English in Germany, has almost revolutionized the study of etymology as hitherto pursued in England." He lays it down as his first canon, "Before attempting an etymology, ascertain the earliest form and use of a word, and observe chronology." As an example of the blunders into which lexicographers have fallen by neglecting this obvious rule, he refers to the etymology of *sir-loin*, or *surloin*, which is given in Richardson's dictionary as having its origin in James I. jocosely knighting a huge loin of beef at table, dubbing it Sir-Loin. But Skeat says that if the canon quoted had been followed, it would have been discovered that *sirloin* was used long before King James was born, being transferred with most of our vocabulary of the table from the French. It is found in English, in the time of Henry the Sixth. If we look into Worcester's dictionary for the etymology of the word *moot*, which was the Saxon name for the primitive town-meeting of our early English ancestors, we shall find that whilst he himself indicates correctly the origin of the word, he says that Crabbe derives it from the Latin *motum*, and Johnson from the French *môt*, neither of which has any connection with it, and both of which

are entirely misleading. Every page of "standard" dictionaries affords similar examples.

The work of recent and living philologists in the Philological Society's Dictionary gives us the means of tracing the history of English words and their forms with a fulness and accuracy which could not be dreamed of twenty years ago. Here for the first time we may expect to find the actual form and usage of a word from the Anglo-Saxon times downward, with the changes of spelling and pronunciation which it has undergone. This will make it possible to form a solid judgment as to what would be a true reform in either or both, and to bring the influence of a revived love of the older forms of English, with the combined power of a much larger fraternity of scholars, to assist in such changes as may seem desirable.

Let us look a moment at some of the changes in words which have already happened, and which bear directly upon the question of spelling. Quite a large class have such awkward forms that we make sure they are relics of a very old usage, when, in fact, the older form was the simpler, and extra letters are mere whims of a modern time. This is the case with the *g* in *right*, *light*, *might*, etc.; it is so also with the *h* in *ghost*. *Rhyme* was in early days spelled *rime*, *again* was spelled *agen*, *believe* was spelled *bileve* or *beleve*, *acorn* was *akern*, *guilty* was *gylty*, *victual* was *vitaille*, *young* was *yung*, *could* was *coud*. All of these examples show how simplicity of spelling would only bring the words into closer and more striking resemblance to the older English, and that our modern change has been ridiculous as well as unreasonable. Two of them, *agen* and *akern*, suggest that the pronunciation of some of us might also be improved by taking the older usage. With these last might be put our *shamefaced*, which is a corruption of the old *shamefast*, analogous to *steadfast*, and *neighborhood* which was once *neighborred*, analogous to *kindred*.

In *aghast*, Professor Earle tells us that the *gh* was not an original guttural, but "an Italian affectation, and for the

most part a toy of the Elizabethan period.”¹ Spenser sometimes wrote *ghess* for *guess*, but we have not followed him, though we keep the awkward combination in *ghost* where Chaucer wrote *gost*. In the Elizabethan period *sprite* was, in the same fashion, written *spright*, but we have gone back to the earlier and simpler form of this word, though we keep the intruding letters in *sprightly*.

The Saxon name for town was *burh*, which was unnecessarily roughened into *burgh*, and we then absurdly dropped the *h* which was in the Saxon word and kept the *g* which was an interloper, making *burg* of it, which our common schools are teaching the children to pronounce *burg*, because it is spelled so, and contrary to English custom and tradition. It would have been more sensible to have made the spelling *bury* the uniform one.

The Scotch lassie who sings “There’s nae luck aboon the hoose, when the gude mon’s awa,” is pronouncing the words as her and our forefathers did before the fourteenth century, and we “put on airs” because we have spoiled the sound of nearly every one of them, and she has learned from her mother the real English. Is it not very much as if a modern Greek bandit should make faces at a child of Plato, speaking the noble dialect in which the *Phaedo* was written?

The same is true when we deal with the dialects of England. It is among the plain unlettered folk of Yorkshire that we find the authentic remains of the speech which is the most direct descendant from both Angle and Saxon. So the other end of England retains among her laboring people of Dorset the peculiarity of the West Saxon tone and utterance. I have spoken of the readiness with which untutored nations clip the words, and adapt the consonants to their unskilful lips, but I have also hinted at the still more astonishing persistence with which they hold to the words they have thus made. It would seem that a thousand years has made less change among them than a generation or two among those to whom a little learning has proven a dangerous thing to their language if not to themselves.

¹ Earle, *Philology of English Tongue*, p. 152.

The first lesson we have to learn, I venture to say, is that in regard to the fashion of speech which so-called polite circles affect to make the standard of usage, nine tenths of the pretence is presumptuous ignorance, and has absolutely no claim to be followed. It is oftener a corruption of the mother-tongue than a preservation of it, and any new pronunciation coming from such quarters is more likely to be wrong than right. When we have fully accepted this truth, we shall begin to be in the modest and teachable frame of mind which is the necessary condition of progress in the right direction. In this case, as in most others, it is much easier to tell what is wrong than what is right; but a knowledge of our own ignorance is always a safe and wholesome preparation for study. Perhaps any attempt to fix a goal at which we should aim in our reform would be as presumptuous as the fashionable meddling with our speech of which I have spoken. My impression is that it is safest to confine ourselves to advocating healthy *tendencies* at present, and to be content with turning our faces in the right direction, stopping all further progress in the way of corruption, and doing whatever we do to make our mother-tongue more like what it was in the great era of Queen Bess, rather than more unlike it. I name the Elizabethan time because the period which produced Shakespeare, Spenser, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher in poetry; Bacon, Raleigh, and Coke in general literature and in law; Tyndale and the authorized version of the Bible, must always be the great classic time of our language, and by a moderate extension of its limits we may take in Chaucer and Wickliff on the one hand, and Milton and Bunyan on the other. To let that speech become obsolete, or even old-fashioned, is a crime against everything that is noble in thought, in imagination, and in diction. We may be glad that it is more familiar to us now than it was to our predecessors a century ago, and by cherishing the good tendencies which exist, it is not unreasonable to hope that our children will discard hosts of foreign interlopers for the older and stronger English, and they may even purify the tongue more than we now dream of.

If a people have a history worth telling, there is pretty sure to come a time when they begin to take an honest pride in it. The old names are revived again, and children are baptized with them. The old architecture is found to be full of beauty and of romantic associations, and we build our houses and our churches in it again. The old speech renews a mysterious power over us, and its words, half forgotten, are found to have strange poetry in the very sound. That we are in such a time of revival nobody doubts. Let us review for a few moments the outline of the history of English, by way of finding something to help us answer the questions I have already asked, or at least to form some distinct idea of the path we ought to travel.

Scholars are now agreed that our English is not the Anglo-Saxon; for the Norman Conquest by grasping all power and wealth into the hands of a foreign aristocracy, beat down the English people into illiterate drudges; and the absence of schools, of literature, of leisure for intellectual pursuits, and of the wealth which gives ease and opportunity for study, soon produced great changes in the common language, or carried further changes which had begun at the Danish invasion. Its grammar changed — its nouns and pronouns lost their inflections, its verbs lost their strong form of conjugation. For two centuries Englishmen and English speech had their dark age; and similar causes to those which changed the vulgar Latin into French and Italian, into Spanish and Portuguese, were at work changing the Anglo-Saxon into the North, Midland, and South English, which may still be heard in the valley of the Tweed, among the fens of the Ouse, and along the banks of the Severn. The generation of thegns and learned priests who had surrounded Harold passed away, and the name of *churl*, which had borne no unhappy association when it was the common designation of free farmers and Saxon England was still “merrie England,” took a new meaning from the dogged, sullen spirit with which all Englishmen, reduced to a common level, bore the hated Norman yoke. Several generations passed, generations of ignorance,

of little speech, and that little growling and mumbling the words with little knowledge or care of moods and tenses, of cases, or of persons. But the thrift and the energetic labor of the "churls" began to make them comparatively rich again; their careful tradesmen in the towns, their skilful mechanics, their stout husbandmen on the broad manor lands, began to know a comfort and good cheer which it had seemed would never come in the slavish days when each evening brought the hated sound of the curfew to their ears. Changes were happening among their masters too. The barons at Runnymede were forced to make the liberties of all England the gathering cry when they would withstand King John, and the kings in their turn were forced to give liberal charters to the good English boroughs when they wanted their help to curb the too powerful earls and dukes. The bloody wars of the succession played havoc with the nobles and military leaders not only in battle, but by means of the dripping scaffold. And all the while the "churl" was gaining heart and courage, and expanding into the good English yeoman. The knights in case-armor began to find the need and the mighty help of the stout footmen with bills and bows, and the cloth-yard shaft became almost as much a terror to the heavy horseman as the bullet was afterwards. A leader who had known a battle saved to him by his stout infantry, warmed to them, and made a merit of addressing them in their own speech. Then two or three centuries had worked changes in earl as well as in churl, and foreign wars made a Norman baron feel that he had less in common with the Frenchman than with the stout archer who followed him. After Cressy, we are told by Oliphant,¹ in 1349, King Edward III. had his shield and surcoat embroidered with his motto in English, thus:

"Hay, Hay, the wythe swan,
By Goddes soule, I am thy man!"

It was now politic to favor the English, and it became the fashion. In 1362 it was made the language of the law

¹ Standard English, p. 260.

courts. A century before this, Henry III. had found it advisable to send out his proclamations in English to gain the common people to his support; and less than half a century afterward Henry, Prince of Wales, writing to his father Henry IV., wrote in English, which had by that time become the king's English as well as the people's English. The Norman conquest had ended in the absorption of the conquerors into the English people; Chaucer, amid the plaudits of the court, as well as the hearty blessings of the common folk, had written poems that were never to be forgotten, and an immortal literature in the new English was begun.

It would need no proof to convince one that the triumph of English must have been preceded by a time of struggle in which English and French must have reacted upon each other, sometimes the one and sometimes the other gaining. But it would seem that the English element was the more virile, and the language that became national was the old speech, modified by the grammatical changes which had come in the period of darkness and gloom, having lost some old Saxon words and gained a great many French ones, but remaining distinctly and recognizably the English. No small part of the French words Chaucer used failed to hold a permanent place in the tongue. They were recognized as foreign, and, though part of polite speech, were likely to go out of fashion again, as many of them did; so that in fact Chaucer's English was by no means so pure as that of writers who lived a century later. Still, the language of the festive table, of the ball-room, the camp, the tourney, the chase, would necessarily be that of the aristocracy, for the common people had lost the names as well as the things they signified, and in spite of the most stubborn attachment to their mother tongue, they would insensibly adopt some words which they gained from their superiors in rank without knowing when or how.

The accession of Edward of York to the throne was accompanied by a positive influence in favor of the northern English, and Caxton, who would otherwise have printed his

books in the midland English dialect, was so far influenced by the king's sister (who was wife of Charles the Bold when the Englishman was working with his press in Flanders), that he fell in with the court tendency, and by the enormous influence his printing had upon the language, fixed it in a modified form of nothern and midland dialects quite different from that of London, which was then as now the heart of the kingdom, but whose speech was that of the south of England. He says of the duchess, "Anon she found defeaute in mine English, which she commanded me to amend."¹ After this, the greatest of all influences in settling the language was undoubtedly Tyndale's translation of the Bible, of which the New Testament was published in 1525, about fifty years after the first English book was printed. We commonly speak of King James Bible as the great repository of our mother-tongue, forgetting the closeness with which it followed Tyndale, and that the king's greatest merit in the matter was his command to the revisers to stick to Tyndale as closely as possible, as it is the merit of our most recent revision that it too professes to depart as little as may be from the authorized version. It was Tyndale's Bible that, when the Reformation came, was put in every parish church by Henry VIII. If then we may seek anywhere for a "pure well of English undefiled," it is in Tyndale's Bible. Comparing its vocabulary with Chaucer's, we see that the latter had a strongly marked French tone which contrasts with the sturdy English of the former, and that we may mark a long list of courtly phrases and words that now became wholly naturalized in our speech. The century and a half that had intervened between them, had made the victory of the English more and more pronounced, and this is noticeable quite as much in the strong swing and march of the sentences as in the choice of words themselves.

The truth, then, seems to be that English was formed out of the Anglo-Saxon in the anguish and slavery of the Norman and Angevine rule from 1066 for some two hundred years; that

¹ Oliphant, p. 284.

it then began to feel the influence of the old French at that time spoken by the upper classes ; but that this influence was limited to the addition of a considerable number of words to its stock, the additions being greatest at the time when it was first accepted as the language of all classes, and the Saxon element struggled with some success to reassert itself till the sixteenth century. That the two sorts of words were each better understood by a part of the people is evident from the way in which writers could couple an English word with a synonyme of French extraction. Examples are often quoted from the Prayer-book of the English church, as "acknowledge and confess," "humble and lowly," "goodness and mercy," "assemble and meet together," "pray and beseech." But they are quite as frequent in other writings. Our law phrases are full of them, such as "devise and bequeath," "will and testament," "demise and to farm let," "yielding and paying," "act and deed," "aid and abet," "metes and bounds," and the like. So in general literature we find "head and front," "uncouth and strange," "disease and woe," "watch and ward," "ways and means," etc. This bi-lingualism of the language it would now be in vain to quarrel with. No purist would be so rash as to go back of the Bible and Shakespeare for a standard. But there may be quite different ways of treating the standard. An inflexible rule and pattern cannot be maintained, and a flux and reflux of the tide will happen in spite of all we can do. It would, however, be within the range of reasonable wish, if we were to say that the influence of all scholars and people who have learned to love purity of speech might be lent to favor such changes as may at least *tend* to restore the language to the standard of the great era ; and if this were ever attained, there would be at least as good reason for reviving old Anglo-Saxon words of a still earlier period as for adding any from foreign sources whether ancient or modern.

If all that is strong and good in an old tongue is kept, the language may be fairly enriched by new accumulations. The wrong is done when a better old word is swapped off for a

worse new one. The richness of English in words to express the same or a similar idea is shown in the many ways in which we can express the old Saxon *wrath* or *ire*. We call it *anger* from the Danish, *rage* and *fury* from the French. *indignation* from the Latin, *choler* from the Greek, and we have invented a new-fangled use of the old word *passion* to express the same, and perhaps use it more often than any other, though we had so many proper names for it before. It is hard to see how any one can doubt that the old English is the best.

One of the ways in which we may help on a healthful reaction is to take some pains to save old forms which are struggling for a place in common use against a fashionable opposition. No one will pretend that it is not allowable to use the old and 'strong' form of participle in such words as *mown*, *blown*, *strown*, and the like. Yet the form in *ed* has been gaining on them, and it will require a positive purpose and effort to save them. Professor Earle gives a considerable list of verbs which formerly had this form of conjugation and have lost it wholly or partly. Analogous to *sing*, *sang*, *swung*, were *sling*, *slang*, *slung*, *slink*, *slank*, *slunk*, *spin*, *span*, *spun*, *sting*, *stang*, *stung*, *spring*, *sprang*, *sprung*, and even *rin*, *ran*, *run*. The *rin* survives in the Scotch, "rin hiszy," and Chaucer used *swal* for *swelled*.

"His thoughte it swal so soore about his herte."¹

The original preterite of *sting*, Earle says he heard naturally revived by a little maid of four years old, influenced only by an unconscious analogy, who said piteously, "If a bee stang you, dad, would you cry?"

There are modes of pronunciation also which hover on the brink of destruction, though not quite gone. An example of this is the word *advertise*. That it was pronounced *adver-tised* by Shakspeare may be proved by numerous quotations. One from Henry VI. may be enough. "I have adver'tised him by secret means."² We rarely hear the verb so pro-

¹ Wife of Bath's Tale, 967.

² Part 3, iv. 5, 9.

nounced nowadays, though the noun advertisement commonly follows the old rule

A class of words of which the first syllable ends in *er* illustrates in a very neat way the lawlessness of our changes in pronunciation. They are such words as *person*, *sergeant*, *servant*, *clerk*, *merchant*, and related to them are *barber*, *farrier*, *parson*. Some of these words were indirectly taken from the old French, as *marchant*, *barbier*, *ferrier*, *sergant*, *servant*, the last two coming from the same root. Others like *clerk* and *person* were found in the Anglo-Saxon, but perhaps came there from the Latin. But mark what strange fortunes they have had. Chaucer used them according to their etymology, and spelled them with proper regard to their original vowels. Only forty years later we find Audley (1426) writing *parson*. Then the *e* supplanted the vowel *a* in *marchant*, and then again it would seem that polite people thought they were reviving a proper French pronunciation by pronouncing the whole list as if they were spelled with broad *a*, *marchant*, *clark*, *sargeant*, *parson*, etc. All this time they were more or less used as proper names, and as such they have kept the *a*, for we have *Marchants*, *Clarks*, *Sargeants*, and *Parsons*, in plenty among us to this day. Then the *parson* was *par excellence* the *personage* of the village, and when the word was needed for anybody else it became *person* again, and both forms remain. The wrongly spelled *farrier*, and the rightly spelled *barber* also remain side by side; but *merchant*, *servant*, *clerk*, *sergeant*, regained the *e*. Not so as to pronunciation, however. In England people commonly say *clark*, and it is thought 'stylish' to do so here. 'Sergeant' as a military title is pronounced generally in both countries as if spelled with an *a*, but not in other connections. 'Sarvent Sir!' and Sarve 'em right' have become intolerably vulgar and are relegated to the dialects and the negro quarters. Was ever a stranger jumble seen? Even the word *perfect* at one time became *parfit*, and I believe that Walker's pronouncing Dictionary, the great authority of fifty years ago, gives its pronunciation as *pairfect*.

Then every little while we would forget that we had appropriated a French word, and do it over again, giving it a little change of spelling, perhaps following the modern French. We had *suit* from time immemorial, and the pleadings in court in which the plaintiff wound up his complaint by saying "thereto he brings his suit," only meant that he brought his followers of friends or peers to back up his assertion. The meaning of "action at law" given to it is clear corruption. A suit of clothes or of rooms meant the related parts, the whole "string" of them, to use a colloquial idiom. But the true meaning of the word got a little obscured, and some fine person, fresh from continental travel introduced *suite* as it were a "bran new idea," when the identical word in an English dress had been doing duty no end of centuries!

Exactly similar was the case with *rout* and *route*. So it was with *ticket* and *etiquette*. To say a thing is "the ticket" would be terribly slangy; but to say that it is *etiquette*, i.e. *etiquetté*, labelled, stamped, approved, *ticketted*, is unexceptionably polite. The upstart has come from abroad with his foreign drawl, and has actually the impudence to deny that he is the plain English word that had lived in the village time out of mind!

The vanity of scholarship must come in for a large share of responsibility for taking the pith out of our speech. An old writer of Queen Elizabeth's time said "the foolish phantasticall, that smells but of learning, will so *Latin* their tongues, that the simple cannot but wonder at their talke, and think surely they speake by some revelation. . . . and he that can catch an ynke-horne terme by the taile, him they count to be a fine Englishman, and a good Rhetorician."¹

Under this sort of scholastic influence many good old words changed countenance: *balm* became *balsam*, *frail* became *fragile*, *sure* became *secure*. This has been sheer loss only in cases where the old word became obsolete; for in many others we have had the sense to keep both, and give some slight change of signification to one of them, thus

Wilson, quoted by Olfohant 307.

enriching our language. Professor Skeat (or rather his daughter) gives a long catalogue of these "doublets," among which are some of a good deal of interest. Such are

causey and causeway	arbour and harbor
sponge and fungus	jealous and zealous
manure and manœuvre	vencer and furnish
scrub and shrub	scatter and shatter
cud and quid	vast and waste

This "Latinizing" of their tongues was carried so far, that its culmination in such writers as Samuel Johnson and Gibbon produced a reaction, and since then a national taste for real English has grown rapidly in the mother-country and among us.

No better mark of the good progress we have lately made can be found than in a table given by Mr. Oliphant in his *Standard English* which shows that Gibbon in his *Decline and Fall* sometimes uses as many as forty-four Romance words in a hundred, meaning by Romance, words derived from the Latin, usually through the French, whilst William Morris in his *Earthly Paradise* often uses even fewer than Chaucer or Tyndale. Perhaps, however, quite as vivid an impression of the change a little more than fifty years has made will be got by recalling that a distinguished critic said of Scott's *Guy Mannering* "we are persuaded not one word in three is understood by the generality of English readers."¹

The truth is, that there was at one time a likelihood that we should depart as far from Shakespeare's English as modern Romaic is from the Greek of Demosthenes, and it may be doubted if the change which had really come about would not have made a page of Gibbon more foreign to Chaucer than any part of the old poet has ever been to us. There was always a saving salt in the old English in that it was the colloquial tongue of the common people, who, however they might feel that a stilted style was wonderful as speaking with tongues, could not learn it, and saved the great bulk of true English words for the time when poet and historian should alike feel their force and come back to their use.

¹ Dr. McCrie in his attack on *Old Mortality*.

Indeed it is often a matter of astonishment that the old words have held their own so well. I have already acknowledged the debt we owe to the English Bible in this respect, a debt which would make it ever a "precious treasure" to us if no more sacred claim on our love and veneration existed. In a less degree the same may be said of other religious writings, particularly the offices of the church. There is often a grand simplicity about them which is a test of the very best style, far more moving to a rightly cultivated ear, than the sesquipedalian verbiage of the Johnsonian time. I will venture to give as a final quotation the creed as found in an early English primer of Chaucer's time, and one of the old collects of the church done into English with it.

"I bileve in God, fadir almygti, makere of hevene and of erthe: and in Jesu Christ the sone of him, oure lord, oon alone: which is conceyved of the hooli gost; born of Marie maiden; suffride passioun undir Pounce Pilat: crucified, deed, and biried: he went doun to hellis: the thridde day he roos agen fro deede; he steig to hevenes: he sitteth on the right side of God the fadir almygti: thenns he is to come for to deme the quyke and deed. I beleve in the hooli gost: feith of hooli chirche: comunyng of seyntis: forgyveness of synnes; agenrisyng of fleish, and everlastyng lyf. So be it."

In this the only word which has become quite obsolete is "steig" Saxon for ascended. To "deem the quick and dead" is an old use of the word *deem*, though hardly a different one from that we now have, for when we say "I deem it true," we ought to mean, I judge it true. "Agenrising," though not in use in the compound form, would be understood by any child.

The collect for peace has even less that is archaic. It reads: "God, of whom ben hooli desiris, rigt counceles and just workis: gyve to thi servantis pees that the world may not geve, that in our hertis goven to thi commandementis, and the drede of enemys put awei, our tymes be pesible thurgh thi defendyng. Bi oure lord Jesu Crist, thi sone, that with

thee lyveth and regneth, in the unities of the hooli goost, God, bi all worldis of worldis. So be it."

Let me conclude by shortly throwing together some of the conclusions I would draw from what I have said.

1. The work of reform in English is by no means a change of spelling alone, it is of speech and pronunciation as well. Consequently, I cannot think that the assumption of a present standard of sound to which our spelling could be made to agree is a true method of proceeding, and hence do not favor the Pitman *phonotypy* as distinguished from his phonographic short-hand.

2. The first thing needed as a basis of reform is a thorough history of the language, embodied in dictionaries that shall give true etymologies, and the original forms of all words with all the changes they have undergone. When I say all words, I mean all that have been used since the revival of written English after the Norman conquest, and not simply all that a lexicographer may consider as in present use.

3. We need to cultivate a love for and a pride in the old mother-tongue, so that we shall be glad of an opportunity to revive its neglected but strong and pithy words, — a love and pride that shall make us always prefer an old English word to any equivalent that may be furnished from the vocabularies of Romance or Latinized words.

4. Our competent philologists should give us lists of words of which the old spelling is shorter and simpler than those in common use, as well as of those in which an analogous reform of pronunciation is feasible, and we should adopt them on the avowed ground that we are getting rid of modern corruptions which are the offspring of ignorance. In this the lovers of pure English should unite and strengthen each other's hands. Something is being done in this way already, and though we should go no faster than is consistent with good and solid work, the movement will gain more speed than we think. Reading in Green's *Making of England* we find that he has adopted the old Saxon words *burh* for borough, *tun* for the Saxon town or village, *ham* and *croft* and

steading, and other old words which tell of the home life of our ancestors. They do not jar on one's nerves, for the meaning is made clear as they are introduced, and they fall into place in his sentences like old kinsmen come home.

5. We shall soon be able to put in our children's hands school dictionaries in which English words shall be distinguished from those of foreign birth by form of type, and the children may be taught that these are the better words to use.

When all this has been done we shall be ready for another step, and the last, viz. to bring all our philological talent to bear on the question of simplifying both pronunciation and spelling by making both accord as closely as may be practicable to a standard which would be entirely intelligible to any Englishman from the fourteenth century downward, and which would also be systematic in the modes of representing the sounds to the eye. I am sanguine enough to believe that if we let the principles of reform work long enough and freely enough, we shall find the anomalies and inconsistencies insensibly disappearing, and that the final work of reducing spelling to consistent and scientific rules will have been in great measure done in advance, so that not even the last step will be a large one.

The whole then may be practically included in this one exhortation. Let us love and learn our mother-tongue!