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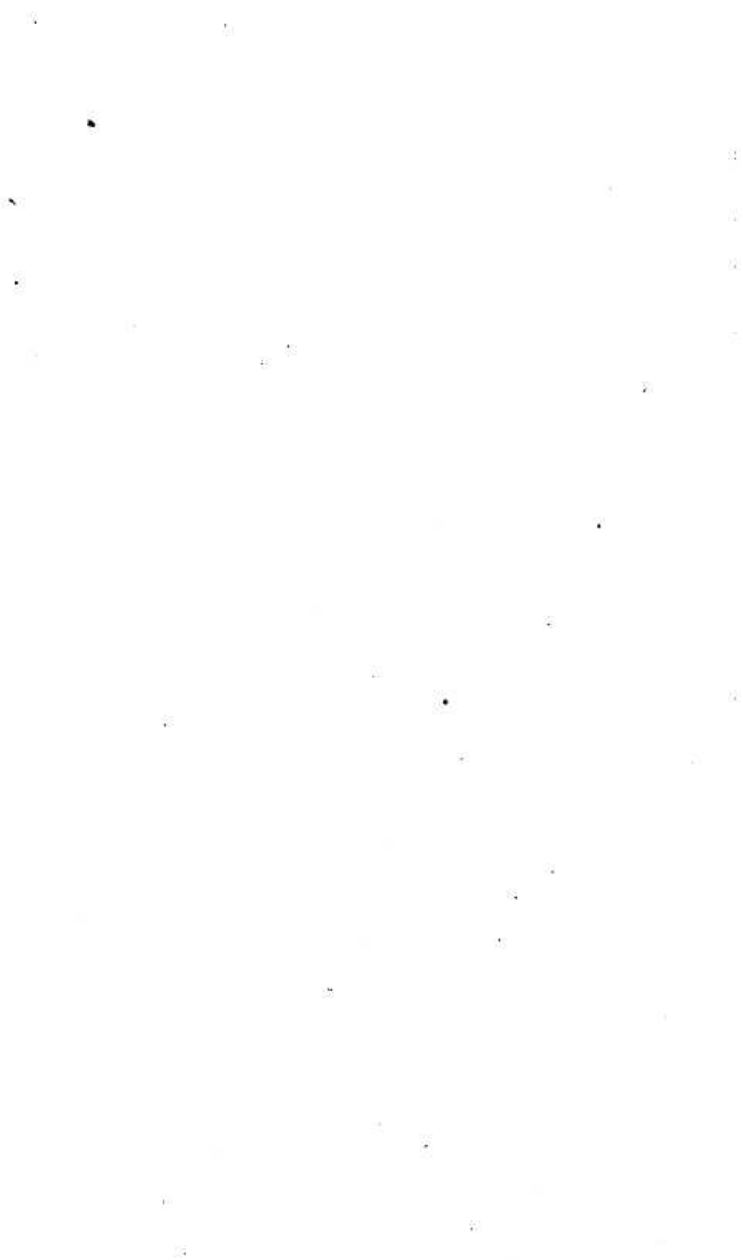
BY

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
BUREAU OF EDUCATION,
Washington, D. C., July 7, 1893.

SIR: I have the honor to present herewith for publication a revised edition of a circular of information on the subject of the spelling reform. It is prepared by the eminent Anglo-Saxon scholar and philologist Prof. F. A. March, of Lafayette College, Easton, Pa. Inasmuch as Prof. March is the president of the Spelling Reform Association, it is natural to expect that this circular will be found entirely favorable to the proposed reform. But, doubtless, as in all cases of proposed change, there are arguments on both sides, for and against change. The fact that a system exists and is in use is a strong conservative argument. On the other hand the arguments in favor of a change are in the present instance many in number, and some of them are entitled to careful consideration.

The irregularities of English spelling are too well known to need more than brief mention. According to Mr. A. J. Ellis, the distinguished specialist in the pronunciation of Old English, the letter *a* is used to represent eight different sounds; *e*, eight; *i*, seven; *o*, twelve; *u*, nine; *y*, three. Twenty-one consonants have seventy sounds, averaging three and a third apiece; but while there is much difficulty in determining the proper pronunciation from the spelling it is still more difficult to ascertain the proper letters with which to represent the spoken word. The sound of *e* in *be* has no less than forty equivalents in the language; *a* in *mate* has thirty-four. Mr. Ellis has shown that the single word *scissors*, which is composed of six elementary sounds (*s*, short *i*, *z*, short *u*, *r*, and *x*), could be spelled in a vast number of ways; for example, the person familiar with the words *schism*, *sieve*, *myrrh*, *visor*, *scourge*, *suffice*, might spell the word *scissors* *schiesourrhee*. The fact that one is never quite sure of the pronunciation of a new printed word he has only heard pronounced and not seen in print is sufficient to prove the illogical and capricious character of English spelling.

In the last century Dr. Franklin wrote a paper on the subject that is marked with his eminent good sense. In the first half of the present century Noah Webster, the pioneer of American lexicographers, repeatedly urged the same reform. To him is due the fact that American spelling differs slightly from the spelling in England in such words as honor and traveler.

If, however, the spelling reform were merely a matter of logical consistency its claims would not entitle it to much attention. The strong ground is that of saving the time of those who have to learn how to write the language and read it, and a saving of expense to all who have to buy or make books. One-sixth of the population of the country is foreign born or from foreign-born parents. The importance of an easy method of teaching reading to this class of our population is obvious. About 15 per cent of the cost of typesetting and of presswork and paper would be saved in books and periodicals if the reform were adopted.

The saving of time in learning to read and spell is a matter of even greater importance. Very few adults can write a long letter without making a mistake in the spelling of some word. Dr. Morrell, one of the English inspectors of schools, reports that out of 1,972 failures in the civil-service examinations in Great Britain, 1,866 candidates owed their failure to poor spelling. Dr. Hagar compiled the results of the examination in spelling of 1,000 candidates for admission for a State normal school in Massachusetts. They were proposing to become teachers, and yet these young women averaged only 80 per cent of correct spelling in the examination in that branch. Upon an average one word in five was misspelled. This indicates fairly the obstacle in the way of scholarship. In order to attain to a high degree of excellence in spelling many years must be devoted to study and practice in writing the difficult words of the language, and a corresponding amount of time taken from studies in science and history and literature.

Experiments have been made in different parts of the country since 1845 to ascertain the amount of time required to learn to read the English language when printed in a phonetic alphabet. The average results have shown that about two years may be saved in learning to read by the phonetic method. These two years are taken from the time which might be given by children to learning history, geography, science, and literature, and it is worthy of mention that the president of Harvard University, who has investigated the rate of progress on

the part of students in the high schools of France, finds them at a given age, say fourteen or sixteen, to be two years in advance of American youth in regard to substantial studies in literature and science.*

In 1866, in St. Louis, an experiment was made with a modified alphabet invented by Dr. Edwin Leigh. The silent letters in the language were printed in hair-line type (skeleton type); the other letters were printed in type of a modified form, showing by the modification the sound of the letter used. This alphabet of modified letters amounted to some seventy or seventy-five characters, but when the sound of a character was once learned the child on seeing the letter again could be sure that it represented the same sound as before. Previous to the introduction of the new alphabet the children required a year to finish the First Reader and another year to finish the Second Reader. No child began the Third Reader before the third year. With the new alphabet two books were printed instead of one (a primer and a First Reader), doubling the amount of reading matter. One hundred and fifty primary teachers commenced teaching the books printed in Dr. Leigh's type at the beginning of the year, and in ten weeks' time all reported the primer finished and well learned. A second ten weeks finished the First Reader with similar thoroughness. In the second half-year the entire Second Reader was finished by many pupils and at least one-half of it by all. The bright pupils, who were promoted from class to class and not kept back for the dull pupils, were found to be able to complete in the first year the primer and First Reader in Leigh's type and the Second Reader and one hundred pages in the Third Reader in the ordinary spelling. This showed a saving from one and a half to two years in learning to read. It was found, moreover, that these children not only learned to read rapidly, but that they learned to spell the ordinary spelling much more correctly than other pupils. This was due to the fact that they noticed the silent letters more carefully. The children learned logical habits of analysis and were more intelligent in regard to the meaning of what they read than others. This system was used about twenty years under my observation, and is, I doubt not, still in use in St. Louis. It was noted that the children found learning to read so easy a task by Leigh's method that they took more pleasure in reading books and newspapers at home, and yet Leigh's system would be called a very difficult method of learning to read as compared with any perfectly phonetic alphabet; for the pho-

* See Proceedings of the National Association of Educational Superintendents, 1888.