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Henry Pynes Clinton.

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Professor WILSON, V.P., in the Chair.

The following works were laid on the table:—

"Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar enlarged," by E. Rödiger, D.D.: translated by Benjamin Davies, Ph.D. of the University of Leipsic: London 1846, presented by the Translator.—"A Grammar of the Mosquito Language," by Alexander Henderson, Belize, Honduras, New York 1846, presented by Dr. Davies.—"Address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science," by Sir R. I. Murchison, London 1846, presented by the Author.

A paper was then read:—

"On Orthographical Expedients," by Edwin Guest, Esq.

The laws of letter-change have been investigated with a zeal, which may have been called for by the importance of the subject, but which has certainly not been attended with a proportionate success. An humbler line of research, and one which promised more satisfactory results, has been comparatively neglected. A knowledge of the contrivances resorted to at different periods to express the various articulate sounds used by language, would seem to be essential to any real progress in philological science; but the slight attention which has been hitherto paid to the subject is calculated rather to discover than to enlighten our ignorance. Philologists have generally hurried over inquiries which led to no immediate result, and whose chief object was merely the removal of difficulties from the way of future investigations.

It is probable there never was a language which had all its sounds represented by their appropriate symbols. A spoken language is ever liable to change; and though peculiar circumstances—such as the existence of a national literature, and reading habits widely spread among the people—may check, they have never yet been known entirely to subdue this tendency. But a system of orthography is much less flexible than the language to which it has been accommodated; *litera scripta manet*, and the difference in the rate of change between the written and the spoken language must necessarily produce a certain amount of *conventional* spelling, which may prove a serious obstacle in the way of philological inquiry.

In the older and the purer languages, discrepancies between the spelling and the pronunciation were probably rare and comparatively unimportant. In certain cases a letter may have been permuted,

that is, changed to some kindred letter, without such permutation being indicated by the orthography; but as the change was no doubt regulated according to fixed and definite laws, the reader was sufficiently forewarned, and little or no inconvenience resulted.

Much inconsistent spelling has been introduced into the more modern languages by the attempt to exhibit the etymological connexion of words; and the mischief has in some cases gone much further than a mere question of orthography. Ignorance has often suggested false etymologies; and the corresponding orthography has not unfrequently led to false pronunciation and a serious perversion of the language. For example, the old word *causey* was spelt *causeway*, and *life-lode*, *livelihood*, and the pronunciation of these words is now generally accommodated to the corrupt spelling, though it is presumed that no one, who regards purity of style, would under any circumstances employ terms so barbarous.

In certain Celtic constructions the initial consonant is very generally permuted. Thus, after the pronoun *dy* thy, the Welsh noun changes an initial *p*, *c*, *t*, to *b*, *g*, *d*; and from *pen* a head, *coes* a leg, *tad* a father, we have *dy ben* thy head, *dy goes* thy leg, *dy dad* thy father. In Irish orthography, the permuted letter instead of being displaced by its substitute is merely preceded, or as the Irish grammarians express it, eclipsed by it. Thus from *pobul* a tribe, *coll* ruin, *tigh* a house, we have *ar bpobul* our tribe, *ar gcoll* our ruin, *ar dtigh* our house, the nouns being pronounced as if they were written *bopul*, *goll*, *digh*. This expedient is certainly an awkward one, but it possesses the merit of bringing both the radical and the adventitious letter to the notice of the reader.

In other European languages the change of letter generally takes place in the middle or at the end of words, and the new letter is affixed instead of being prefixed to the letter which it eclipses. In the Old-French the *v*, which answers to the Latin *b*, is generally written *bv*; and instead of the modern spelling *devoir*, *feve*, *fevre*, &c., we find in Cotgrave *debvoir*, *febve*, *febvre*, &c.; and the feminine forms of *naif*, *neuf*, &c. are written by the same author *naifve*, *neufve*, &c. A similar mode of spelling is still commonly used in the Swedish. In this language, as in the English, most nouns ending in *f*, change the *f* to *v* when they take the plural inflexion; but instead of superseding the *f*, as in English, the *v* is employed merely to eclipse that letter—*graf* a grave, *grafvar* graves.

In certain Gothic dialects the final *d* was sometimes pronounced *t*, particularly in the combinations *nd* and *ld*. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries this pronunciation was commonly represented by *ndt*, *ldt*. In some Gothic dialects, and more especially in Danish, we may still occasionally find examples of this old-fashioned spelling—*feldt* the field, *pandt* a pawn, &c. In our own dialects, the final *th* was sometimes pronounced *t*, and in our Northern MSS. we often find *with* written *wit*. Certain MSS. instead of rejecting the *th*, employ the eclipsis and write *witht*; and a similar orthography is sometimes met with in other instances, for example in *northt*, *fortht*, *birtht*, &c. In some of our southern dialects the final *th* was

superseded by *d*. In the Romance of Octovian we find *wylled, casted, fallyd*, &c. for *willeth, casteth, falleth*, &c.; and we also occasionally find the third person singular of *have* spelt *hathd*. This word the writer certainly intended to be pronounced *had*, and the spelling is therefore a clear case of an eclipsis.

There are a number of Anglo-Saxon words ending in *cg*, whose orthography may admit of a like explanation—*brycg* a bridge, *hrycg* a ridge, *ecg* an edge, *hrincg* a ring, &c. In many of these cases we find diversity of spelling, *c* or *g* occasionally taking the place of *cg*, as *bryc, hryc, hrinc*, &c., or in later MSS. *bryg, hring*, &c. The ending *cg* seems to have originated in an attempt to accommodate the spelling of an earlier literature to the requirements of a dialect which preferred the *g*.

There is another orthographical expedient, to which perhaps the name of *apposition* might be given, inasmuch as the adventitious letter, instead of eclipsing, merely modifies the letter to which it is attached. The Romaic or modern Greek may furnish us with an example. This language, as is well known, has no characters to represent *b* and *d*—its β being pronounced as *v*, and its δ as *dh**, a mode of pronunciation, by the bye, which prevailed in our own universities till the reformation introduced at Cambridge by Sir John Cheeke in the middle of the sixteenth century†. When it is necessary to express the sounds of *b, d*, the modern Greeks take the corresponding whisper or hard letters *p, t*, and in order to vocalize them, prefix the vocal or soft letters which most nearly resemble them in the circumstances of their formation; and thus they obtain the combination *mp* to represent *b*, and *nt* to represent *d*. Some years back, a coin of the Lower Empire was brought to the writer, which it was said had puzzled not a few of our numismatists. The name of the emperor was spelt Μπαλντουινος, and the coin of course belonged to one of the Baldwins‡.

Perhaps we may obtain another example within the limits of our own language. It has been observed elsewhere§, that *Floyd* and *Fluellyn* are the English representatives of the Welsh names Lloyd and Llewellyn. Now if the writer may trust his ear, the Welsh *ll* is related to *l*, not (according to the commonly received opinion) as *th* is to *t*, but as *v* is to *f*, or *th* to *dh*; in other words, *ll* is the whisper-letter corresponding to *l*,—distinguished, it may be, by the circumstance of its being strongly pronounced. If this be the true representation of the case then, in the words *Floyd* and *Fluellyn*, *f*

* *dh* represents the sound of *th* as heard in *this, they, thither*, &c.

† The new pronunciation seems to have worked its way but slowly at Oxford. Gill, who was a Cambridge man, and who wrote as late as the year 1611, slily calls *v, dh*, "β, δ Oxoniensium."

‡ The death of the friend who brought this coin prevents the writer from tracing it to its present possessor; no mention is made of it in the ordinary text-books, and a search for it in our national collection has proved unsuccessful. Perhaps some of the readers of this paper may be able to communicate information respecting a coin which is for several reasons interesting to the numismatist as well as to the philologist.

§ Proceedings of the Philological Society, vol. ii. p. 258.