

**SPELLING REFORM:
FROM AN EDUCATIONAL
POINT OF VIEW**

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Spelling Reform: From an Educational Point of View by J. H. Gladstone

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J. H. GLADSTONE

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From an Educational Point of View.

BY

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SPELLING REFORM,

FROM AN EDUCATIONAL POINT OF VIEW.

THE present movement in favour of a reform in the spelling of the English language has been principally taken up by two classes of the community, the philologists and the teachers. It is of course from an educational point of view that the question is regarded by the School Boards for London, Liverpool, Bradford, Birmingham, and other towns, which are now asking for a Royal Commission of inquiry. The main argument employed by these Boards, and by persons engaged in tuition, is that the present spelling causes a very serious waste of time in teaching to read and write correctly. Yet the vaguest notions

prevail as to the amount of this waste, even by those who have paid attention to the subject. It appeared to me desirable to form some estimate on trustworthy grounds, and to look carefully as an educationist into the other arguments that might be advanced, either for or against the simplification of our orthography.

I tried to determine in the first place how long a time is actually devoted to the arts of spelling and reading; and in the second place how much of this time may be fairly ascribed to the difficulties attending our present unsystematic spelling.

PRESENT EXPENDITURE OF TIME.

In determining the first question I have considered individual cases of no value, as the aptness of the teacher and the pupil are elements for which proper allowance could not

be made; I have rather sought to obtain evidence from those institutions where education is given on a large scale. Had there existed in our English public schools any general instructions as to the time to be devoted to different subjects, that would have afforded valuable information, and would have virtually answered the question. In default of this I have examined the time-tables of a great many elementary schools, generally talking at the same time with the teachers on the subject. In order that the inquiry should fairly represent the general education of the country I have drawn this evidence from National, British, and Wesleyan schools as well as from Board schools; and from village schools as well as those in provincial towns and the metropolis. The inquiry has been restricted to Government inspected schools; and I have had the advantage of learning the opinion of some of the Inspectors.

In infant schools children of three years are set to learn their letters, and various plans are adopted for teaching them their use, until they enter the First Standard. These early stages sometimes appear upon the time-table as reading, sometimes also as letters, spelling, dictation, transcription, or are even included under Kindergarten or writing. It is difficult to tabulate these fairly, but upon adding them together in any particular school I find $6\frac{1}{2}$ hours per week to be a very usual amount of time, while the average of all the schools on my list gives $7\frac{1}{4}$ hours.

In boys' and girls' schools the lessons which we have to consider are spelling, reading, and dictation. Here again there are great diversities of practice, so that it is impossible to tabulate the results satisfactorily. Some teachers give the same amount of time to these subjects in all standards, while others discriminate between the children of different

attainments. The time devoted also appears by my statistics to be as a general rule greater in boys' than in girls' schools; and I believe that this is not accidental.

Spelling lessons, so called, are not given in every school. The subject is often taught only under the head of reading and dictation. Taking a general average of boys and girls of all standards, it seems that in the schools of which I have the statistics, 50 minutes per week are given to the spelling lessons that appear as such on the time-tables. Now as the time devoted to secular instruction may be taken at $22\frac{1}{2}$ hours per week, this gives 3.7 per cent. It must be borne in mind, however, that this does not include the daily ten minutes or so which are very frequently given to actual spelling at the commencement or end of the reading lessons.

Reading lessons are universal, and are given in all standards. The amount of time devoted