

Alphabetic Law with an Improved Alphabet is the crying need of American Literature

OPEN LETTER N^o 3

TO AMERICAN RULERS, AND TO ALL WHO WRITE OR READ AMERICAN LITERATURE.

Properly to educate his people is the first duty of a ruler, from the head of a household up to the ruler of an empire. No part of a nation's education is so important to all its needs as its mother-tongue, the instrument by which all other learning is acquired.

A nation's language is its vehicle of thought, of feeling and of will,—and nothing more needs the supervision of its government.

Written language is either hieroglyphic or alphabetic,—or a mongrel mixture of the two, uglier and far harder to learn than either. Hieroglyphy uses a monogram or single picture [like 7, 7. § or ¶] unfactored and unlabeled, for each word. Having no factors or parts it cannot be analyzed or spelled. To spell a word is to name its separate voice-factors, 2 in ox or no, 3 in fox, six or bos, and so on to 12 or 20.

Alphabecy uses factored or spelled words, each a cluster or string [long or short] of ink-factors exactly measuring its spoken name, W-h-o-l-e for whole, s-y-l-l-a-b-l-e for syllable and f-a-c-t-o-r for factor, and having its ink-factors named both **FOR** and **AFTER** the corresponding factors of the spoken word. Thus, a written word is to the eye [and also to the mind] exactly what its spoken name is to the ear. By interchangeable use its ink-factors become **IDENTICAL**, in thought and use, with its voice-factors.

By a fixed law of interchangeability in their use each word-graph, long or short, must, when written, contain **INK FACTORS** having the same names and set in the same order as the **VOICE-FACTORS** of the spoken word: 3 in tax, fix or fox; 6 in sports or in hippos, and 12 in hippopotamus. [This labels each group like a pill box or a conductor's cap].

And by the same law a reader must voice every **INK FACTOR** of the group by its corresponding **VOICE FACTOR** [**FOR** and **AFTER** which it is named in the alphabet].

A spelled word, then, formed by alphabetic law, is a labeled group of voice factors called letters, which plainly tells its name at sight, so that a reader can voice it correctly if he knows his alphabet, though he knows not its meaning and never before saw the word. This name-telling is the test and the differential of a spelled word, factored and formed by alphabetic law. Every factor in it is both **SEEN** and truly **HEARD** by its reader before he voices it to a listener or to himself.

A monogram or picture word, like 6. 7. § or †, wears no label and cannot tell its name. It has a name,—but like the Sphinx or a dumb man, it cannot **TELL** its name.

This name-telling, which is the differential and the sole distinction of an alphabetic word, makes alphabetic writing incomparably superior to all other forms of word-noting or writing. All others are either hieroglyphs or hybrids, half and half, and worse than either.

A mongrel word [like queue, colonel or crochet] uses the group FORM in writing, but ignores the group LAW.

If the last syllables of BANQUET and of BOQUET, factored alike to the eye, are not also voiced alike to the ear, then one of them, though a group of voice-pictures, taken from the alphabet, violates alphabetic law and wears a false label. Its ink-factors are not true to its voice-factors, or to their own names.

This mongrelcy, embracing a large part of written English, is far worse for a learner than hieroglyphy. The one [like 8 or †] wears no label to guide a reader in voicing it. The other (like eight or boquet) wears a false label that deceives a reader, and misleads every one who trusts it as a guide. Such words a reader must voice not BY LAW, but in known and painful VIOLATION OF LAW. And the arbitrary name of each group he must get—not from spelling it—but from the oft-repeated dictation of a living teacher.

American literature now contains more than 20,000 of these mis-labeled and misleading words. And this number is always increasing—Solely for want of an authoritative alphabet and a trusted leader in using it.

An alphabet is a list of voice-pictures, called graphs or letters, each graph, like a bell, ever carrying with it, and in it, a fixed yet latent sound of its own, and each audibly outputting its own sound as its function and its only use, wherever the graph makes a word or part of a word. Its latent sound, fixed and unchangeable, is, in a letter, (as in a bell or piano string) its only essential element.

A good alphabet, formed by law, requires:

- 1st. A single graph for each voice-sound used in talking;
- 2d. A single sound for each graph; and
- 3d. A single and a common name for both;—the first to guide a writer in graphing correctly a spoken word; the second, to guide a reader in voicing a written word,—and the third to guide both. Its oneness-of-name for a graph and its sound enables the eye, by joint action with the ear to know the name or voice-sound of a written word by and through its named form,—and then to GUIDE the tongue in voicing it. This makes written language, cognized by the eye, identical with oral, cognized by the ear, because the eye and ear by interaction and joint work soon learn vicariously to do each other's work with absolute certainty. Nothing but alphabetic law, fully carried out, can reach this perfection of word-writing and thought-carrying.

American literature has no alphabet of its own, and the English alphabet, though the best ever yet made, is sadly defective in every requirement of a good alphabet meant to guide both writers and readers.—

- 1st. It often gives two or more functions (in one case six) to one graph.
- 2d. It often uses two or more graphs (in one case eight) for one sound; and
- 3d. Some of its graphs are not yet named AFTER the sounds they carry. Down to my own day Z was called "izzard", then "zed", and at last, "ze;" this is i's right name, for this also names its function or sound.

American scholarship can now remedy these great defects and give to our people an alphabet nearly perfect. We need nothing but an authoritative start in this direction. If our government would establish in the "Smithson" a bureau of language with a competent Commissioner (I am not a candidate, I am nearly blind and past four score years of age) and order him to do this work, it would soon be begun and then quickly and eagerly accepted by the people. To begin it in this way is to insure a grand and most beneficent completion, as helpful for all time to the government itself as to every citizen. It will make clear the aim and meaning of the government's laws, and unspeakably will it aid the people in learning to read those laws.

Such an alphabet our Commissioner can form without dropping from our literature any letter now in use, and without adding a new and strange one.

- 1st. He can list in the alphabet many graphs, single and double, that are now used as letters but are not so named or listed, naming each after the sound it carries.
- 2d. He can diacris (mark) each word long or short and new name the short ones.
- 3d. He can diacris both c and g when hard calling the one KE, in CAT, COT or CUT, and the other GHE in GET, GOT or GUN, marking in the same way PH, CH and TH when hard, but not marking them when soft, and naming each both FOR and AFTER the sound it now carries. Then all readers will voice alike and aright such ambiguous words as "oleo-margarine" and "pedagogy," "archangel," "archfiend" and "architect" without a teacher or a dictionary. Safely guided by the simple law that a letter is always to be voiced by the sound that names it in the alphabet. Then to spell a written word will be to name, at once and with the same breath, both its VOICE-FACTORS and its INK-FACTORS.

The Commissioner will, of course, both formulate and follow the five simple rules of alphabetic writing, and order all government printing to be done with diacrised type that will not allow a second sound to any letter. Then, I judge, he will go on in something like the following order,—

- 1st. Drop final graphs that have no sound, as in depot, programme and furlough.
- 2d. When this little change is tested and well established, then drop e—final when used as a diacris and carrying no sound.
- 3d. After a while drop other graphs that have no function or use, as in dest, gnat or knife. At last he will disuse every dead and unmeaning graph, writing each word with factors of the same names and in the same order as its voice-factors. Then will alphabetic law be established in our official literature, and gladly will every citizen accept and follow it in his own writing. It matters not whether this process takes ten, twenty or fifty years. Every step in it will be welcomed as an improvement and a public benefit, helping all and hurting no one.

The new alphabet will so conjoin double letters, like CH, PH and TH, as to show their unity of form and name for new learners, without hurting or hindering their separate use by old readers. To the latter it will be the old alphabet unchanged except by slight marks. But to new learners it will be a new alphabet, with nearly twice as many letters as the old one had, and with ten times its power to guide and to help all learners.

It must now be evident, my reader, that the English alphabet is both defective and misleading and that American literature greatly needs a better one. You know, too, that spelling by word-factors or voice-sound is taught in our schools, and that publishers often diacris letters to discriminate between long and short sounds, and between hard and soft sounds, also to indicate dead letters and double ones. There is, moreover, a wide-spread and growing belief that English, which is already the prevailing language of the commercial world, will one day become universal. This grand event will be greatly hastened by the reform I seek.

As a patriot and a Christian I desire this reform for the honor of my country and the good of my race. But as a teacher, with a very large family of pupil-children, now scattered world-wide, I seek and most earnestly desire it in parental pity for millions of little ones now toiling wearily through years of discouraging and needless work in learning a language both alphabetless and without law, which, if reduced to law, can be learned in a tenth part of the time. Aged and nearly blind, after many years of earnest work in teaching, I now affirm that under alphabetic law and with a perfect alphabet, a bright boy can learn to read and spell correctly in a tithe of the time it now takes. And the sole thing needed is that our government shall bring its own literature under alphabetic law. If our rulers fail to do this greatly needed work, England I hope will do it and gain the glory.

The need of a common language on earth is seen in the growing demands of commerce for a common system of weights, coins and measures. Science and Art are also seeking a common nomenclature. Diplomacy and travel, telegraphy and missionary work would also be greatly aided by it, as would every other interest on earth. Volapuk in Europe and other great and costly efforts of our day to construct such a language, shows plainly both the yearning hope and the urgent need of it. These facts hint at a "necessity" in the case, and suggest that the times demand of us or England a revision of our alphabet and the full use of alphabetic law in our literature.

Mongrelcy has touched and tainted nine-tenths of our words, as a fair count will show, and the corruption goes on. If no competent authority takes this matter in hand, the result will be that each great publishing house will make its own alphabet with its own mode of diacrising, and its own method of writing and pronouncing English words. And after a while it will be as difficult for a native American to learn our language as it now is for an adult foreigner.

If, however, our government will take the lead in this beneficent and much-needed reform, just as it did a century ago with the reform of our confused Colonial currency, adopting for its own use some fixed system and giving to it the weight and authority of its own example, as it did in the matter of currency, then publishers and people will all unite in its use. And never will posterity cease to laud the administration that gave to them the great boon. Then our language (like our currency) will be—not local, variant and sectional, as it now is, but—uniform and national and one day it will become universal.

MATTHEW M. CAMPBELL.

Boulder, Colo., August 15th, 1887.

Please circulate and discuss this paper. I'll answer every inquiry I can, and shall hope to give some other useful hints.

M—M—CAMPBELL, TEACHER.

*Misprints on this paper. But its
drift & purpose I hope are plain.
M M C*