

PRINCIPLES OF SPELLING REFORM

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649274741

Principles of Spelling Reform by F. Sturges Allen

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

F. STURGES ALLEN

**PRINCIPLES OF
SPELLING REFORM**

Principles *of*
Spelling Reform

BY

F. STURGES ALLEN



NEW YORK

THE BRADLEY-WHITE CO.

1907

9282,136



*Quarterly Journal
of Economics.*

COPYRIGHT 1907,

BY

F. STURGES ALLEN

NOTE

The following consideration of the principles of spelling reform consists of two independent papers that somewhat overlap; but in general the second one supplements the first. They are issued in this form because it is believed that there is enough that is new in the views expressed to give them some value in the present discussion of the subject.

F. S. A.

December 1st, 1906

The Main Principles of Spelling Reform

That the spelling of English words needs, and admits of, simplification is the general view of competent persons. As to how this simplification shall be accomplished, however, no such consensus exists. The measures advocated vary from those involving but little change to those that would Italianize our vowel system and by this and other fundamental changes revolutionize our spelling, sever the continuity of the development of our written language, and render useless except to the scholar the entire body of English books now in print. When opinions are so divergent it is evident that there are no generally accepted principles upon which they are based.

We at all times take a kind of Platonic interest in the written form of our language, which is determined by our spelling; but proposed changes in it ordinarily excite only a passing curiosity and perhaps an expression of disapproval or commendation, which at best is indifferent because we feel that any actual change is unlikely to take place, or that it must be accomplished by the slow natural processes which guarantee conservatism and, usually, wisdom. But the present movement for what is called a "simplified spelling" is not a mere proposal; it is an active "campaign," a propaganda. As such it aims to carry into

effect by artificial means the changes deemed wise by those who have proposed or advocated them without waiting for the slow expression of public opinion or that general public discussion which matters affecting all men customarily and properly receive.

The movement has already received such support as to put forcibly before us the question as to whether the proposed changes are wise or unwise. This query cannot be answered by an appeal to mere conservatism or radicalism, nor to prejudices for or against the particular changes recommended. We must rather determine whether the general principle upon which the recommendations are based is correct or incorrect; and, having done this, we must examine the effects of the proposed changes in detail. It is only from such a consideration that we can arrive at any conclusions that will be of any moment, or intrinsically worthy of serious attention. It is proposed to consider here only the general principle on which the recommendations of change are based.

An examination of the circulars distributed by the "Simplified Spelling Board" readily discloses that the governing principle on which the simplifications are based is that the "only proper office" of spelling is to serve as "a guide to pronunciation"—as Professor Lounsbury has expressed it. If this principle is true it is plain that it would be in the end profitable to make the proposed changes. If the principle is not true it is equally plain that such changes as counter the true principle are unwise, and that to give them a forced currency by propagandism or inconsiderate action is pernicious, because the older and

better forms would necessarily be restored by the slow processes that produced them. The question that we must answer, then, is: What is the true function of the written word?

The spelling, or written form, of English is as truly a result of its organic development as its pronunciation. For our knowledge of the facts that have determined and preserved it we are no longer dependent upon myth or tradition; nor need we seek an explanation for the past nor a guide to the future in superstition or prejudice. Its history begins with and includes the history of our alphabet. That is known to us in all essentials, and the facts that prescribe what shall be its character and function in the near future are before us or obtainable.

The first step towards the formation of alphabets was the representation of simple ideas or events by pictures inscribed upon wood or bone, such as the rude American Indian drawings. Here the representation is individualistic and not conventional. A long step from this is the system of pictographs or hieroglyphs—the expression of thought by the use of pictures more or less conventionalized, and directly symbolizing some object or idea. But as yet the picture has no primary association with a fixed sound; it stands rather for a thing, an idea.

Repeated use, however, and perhaps a greater degree of conventionalization of form, lessens the pictorial function, and the inscription becomes an ideograph, a symbol for an idea, for a word, a phrase, or perhaps for several homophonous words. There now remains but a modicum of individualism. Gradually by attrition or association the ideograph loses