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S.P.E.

Tract No. II

ON

ENGLISH HOMOPHONES

BY

Robert Bridges

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ENGLISH HOMOPHONES

When two or more words different in origin and signification are pronounced alike, whether they are alike or not in their spelling, they are said to be homophonous, or homophones of each other. Such words if spoken without context are of ambiguous signification.

Definition of homophone.

Homophone is strictly a relative term, but it is convenient to use it absolutely, and to call any word of this kind a homophone.¹

Homophony is between words as *significant* sounds, but it is needful to state that homophonous words must be *different* words, else we should include a whole class of words which are not true homophones. Such words as *draft*, *train*, *board*, have each of them separate meanings as various and distinct as some true homophones; for instance, a draught of air, the miraculous draught of fishes, the draught of a ship, the draft of a picture, or a draught of medicine, or the present draft of this essay, though it may ultimately appear medicinal, are, some of them, quite as distinct objects or notions as, for instance, *vane* and *vein* are: but the ambiguity of *draft*, however spelt, is due to its being the name of anything that is *drawn*; and since there are many ways of drawing things, and different things are drawn in different ways, the *same word* has come to carry very discrepant significations.

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Though such words as these² are often inconveniently and even distressingly ambiguous, they are not homophones, and are therefore excluded from my list: they exhibit different meanings of one word, not the same sound of different words: they are of necessity present, I suppose, in all languages, and corresponding words in independent languages will often develop exactly corresponding varieties of meaning. But since the ultimate origin and derivation of a word is sometimes uncertain, the scientific distinction cannot be strictly enforced.

Now, wherever the same derivation of any two same-sounding words is at all doubtful, such words are practically homophones:—and again in cases where the derivation is certainly the same, yet, if the ultimate

False homophones.

meanings have so diverged that we cannot easily resolve them into one idea, as we always can *draft*, these also may be practically reckoned as homophones.

Continent, adjective and substantive, is an example of absolute divergence of meaning, inherited from the Latin; but as they are different parts of speech, I allow their plea of identical derivation and exclude them from my list. On the other hand, the substantive *beam* is an example of such a false homophone as I include. *Beam* may signify a balk of timber, or a ray of light. Milton's address to light begins

O first created beam

and Chaucer has

As thikke as motes in the sonne-beam,

and this is the commonest use of the word in poetry, and probably in literature: Shelley has

Then the bright child the plumèd seraph came
And fixed its blue and beaming eyes on mine.

But in Tyndal's gospel we read

Why seest thou a mote in thy brother's eye and perceivest not
the beam that is in thine own eye?

The word *beam* is especially awkward here,³ because the beam that is proper to the eye is not the kind of beam which is intended. The absurdity is not excused by our familiarity, which Shakespeare submitted to, though he omits the incriminating eye:

You found his mote; the king your mote did see,
But I a beam do find in each of three.

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And yet just before he had written

So sweet a kiss the golden sun gives not
To those fresh morning drops upon the rose,
As thy eye-beams when their fresh rays have smote
The night of dew that on my cheeks down flows.

Let alone the complication that *mote* is also a homophone, and that outside Gulliver's travels one might as little expect to find a house-beam as a castle-moat in a man's eye, the confusion of *beam* is indefensible, and the example will serve three purposes: first to show how different significations of the same word may make practical homophones, secondly the radical mischief of all homophones, and thirdly our insensibility towards an absurdity which is familiar: but the absurdity is no less where we are accustomed to it than where it is unfamiliar and shocks us.

And we are so accustomed to homophones in English that they do not much offend us; we do not imagine their non-existence, and most people are probably unaware of their inconvenience. It might seem that to be perpetually burdened by an inconvenience must be the surest way of realizing it, but through habituation our practice is no doubt full of unconscious devices for avoiding these ambiguities: moreover, inconveniences to which we are born are very lightly taken; many persons have grown up to manhood blind of one eye without being aware of their disability; and others who have no sense of smell or who cannot hear high sounds do not miss the sense that they lack; and so I think it may be with us and our homophones. ***Tolerance due to habit.***

But since if all words were alike in sound there would be no spoken language, the differentiation of the sound of words is of the essence of speech, and it follows that the more homophones there are in any language, the more faulty is that language as a scientific and convenient vehicle of speech. This will be illustrated in due course: the actual condition of English with respect to homophones must be understood and appreciated before the nature of their growth and the possible means of their mitigation will seem practical questions.

The first essential, then, is to know the extent and nature of the mischief; and this can only be accomplished by setting out the homophones in a table before the eye. The list below is taken from a ***Great number.***

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'pronouncing dictionary' which professes not to deal with obsolete words, and it gives over 800 ambiguous sounds; so that, since these must be at least doublets, and many of them are triplets or quadruplets, we must have something between 1,600 and 2,000 words of ambiguous meaning in our ordinary vocabulary.⁴

Now it is variously estimated that 3,000 to 5,000 words is about the limit of an average educated man's talking vocabulary, and since the 1,600 are, the most of them, words which such a speaker will use (the reader can judge for himself) it follows that he has a foolishly imperfect and clumsy instrument.

As to what proportion 1,700 (say) may be to the full vocabulary of the language—it is difficult to

estimate this because the dictionaries vary so much. The word *homophone* is not recognized by Johnson or by Richardson: Johnson under *homo-* has six derivatives of Herbert Spencer's favourite word *homogeneous*, but beside these only four other words with this Greek affix. Richardson's dictionary has an even smaller number of such entries. Jones has 11 entries of *homo-*, and these of only five words, but the Oxford dictionary, besides 50 words noted and quoted beginning with *homo-*, has 64 others with special articles.

Dr. Richard Morris estimated the number of words in an English dictionary as 100,000: Jones has 38,000 words, exclusive of proper names, and I am told that the Oxford dictionary will have over 300,000. Its 114 *homo-* words will show how this huge number is partly supplied.

Before the reader plunges into the list, I should wish to fortify his spirit against premature despair by telling him that in my tedious searching of the dictionary for these words I was myself cheered to find how many words there were which are *not* homophones.

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LIST OF HOMOPHONES

This list, the object of which is to make the reader easily acquainted with the actual defect of the language in this particular, does not pretend to be complete or scientific; and in the identification of doubtful words the clue was dictated by brevity. *s.*, *v.*, and *adj.* mean *substantive*, *verb*, and *adjective*. The sections were made to aid the conspectus.

The main indictment is contained in sections i, ii, and iii. These three sections contain 505 entries, involving some 1,075 words.

The homophones in the other sections, iv, v, vi, vii, viii and ix, are *generally* of such a kind that they would not of themselves constitute a very peculiar case against the English language; but their addition to the main list does very much strengthen the case. One intention in isolating them from the main list was to prevent their contaminating it with their weaker quality; but their separate classification crosses and sometimes overrides that more general distinction. Section iv has some literary interest; vi is inconsistent; the other sections are more or less scientific. These six sections contain some 330 entries involving about 700 words, so that the total of words involved is about 1,775.

The order in this section is that of the phonetic alphabet.

I. THE MAIN LIST OF HOMOPHONES.

arc, ark.
arm (*limb*), arm (*weapon*).
alms, arms.
aunt, ant, arn't.
arch (*s.*), arch (*adj.*).
eye, ay, I.
idol, idle, idyll.
aisle, isle, I'll.
eyelet, islet.
our, hour.
bark (*dog*), bark (*tree*), bark (*boat*).
balm, barm.
bite, bight.
buy, by, bye.
bough, bow, bow (*of ship*).
bound (*leap*), bound (*limit*), bound (fr. *bind*).
bank (*ground*), bank (*money*).
barren, baron.
barrow (*hill*), barrow (*wheel-b.*).
bat (*club*), bat (*vespertilio*).
batter (*s.*), batter (*v.*).
buck (*various roots and senses*).
bustle (*hurry*), bustle (*dress*).
but, butt (*tub*), butt (*v.*).
bale (*ill*), bale (*pack*), bail (*bis*).
base, bass.
bate, bait.
beck (*and nod*), beck (*a brook*).
bell, belle.
bury, berry.
bear (*s.*), bare (*adj.*), bear, bare (*v.*).
berth, birth.
bee, be.
beat, beet.
beetle (*insect*), beetle (*hammer*).
beach, beech.

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bier, beer.
blow (*a stroke*), blow (*of wind*).
bow, beau.
bogy, bogie.
bole, bowl.
bolt (*a weapon*), bolt (*sift*), bolt (*run*).
bore (*perforate*), bore (*tidal*), bore (fr. *bear*), boar.
board, bawd, bored.
ball, bawl.
born, borne.
boy, buoy.
boil (*s.*), boil (*v.*).
box (*tree*), box (*receptacle*), box (*v.*).
bridal, bridle.
bray (*of donkey*), bray (*to pound*), brae.
break, brake (*fern*), brake (*of carriages, bis*).
braze (*to solder*), braze (*to brazen*), braise (*to stew*), braes.
breach, breech.
breeze (*the wind*), breeze (*a fly*), breeze (*cinders*).
broach, brooch.
hue, hew.
die (*v.*), dye, die (*cast*).
down (*dune*), down (*fluff*), down (*adv.*).
doubt, dout.
dam (*mother*), dam (*obstruct*), damn.
duck (*bird*), duck (*dear*), duck (*stuff*), duck (*v.*).
dun (*colour*), dun (*importune*), done.
date (*fruit*), date (*datum*).
dean, dene.
deer, dear.
desert, dessert.
due, dew.
doe, dough.
dock (*plant*), dock (*basin*), dock (*shear*).
drill (*sow*), drill (*bore*), drill (*training*).
drupe, droop.
jar (*vase*), jar (*discord*).
jamb, jam.
jet (*mineral*), jet (*squirt*).
gin (*drink*), gin (*snare*), jinn.
there, their.
the, thee.
eh! aye (*ever*).
ale, ail.
eight, ait or eyot, ate (fr. *eat*).
egg, egg (*to incite*).
elder (*tree*), elder (*senior*).
air, heir, ere, e'er.
airship, heirship.
aery, airy.
earn, urn, erne (*eagle*).
alight (*adj.*), alight (*v.*).
ascent, assent.
foul, fowl.
fallow (*untilled*), fallow (*colour*).
fane, feign, fain.
faint, feint.
fast (*eccl.*), fast (*adj. various*).
fate, fête.
fell (*fierce*), fell (*skin*), fell (*hill*), fell (fr. *fall*).
fellow, fellow.
ferule, ferrule.
fair, fare [*doublet*], phare.
fir, fur.
feet, feat (*s.*), feat (*adj. obs.*).
filter, philtre.
fit (*benefit*), fit (*conflict*), fytté [*obs.*].
flag (*v.*), flag (*ensign*), flag (*plant*), flag (*-stone*).
flee, flea.
flow, floe.
flock (*herd*), flock (*of wool*).
flue (*chimney*), flue (*velu*), flew (fr. *fly*).
fluke (*fish*), fluke (*of anchor*), fluke (*slang word*).
fold (*wrap*), fold (*of sheep*), foaled.
four, fore, for.

forego, forgo, and other compounds.
 fourth, forth.
 foil (*s.*), foil (*v.*), foil (*fencer's*).
 fray (*ravel*), fray (*combat*).
 fret (*eat away*), fret (*adorn*), fret (*on lute*).
 freeze, frieze (*archit.*), frieze (*cloth*), frees (fr. *free*).
 gamble, gambol,
 gum (*resin*), gum (*teeth*).
 gage, gauge,
 gate, gait.
 gird (*encircle*), gird (*revile*).
 guild, gild.
 guilt, gilt.
 glare, glair (*white of egg*), + glary, glairy.
 gore (*pierce*), gore (*triangle*), gore (*blood*).
 groin, groyne (*breakwater*).
 great, grate (*s.*), grate (*v.*).
 heart, hart.
 high, hie.
 hide (*v.*), hide (*skin*), hied.
 hack (*hew*), hack (*hackney*).
 hamper (*impede*), hamper (*hanaper*).
 hail! hail (*snow*), hale (*adj.*), hale (*haul*).
 helm (*of ship*), helm (*helmet*).
 hair, hare.
 heel, heal, he'll.
 here, hear.
 hymn, him.
 hole, whole, + holy, wholly, holey.
 home, holm.
 hoar, whore, haw.
 hoard, horde,
 hawk (*bird*), hawk (*v. of hawker*), hawk (*hoquet*).
 hall, haul.
 halt (*v.*), halt (*adj.*).
 horse, hoarse.
 hock (*of horse*), hock (*wine*).
 hop (*jump*), hop (*plant*).
 hue, hew.
 humorous, humerus.
 even (*s.*), even (*adj.*).
 ear, ear (*plough*), ear (*of corn*).
 yoke, yolk.
 yew, ewe, you.
 ure, ewer, your.
 card (*s.*), card (*v.*).
 cask, casque.
 cast, caste.
 cart, carte, quart (*cards and fencing*).
 count (*s.*), count (*v.*).
 counter (*opp.*), counter (*of shop*), counter (*in games*), &c.
 couch (*coucher*), couch (*grass*).
 caddy (*lad*), caddy (*box*).
 can (*s.*), can (*v.*).
 cannon, canon *bis*.
 currant, current.
 curry (*food*), curry (*comb*).
 colonel, kernel.
 cape (*dress*), cape (*headland*).
 caper (*skip*), caper (*plant*).
 case (*event*), case (*receptacle*).
 cashier (*s.*), cashier (*v.*).
 key, quay.
 keen (*adj.*), keen (*v.*).
 cue, queue.
 climb, clime.
 cleek, clique.
 coal, cole.
 cope (*v.*), cope (*s.*).
 coat, cote.
 core, corps, caw.
 cork, caulk.
 call, caul.
 corn (*grain*), corn (*horny growth*).
 course, coarse, corse.

cobble (*to patch*), cobble (*boat*), cobble (*-stones*).
 cock (*s. and v.*), cock (*of hay*).
 cockle (*v.*), cockle (*s. var.*).
 creak, creek.
 cricket (*insect*), cricket (*game*).
 cruel, crewel.
 cruise, cruse, crews.
 coombe (*valley*), coom (*dry measure*).
 choir, quire (*of paper*).
 quiver (*v.*), quiver (*s.*).
 queen, quean [*obs.*].
 last (*adj., verb*), last (*s.*)
 lye (*s.*), lie (*v.*), lie (*s. and n.*).
 lyre, liar.
 lichen, liken.
 light (*s.*), light (*not heavy*), and hence lighten, lighten.
 lack, lac, lakh.
 lap (*lick up*), lap (*fold*), lap (*knees*).
 lay (*s., bis*), lay (*v.*).
 lake (*pond*), lake (*colour*).
 let (*allow*), let (*lease, v.*), let (*hinder, obs.*).
 lee, lea.
 leaf, lief.
 league (*s.*), league (*v. and s.*)
 leak, leek.
 lean (*v.*), lean (*adj.*).
 leech (*sucker and doctor*), leech (*of sail*).
 leave (*quit*), leave (*permit*).
 limp (*adj.*), limp (*v.*).
 link (*chain*), link (*torch*), also golf-links,
 list (*listen*), list (*heel over*), list (*of flannel*).
 liver (*organ*), liver (*who lives*).
 lo! low (*adj.*), low (*of cow's voice*).
 load, lode, lowed,
 lone, loan.
 lock (*of door*), lock (*of hair*), loch.
 long (*adj.*), long (*v.*).
 lorn, lawn,
 lute, loot.
 mast (*of ship*), mast (*beech-m.*).
 march (*step*), march (*boundary*), March (*month*).
 mine (*s.*), mine (*poss. pron.*).
 mite, might (*s.*), might (*v.*), [*and adj. -y*].
 mitre (*headdress*), mitre (*carpentry, &c.*).
 mass (*quantity*), mass (*office*).
 match (*equal*), match (*mèche*).
 muff (*dress*), muff (*a stupid*).
 may (*month*), may (*maid, obs.*), may (*v.*).
 male, mail (*coat of*), mail (*post*).
 mane, main.
 mace (*staff*), mace (*spice*).
 maze, maize, Mays (*pl. of month*).
 mare, mayor.
 meed, mead (*meadow*), mead (*drink*).
 mean (*intend*), mean (*intermediate*), mean (*poor*), mien (*countenance*).
 meet, meat, mete (*adj. and v.*).
 mere (*pool*), mere (*adj.*).
 mint (*herb*), mint (*coining*).
 miss (*fail*), Miss.
 mew (*cage*), mew (*bird*), mew (*of cat*).
 mute (*adj.*), mute (*of birds*).
 muse (*think*), Muse, mews (*stable*), mews (*fr. mew*).
 mote, moat.
 mow (*various senses*), mot (*French*).
 mole (*animal*), mole (*of skin*), mole (*breakwater*).
 mould (*to model*), mould (*earth*), mould (*rust*).
 maul (*disfigure*), Mall (*place*), mahl (*-stick*).
 morn, mourn, and morning.
 moor (*country*), Moor (*race*)
 night, knight.
 none, nun.
 need, knead, knee'd.
 neat (*s.*), neat (*adj.*).
 no, know.
 not, knot.

oar, ore, or, o'er, awe.
 augur, auger.
 all, awl, orle (*heraldry*).
 altar, alter.
 oral, aural.
 ought (*zero*), ought (*pp. of owe*), ort [*obs.*].
 par, pas (*faus*).
 pie (*pica*), pie (*dish*).
 pale (*pole*), pale (*pallid*), pail.
 pile (*heap*), pile (*stake*), pile (*hair*).
 pine (*v.*), pine (*tree*).
 pound (*weight*), pound (*enclosure*), pound (*to bruise*).
 pounce (*v.*), pounce (= *pumice*).
 pallet, palette, palate.
 paten, patten, pattern.
 pulse (*beat*), pulse (*pease*).
 punch (*strike*), punch (*drink*), Punch (*and Judy*).
 page (*of bk.*), page (*boy*).
 pane, pain.
 peck (*measure*), peck (*v.*).
 pelt (*to throw*), pelt (*skin*).
 pen (*writing*), pen (*inclose*).
 pair, pear, pare.
 pearl, purl (*flow*), purl (*knitting*).
 pique, peak.
 peal, peel.
 peep (*to look*), peep (*chirp*).
 piece, peace.
 peach (*fruit*), peach (*impeach*).
 peer (*to look*), peer (*s.*), pier.
 pill (*ball*), pill (*to pillage*).
 pink (*a flower*), pink (*a colour*), pink (*to pierce*).
 pip (*a seed*), pip (*a disease*), pip (*on cards*).
 pitch (*s.*), pitch (*to fall, &c.*).
 plight (*pledge*), plight or plite (*to plait*), and 'sad plight'.
 plat (*of ground*), plait.
 plum, plumb.
 plump (*adj.*), plump (*to fall heavily*).
 plane (*tree*), plain [*both various*].
 plot (*of ground*), plot (*stratagem*), + verbs.
 pole, poll.
 poach, (*eggs*), poach (*steal game*).
 pore (*of skin*), pore (*top. over*), paw.
 potter (*v.*), potter (*s.*).
 pall (*v.*), pall (*cloak*), pawl (*mechanics*).
 pry (*inquisitive*), pry (*to prise open*).
 prise, prize.
 pray, prey.
 prune (*fruit*), prune (*s.*).
 rye, wry.
 rime, rhyme.
 right, write, wright, rite.
 rabbit, rabbet (*carpentry*).
 rack [*various*], wrack.
 racket, racquet.
 rally (*assemble*), rally (= *raillery*).
 rank (*s.*), rank (*rancid*).
 rap, wrap.
 rash (*s.*), rash (*adj.*).
 ruff, rough.
 rum (*queer*), rum (*drink*), rhumb (*naut.*).
 rung (*s.*), and past pp. rung, wrung.
 rush (*s.*), rush (*v.*).
 rape (*seed*), rape (*ravish*), rape (*divn. of county, obs.*).
 race (*family*), race (*root*), race (*that is run*).
 rate (*proportion*), rate (*to chide*).
 rut (*furrow*), rut (*of animals*).
 rake (*tool*), rake (*a prodigal*), rake (*of a ship*).
 rail (*fence*), rail (*bird*).
 rain, reign, rein.
 raise, raze.
 reckon, wreck.
 rent (*paymt.*), rent (*s., tear*), rent (*fr. rend*).
 rest (*repose*), rest (*remainder*), wrest.
 reed, read.

reef (*of rocks*), reef (*of sails*).
 reek, wreak.
 reel (*highland-*), reel (*cotton-*).
 reach, retch.
 reave, reeve (*naut.*), reeve (*bailiff, obs.*).
 rifle (*ransack*), rifle (*s.v., groove*).
 rear (*raise*), rear (*arrière*).
 rig (*of ship*), rig (*prank, riggish*), rig (*-s of barley*).
 rick (*of corn*), rick wrick (*strain*).
 ring, wring.
 repair (*mend*), repair (*resort, v.*).
 row (*oaring*), row (*s. of things in line*), roe (*of fish*), roe (*fem. deer*).
 roll [*various*], rôle.
 rock (*stone*), rock (*v.*), roc.
 rocket (*plant*), rocket (*firework*).
 rue (*plant*), rue (*v. of ruth*).
 rude (*adj.*), rood (*s.*), rued (*fr. rue*).
 room, rheum.
 root, route.
 rout, route (*military*).
 sign, sine (*trigonom.*).
 site, sight, cite.
 size (*magnitude*), size (*glue*).
 sough, sow.
 sound (*noise*), sound (*to fathom*), sound (*adj.*), sound (*strait of sea*), sound (*fish bladder*).
 sack (*bag*), sack (*to plunder*), sack (*wine*).
 swallow (*a willow*), sallow (*pale colour*).
 sap (*of trees*), sap (*mine*).
 sum, some.
 sun, son + sunny, sonnie.
 sage (*plant*), sage (*adj.*).
 sale, sail.
 sell, cell.
 sense, cense.
 censual, sensual.
 surge, serge.
 surf, serf.
 scent, cent, sent (*fr. send*).
 session, cession.
 sea, see.
 seed, cede.
 seal (*animal*), ciel or ceil, seal (*sign*).
 seam, seem.
 sear, sere, cere, seer.
 serial, cereal.
 signet, cygnet.
 cist (*box*), cyst (*tumour, Gr.*).
 scar (*of wound*), scar (*a rock*).
 skull, scull.
 scale (*shell*), scale (*of balance*), scale (*of stairs*).
 scald (*burn*), skald (*poet, Norse*).
 scrub (*of shrubs*), scrub (*v.*).
 sledge (*vehicle*), sledge (*-hammer*).
 slight, sleight.
 slay, sleigh (*sledge*).
 slate (*s.*), slate (*v., abuse*).
 sloe, slow.
 slop (*puddle*), slop (*loose garment*).
 slot (*track*), slot (*bar*).
 sole (*adj.*), soul, sole (*a fish*).
 sow, sew.
 saw (*tool*), soar, sore, saw (*maxim*), saw (*fr. see*).
 soil (*ground*), soil (*defile*), soil (*v., of horses*).
 spar (*beam*), spar (*mineral*), spar (*to box*).
 salter (*who salts*), psalter.
 source, sauce.
 spell (*incantation*), spell (*letters*), spell (*turn of work*).
 spill (*upset*), spill (*match*).
 spit (*v.*), spit (*roasting*), spit (*of land*).
 spray (*drizzle*), spray (= *sprig*).
 spruce (*tree*), spruce (*adj.*)
 style, stile.
 stud (*nail*), stud (*of horses*).
 stake (*post*), steak, stake (*deposit*).

step, steppe.
 stair, stare.
 stern (*adj.*), stern (*of ship*).
 steal, steel, stele.
 steep (*adj.*), steep (*v.*).
 steer (*direct*), steer (*young ox*).
 still (*tranquil*), still (*distil*).
 stalk (*stem*), stalk (*v.*), stork.
 story, storey.
 strand (*shore*), strand (*fibre*).
 strain (*v. and s.*), strain (*a breed*).
 strait (*narrow*), straight (*upright*).
 stroke (*a blow*), stroke (*fondle*).
 stoup, stoop.
 shed (*scatter*), shed (*shelter*).
 tart (*adj.*), tart (*a pie*).
 tyre (*of wheel*), tire (*fatigue*), tire (*attire*), + tier (*who ties*).
 time, thyme.
 tap (*to strike*), tap (*short pipe*).
 tale, tail, tail (*estate in t.*).
 tender (*adj.*), tender (*s., attender*).
 tent (*pavilion*), tent (*plug of lint, s. and v.*), tent (*wine*).
 tare, tear (*v.*).
 teem, team.
 tear (*eye*), tier.
 tick (*bedding*), tick (*sheep*), tick (*clock*), tic (*spasm*), tick (*credit*).
 till (*cash drawer*), till (*until*).
 tilt (*v. to make aslant*), tilt (*tourney*), tilt (*of caravan*).
 tip (*top*), tip (*make to slant*), tip (*a gift*).
 toe, tow (*hemp*), tow (*draw a boat*).
 two, too, to.
 toll (*lax*), toll (*of bells*).
 taut, taught, tort.
 toil (*labour*), toil (*a snare*).
 top (*summit*), top (*a toy*).
 truck (*vehicle*), truck (*naut.*), truck (*barter*).
 trump (*trumpet*), trump (*at cards*).
 trunk (*box*), trunk (*of tree*), trunk (*of elephant*).
 tray, trait.
 trace (*track*), trace (*strap*).
 chair, chare.
 chap (*crack*), chap (*chapman*), chap (*cheek*).
 char (*burn*), char (*fish*), char (*-woman*).
 chop (*with hatchet*), chop (*and change*).
 chuck (*chick*), chuck (*strike gently*).
 chase (*hunt*), chase (*enchase*), chase (*printer's case*), chase (*groove*).
 vice (*depravity*), vice (*clench*), vice (*deputy*).
 valley, valet.
 van (*front of army*), van (*fan*), van (*caravan*).
 vale, veil, veil.
 vain, vein, vane.
 won, one.
 wake (*awake*), wake (*watch*), wake (*of ship*).
 wain, wane.
 waste, waist.
 wait, weight.
 wave, waive.
 well (*good*), well (*spring*).
 wee, we.
 weak, week.
 ween, wean.
 war, wore.
 would, wood.

II. All the following examples involve *wh.* > *w.*⁵

ware (*earthen-*), ware (*aware*), wear, where, were.
 way, weigh, whey.
 weal (*wealth*), weal (*a swelling*), wheel.
 weald, wield, wheeled.
 while, wile.
 whine, wine,
 white, wight.
 whether, weather.

whither, wither.
whig, wig.
whit, wit.
what, wot.
whet, wet.
whirr, were = wer'.
whin, win.
whist, wist.
which, witch, wych (*elm*).

III. Group of Homophones caused by loss of trilled R.⁶

ion, iron.
father, farther.
lava, larva.
halm, harm.
calve, carve.
talk, torque.
daw, door.
flaw, floor.
yaw, yore.
law, lore.
laud, lord.
maw, more,
gnaw, nor.
raw, roar.
shaw, shore.

IV. The name of a species (of animals, plants, &c.) is often a homophone. Where there is only one alternative meaning, this causes so little inconvenience that the following names (being in that condition) have been excluded from List I.⁷

bleak (*fish*), bleak (*adj.*).
dace, dais.
gull (*bird*), gull (*s. and v.*).
carp, carp (*v.*).
cod, cod (*husk*).
codling, coddling (fr. *coddle*).
flounder (*fish*), flounder (*v.*).
quail (*bird*), quail (*v.*).
lark (*bird*), lark (*fun*).
ling (*fish*), ling (*heather*).
mussel, muscle.
nit, knit.
awk, orc.
oriole, aureole.
pike (*fish*), pike (*weapon*).
pout (*fish*), pout (*v.*).
perch (*fish*), perch (*alight*).
plaice, place.
ray (*fish*), ray (*of light*).
rook (*bird*), rook (*v.*).
skua, skewer.
skate (*fish*), skate (*on ice*).
smelt (*fish*), smelt (fr. *smell*).
swift (*bird*), swift (*adj.*).
swallow (*bird*), swallow (*throat*).
tapir, taper.
tern, turn.
teal (*fish*), teil (*tree*).
thrush (*bird*), thrush (*disease*).

V. The suffix *er* added to a root often makes homophones. The following are examples. (And see in List VI.)

byre, buyer (*who buys*).
butter (*s.*), butter (*who butts*).
better (*adj.*), better (*who bets*).
border, boarder.
dire, dyer.
founder (*v.*), founder (*who founds*).
geyser, gazer.
greater, grater (*nutmeg*).

canter (*pace*), canter (*who cants*).
medlar, meddler.
moulder (*v.*), moulder (*who moulds*).
pitcher (*vessel*), pitcher (*who pitches*).
pillar, piller.
platter, plaiter.
plumper (*adj.*), plumper (*s.*).
sunder (*adj.*), sunder (*who sounds*).
cellar, seller, &c.

VI. Words excluded from the main list for various reasons, their homophony being rightly questioned by many speakers.

actor, acta (*sanctorum*).
brute, bruit.
direst, diarist.
descent, dissent.
deviser, divisor.
dual, duel.
goffer, golfer.
carrot, carat.
caudle, caudal.
choler, collar.
compliment, complement.
lumber, lumbar.
lesson, lessen.
literal, littoral.
marshal, martial.
minor, miner.
manor, manner.
medal, meddle.
metal, mettle.
missal, missel (*thrush*).
orphan, often.
putty, puttee.
pedal, peddle.
police, pelisse.
principal, principle.
profit, prophet.
rigour, rigger.
rancour, ranker.
succour, sucker.
sailor, sailer.
cellar, seller.
censor, censer.
surplus, surplice.
symbol, cymbal.
skip, skep.
tuber, tuba.
whirl, whorl.
wert, wort (*herb, obs.*).
vial, viol.
verdure, verger (*in Jones*).

VII. Homophones due only to an inflected form of a word. Comparatives of adjectives, &c.

adze, adds.
art (*s.*), art (*v.*).
bard, barred.
band, banned.
battels, battles (*bis*).
baste, based.
baize, bays (*bis*).
bent, bent (*pp. bend*).
bean, been.
blue, blew.
bode, bowed.
bold, bowled, bolled (*obs.*).
bald, bawled.
braid, brayed.
bread, bred.
brood, brewed.
bruise, brews.

depose, dépôts.
divers (*adj.*), divers (*plu.*).
dug (*teat*), dug (fr. *dig*).
duct, ducked.
dust, dost.
daze, days.
daisies, dazes (*both inflected*).
doze, does (*plu. of doe*).
aloud, allowed.
fort, fought.
found (*v.*), found (fr. *find*)
phase, fays (*pl. of fay*).
felt (*stuff*), felt (fr. *feel*)
furze, firs, and furs.
feed (*s. and v.*), fee'd.
flatter (*v.*), flatter (*adj.*).
phlox, flocks.
phrase, frays.
guise, guys (*plu.*).
gaud, gored.
gauze, gores.
guest, guessed.
glose, glows.
ground (*s.*), ground (fr. *grind*).
graze, greys.
greaves, grieves.
groan, grown.
grocer, grosser.
hire, higher.
herd, heard.
hist, hissed.
hose, hoes.
hawse (*naut.*), haws, &c.
eaves, eves.
use (*v.*), ewes, yews.
candid, candied.
clove (*s.*), clove (fr. *cleave*).
clause, claws.
cold, coaled.
courser, coarser.
court, caught.
cause, cores, caws.
coir, coyer (fr. *coy*).
crew (*s.*), crew (fr. *crow*).
quartz, quarts.
lighter (*s.*), lighter (fr. *light, adj.*).
lax, lacks, &c.
lapse, laps, &c.
lade (*v.*), laid.
lane, lain.
lead (*mineral*), led.
left (*adj.*), left (fr. *leave*).
Lent, leant, lent (fr. *lend*).
least, leased.
lees (*of wine*), leas, &c.
lynx, links.
mind, mined.
madder (*plant*), madder (fr. *mad*).
mustard, mustered.
maid, made.
mist, missed.
mode, mowed.
moan, mown.
new, knew, &c.
nose, knows, noes.
aught (*a whit*), ought (fr. *owe*).
pact, packed.
paste, paced.
pervade, purveyed.
pyx, picks.
please, pleas.
pause, paws, pores.
pride, pried [*bis*].
prize, pries.
praise, prays, preys.

rouse, rows.
 rasher (*bacon*), rasher (fr. *rash*).
 raid, rayed.
 red, read (*p. of to read*).
 rex, wrecks, recks.
 road, rode, rowed.
 rote, wrote.
 rove (*v. of rover*), rove (fr. *reeve*).
 rose, rows (*var.*), roes (*var.*), rose (*v.*).
 ruse, rues (fr. *rue*).
 side, sighed.
 size, sighs.
 scene, seen.
 seize, seas, sees.
 sold, soled (*both inflected*).
 sword, soared.
 sort, sought.
 span (*length*), span (fr. *spin*).
 spoke (*of wheel*), spoke (fr. *speak*).
 stole (*s.*), stole (fr. *steal*).
 stove (*s.*), stove (fr. *stave*).
 tide, tied.
 tax, tacks (*various*).
 tact, tacked.
 tease, teas, tees.
 toad, towed, toed.
 told, tolled.
 tract, tracked.
 trust, trussed.
 chaste, chased (*various*).
 choose, chews.
 throne, thrown.
 through, threw.
 wild, wiled.
 wind (*roll*), whined.
 wax, whacks.
 wade, weighed.
 weld, welled.
 word, whirred.
 wilt (*wither*), wilt (fr. *will*).
 ward, warred.
 wont, won't.
 warn, worn.

VIII. 'False homophones' [see p. 4], doubtful doublets, &c.

beam, beam (*of light*).
 bit (*horse*), bit (*piece*), bit (fr. *bite*).
 brace, brace.
 diet, diet.
 deck (*cover*), deck (*adorn*).
 deal (*various*).
 dram (*drink*), drachm.
 drone (*insect*), drone (*sound*).
 jest, gest (*romance, and obs. senses*).
 jib (*sail*), jib (*of horses*).
 fine (*adj., v. senses*), fine (*mulct*).
 flower, flour.
 fleet (*s.*), fleet (*adj.*), Fleet (*stream*).
 grain (*corn*), grain (*fibres*).
 indite, indict.
 incense (*v. =cense*), incense (*incite*).
 kind (*adj.*), kind (*s.*).
 canvas, canvass.
 cuff (*sleeve*), cuff (*strife*).
 cousin, cozen.
 cord, chord (*music*).
 coin, coign.
 cotton (*s.*), cotton (*v.*).
 crank (*s.*), crank (*adj.*).
 quaver (*v.*), quaver (*music*).
 levy, levee.
 litter (*brood*), litter (*straw*).
 mantle (*cloak*), mantle (*shelf*).

mess (*confusion*), mess (*table*).
 mussel, muscle.
 nail (*unguis*), nail (*clavus*).
 patent (*open*), patent (*monopoly*).
 pommel (*s.*), pummel (*v.*).
 refrain (*v.*), refrain (*s., in verse*).
 retort (*reply*), retort (*chemical vessel*).
 second (*number*), second (*of time*).
 squall (*v.*), squall (*a gale*).
 slab (*s.*), slab (*adj.*).
 smart (*s. and v., sting*), smart (*adj.*).
 stave (*of barrel*), stave (*of music*), [*stave in (v.)*].
 stick (*s.*), stick (*v.*).
 stock (*stone*), stock (*in trade*), &c.
 strut (*a support*), strut (*to walk*).
 share (*division*), share (*plough*).
 sheet (*sail and clew*), sheet (*-anchor*).
 shear (*clip*), sheer (*clear*), sheer off (*deviate*).
 tack (*various*), tack (*naut.*).
 ton, tun.
 wage (*earnings*), wage (*of war*).

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IX. The following words were not admitted into the main class chiefly on account of their unimportance.

ah! are.
 arse, ass.
 ask, aske (*newt*)
 ayah, ire.
 bah! bar, baa.
 barb, barb (*horse*).
 bask, basque.
 barn, barne = bairn.
 budge, budge (*stuff*).
 buff, buff.
 buffer, buffer.
 berg, burgh (*suffixes*).
 bin, bin = been.
 broke (*v. of broke*), broke (*fr. break*).
 broom, brume (*fog*).
 darn, darn.
 fizz, phiz.
 few, feu.
 forty, forte.
 hay, heigh!
 hem (*sew*), hem (*v., haw*).
 hollow, hollo (*v.*).
 inn, in.
 yawl (*boat*), yawl (*howl*).
 coup, coo.
 lamb, lam (*bang*).
 loaf, loaf (*v. laufen*).
 marry! marry (*v.*).
 nag (*pony*), nag (*to gnaw*), knag.
 nap (*of cloth*), nap (*sleep*).
 nay, neigh.
 oh! owe.
 ode, owed.
 oxide, ox-eyed.
 pax, packs.
 pants, pants (*fr. pant*).
 prose, pros (*and cons*).
 sink (*var.*), cinque.
 swayed, suede (*kid*).
 ternary, turnery.
 tea, tee (*starting point*).
 taw (*to dress skins*), taw (*game, marbles*), tore (*fr. tear*).
 cheap, cheep.
 tool, tulle,
 we! woe.
 ho! hoe.

The facts of the case being now sufficiently supplied by the above list, I will put my attitude towards those facts in a logical sequence under separate statements, which thus isolated will, if

examined one by one, avoid the confusion that their interdependence might otherwise occasion. The sequence is thus:

1. Homophones are a nuisance.
2. They are exceptionally frequent in English.
3. They are self-destructive, and tend to become obsolete.
4. This loss impoverishes the language.
5. This impoverishment is now proceeding owing to the prevalence of the Southern English standard of speech.
6. The mischief is being worsened and propagated by the phoneticians.
7. The Southern English dialect has no claim to exclusive preference.

[pg 19]

1. *That homophones are a nuisance.*

An objector who should plead that homophones are not a nuisance might allege the longevity of the Chinese language, composed, I believe, chiefly of homophones distinguished from each other by an accentuation which must be delicate difficult and precarious. I remember that Max Müller [1864] instanced a fictitious sentence

ba bà bâ bá,

'which (he wrote) is said to mean if properly accented *The three ladies gave a box on the ear to the favourite of the princess.*' This suggests that the bleating of sheep may have a richer significance than we are accustomed to suppose; and it may perhaps illustrate the origin as well as the decay of human speech. The only question that it raises for us is the possibility of distinguishing our own homophones by accentuation or by slight differentiation of vowels; and this may prove to be in some cases the practical solution, but it is not now the point in discussion, for no one will deny that such delicate distinctions are both inconvenient and dangerous, and should only be adopted if forced upon us. I shall assume that common sense and universal experience exonerate me from wasting words on the proof that homophones are mischievous, and I will give my one example in a note⁸; but it is a fit place for some general remarks.

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The objections to homophones are of two kinds, either scientific and utilitarian, or æsthetic. The utilitarian objections are manifest, and since confusion of words is not confined to homophones, the practical inconvenience that is sometimes occasioned by slight similarities may properly be alleged to illustrate and enforce the argument. I will give only one example.

The telephone, which seems to lower the value of differentiating consonants, has revealed unsuspected likenesses. For instance the ciphers, if written somewhat phonetically as usually pronounced, are thus:

Utilitarian objections not confined to homophones.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
nawt wun too three fawr faiv six sev'n eit nain

by which it will be seen that the ten names contain eight but only eight different vowels, 0 and 4 having the same vowel *aw*, while 5 and 9 have *ai*. Both these pairs caused confusion; the first of them was cured by substituting the name of the letter O for the name of the zero cipher, which happens to be identical with it in form,⁹ and this introduced a ninth vowel sound *ou* (= owe), but the other pair remained such a constant source of error, that persons who had their house put on the general telephonic system would request the Post Office to give them a number that did not contain a 9 or a 5; and it is pretty certain that had not the system of automatic dialling, which was invented for quite another purpose, got rid of the trouble, one of these two ciphers would have changed its name at the Post Office.

In the effect of uniformity it may be said that utilitarian and æsthetic considerations are generally at one; and this blank statement must here suffice, for the principle could not be briefly dealt with: but it

Æsthetic objections.

follows from it that the proper æsthetic objections to homophones are never clearly separable from the scientific. I submit the following considerations. Any one who seriously attempts to write well-sounding English will be aware how delicately sensitive our ear is to the repetition of sounds. He will often have found it necessary to change some unimportant word because its accented vowel recalled and jarred with another which was perhaps as far as two or three lines removed from it: nor does there seem to be any rule for this, since apparently similar repetitions do not always offend, and may even be agreeable. The relation of the sound to the meaning is indefinable, but in homophones it is blatant; for instance the common expression *It is well* could not be used in a paragraph where the word well (= well-spring) had occurred. Now, this being so, it is very inconvenient to find the omnipresent words *no* and *know* excluding each other: and the same is true of *sea* and *see*; if you are writing of the *sea* then the verb *to see* is forbidden, or at least needs some handling.

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I see the deep's untrampled floor
With green and purple seaweeds strewn:

here *seaweeds* is risky, but *I see the sea's untrampled floor* would have been impossible: even the familiar

The sea saw that and fled

is almost comical, especially because 'sea saw' has a most compromising joint-tenant in the children's rocking game

See saw Margery daw.

The awkwardness of these English homophones is much increased by the absence of inflection, and I suppose it was the richness of their inflections which made the Greeks so indifferent (apparently) to syllabic recurrences that displease us: moreover, the likeness in sound between their similar syllables was much obscured by a verbal accent which respected the inflection and disregarded the stem, whereas our accent is generally faithful to the root.¹⁰ This sensitiveness to the sound of syllables is of the essence of our best English, and where the effect is most magical in our great poets it is impossible to analyse.

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Once become sensible of such beauty, and of the force of sounds, a writer will find himself in trouble with *no* and *know*. These omnipresent words are each of them essentially weakened by the existence of the other, while their proximity in a sentence is now damaging. It is a misfortune that our Southern dialect should have parted entirely with all the original differentiation between them; for after the distinctive *k* of the verb was dropped, the negative still preserved (as it in some dialects still preserves) its broad open vowel, more like *law* than *toe* or *beau*, and unless that be restored I should judge that the verb *to know* is doomed. The third person singular of its present tense is *nose*, and its past tense is *new*, and the whole inconvenience is too radical and perpetual to be received all over the world. We have an occasional escape by using *nay* for *no*, since its homophone *neigh* is an unlikely *neighbour*; but that can serve only in one limited use of the word, and is no solution.

In talking with friends the common plea that I have heard for homophones is their usefulness to the punster. 'Why! would you have no puns?' I will not answer that question; but there is no fear of our being insufficiently catered for; whatever accidental benefit be derivable from homophones, we shall always command it fully and in excess; look again at the portentous list of them! And since the essential jocularity of a pun (at least when it makes me laugh) lies in a humorous incongruity, its farcical gaiety may be heightened by a queer pronunciation. I cannot pretend to judge a sophisticated taste; but, to give an example, if, as I should urge, the *o* of the word *petrol* should be preserved, as it is now universally spoken, not having yet degraded into *petr'l*, a future squire will not be disqualified from airing his wit to his visitors by saying, as he points to his old stables, 'that is where I store my petrel', and when the joke had been illustrated in *Punch*, its folly would sufficiently distract the patients in a dentist's waiting-room for years to come, in spite of gentlemen and chauffeurs continuing to say *petrol*, as they do now; nor would the two *petr'ls* be more dissimilar than the two *mys*.

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Puns must of course be distinguished from such a play on words as John of Gaunt makes with his own name in Shakespeare's *King Richard II*. **Play on words.**

K. What comfort man? How is't with aged Gaunt?

G. O, how that name befits my composition!
Old Gaunt indeed, and gaunt in being old, &c.

where, as he explains,

Misery makes sport to mock itself.

This is a humorous indulgence of fancy, led on by the associations of a word; a pun is led off by the *sound* of a word in pursuit of nonsense; though the variety of its ingenuity may refuse so simple a definition.

It is true that a real good may sometimes come indirectly from a word being a homophone, because its inconvenience in common parlance may help to drive it into a corner where it can be retained for a special signification: and since the special significance of any word is its first merit, and the coinage of new words for special differentiation is difficult and rare, we may rightly welcome any fortuitous means for their provision. Examples of words specialized thus from homophones are *brief* (a lawyer's brief), *hose* (water-pipe), *bolt* (of door), *mail* (postal), *poll* (election), &c.¹¹ **An indirect advantage of homophones.**

2. That English is exceptionally burdened with homophones.

This is a reckless assertion; it may be that among the languages unknown to me there are some that are as much hampered with homophones as we are. I readily grant that with all our embarrassment of riches, we cannot compete with the Chinese nor pretend to have outbuilt their Babel; but I doubt whether the statement can be questioned if confined to European languages. I must rely on the evidence of my list, and I would here apologize for its incompleteness. After I had patiently extracted it from the dictionary a good many common words that were missing occurred to me now and again, and though I have added these, there must be still many omissions. Nor must it be forgotten that, had obsolete words been included, the total would have been far higher. That must plainly be the case if, as I contend, homophony causes obsolescence, and reference to the list from Shakespeare in my next section will provide examples of such words.

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Otto Jespersen¹² seems to think that the inconvenience of homophones is so great that a language will naturally evolve some phonetic habit to guard itself against them, although it would otherwise neglect such distinction. I wish that this admirable instinct were more evident in English. He writes thus of the lists of words which he gives 'to show what pairs of homonyms [homophones] would be created if distinctions were abolished that are now maintained: they [the lists] thus demonstrate the force of resistance opposed to some of the sound-changes which one might imagine as happening in the future. A language can tolerate only a certain number of ambiguities arising from words of the same sound having different significations, and therefore the extent to which a language has utilized some phonetic distinction to keep words apart, has some influence in determining the direction of its sound-changes. In French, and still more in English, it is easy to enumerate long lists of pairs of words differing from each other only by the presence or absence of voice in the last sound; therefore final *b* and *p*, *d* and *t*, *g* and *k*, are kept rigidly apart; in German, on the other hand, there are very few such pairs, and thus nothing counterbalances the natural tendency to unvoice final consonants.'

3. *That homophones are self-destructive and tend to become obsolete.*

For the contrary contention, namely, that homophones do *not* destroy themselves, there is prima facie evidence in the long list of survivors, and in the fact that a vast number of words which have not this disadvantage are equally gone out of use.

Words fall out of use for other reasons than homophony, therefore one cannot in any one case assume that ambiguity of meaning was the active cause: indeed the mere familiarity of the sound might prolong a word's life; and homophones are themselves frequently made just in this way, for uneducated speakers will more readily adapt a familiar sound to a new meaning (as when my gardener called his Pomeranian dog a Panorama) than take the trouble to observe and preserve the differentiation of a new sound. There is no rule except that any loss of distinction may be a first step towards total loss.¹³

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Causes of obsolescence.

It is probable that the working machinery of an average man's brain sets a practical limit to his convenient workable vocabulary; that is to say, a man who can easily command the spontaneous use of a certain number of words cannot much increase it without effort. If that is so, then, as he learns new words, there will be a tendency, if not a necessity, for him to lose hold of a corresponding number of his old words; and the words that will first drop out will be those with which he had hitherto been uncomfortable; and among those words will be the words of ambiguous meaning.

It is plain that only general considerations can be of value, unless there should be very special evidence in any special case; and thus the caution of Dr. Henry Bradley's remarks in note on page [19](#).

No direct proof

I remember how I first came to recognize this law; it was from hearing a friend advocating the freer use of certain old words which, though they were called obsolete and are now rarely heard, yet survive in local dialects. I was surprised to find how many of them were unfit for resuscitation because of their homophonic ambiguity, and when I spoke of my discovery to a philological friend, I found that he regarded it as a familiar and unquestioned rule.

But to prove this rule is difficult; and as it is an impossible task to collect all the obsolete words and classify them, I am proposing to take two independent indications; first to separate out the homophones from the other obsolete words in a Shakespearian glossary, and secondly, to put together a few words that seem to be actually going out of use in the present day, that is, strictly obsolescent words caught in the act of flitting.

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Obsolescence in this connexion must be understood only of common educated speech, that is, the average speaker's vocabulary. Obsolescent words are old words which, when heard in talk, will sound literary or unusual: in literature they can seem at home, and will often give freshness without affectation; indeed, any word that has an honourable place in Shakespeare or the Bible can never quite die, and may perhaps some day recover its old vitality.

Obsolescence defined.

The best evidence of the obsolescence of any word is that it should still be frequently heard in some proverb or phrase, but never out of it. The homophonic condition is like that of *aural* and *oral*, of which it is

Evidence of obsolescence.

impossible to make practical use.¹⁴ We speak of an *aural surgeon* and of *oral teaching*, but out of such combinations the words have no sense. It happens that oral teaching must be aural on the pupil's side, but that only adds to the confusion.

In deciding whether any obsolete homophone has been lost by its homophony, I should make much of the consideration whether the word had supplied a real need, by naming a conception that no other word so fitly represented; hence its survival in a proverb is of special value, because the words of proverbs are both apt and popular; so that for the disuse of such a word there would seem to be no other cause so likely and sufficient as damage to its signification.

The glossary is relied on to contain, besides its other items, all the obsolete words: the homophones separated out from these will show various grades of obsolescence, and very different values as examples bearing on the question at issue.

Table of homophones taken from among the obsolete words in Cunliffe's 'A New Shakespearean Dictionary,' Blackie, 1910.

ancient: replaced by *ensign*.

bate = *remit*.

beck = a bow of the head: preserved in 'becks and nods', mutual loss with *beck* = rivulet.

boot = to profit: Sh. puns on it, showing that its absurdity was recognized.

bottle (of hay): preserved in proverb.

bourne = streamlet: preserved in sense of limit by the line of Sh. which perhaps destroyed it.

breeze = gadfly.

brief (*subs.*): now only as a lawyer's brief.

brook (*verb*).

buck = to steep (linen) in lye.

cote: as in *sheepcote*.

dole = portion, and *dole* = sorrow: probably active mutual destruction; we still retain 'to dole out'.

dout.

dun (*adj.*): now only in combination as *dun-coloured*.

ear = to plough.

fain and **feign**: prob. mutual loss due to undefined sense of **fain**. n.b. **fane** also obsolete.

feat (*adj.*) and **featly**: well lost.

fere.

fit = section of a poem.

flaw: now confined to a flaw in metal, &c.

fleet (*verb*) and **fleeting**, as in the sun-dial motto, 'Time like this shade doth fleet and fade.'

foil: common verb, obsolete.

gest: lost in *jest*.

gird = to scoff: an old well-established word.

gout = a drop of liquor.

gust = taste (well lost).

hale = haul (well lost).

hight = named.

hoar: only kept in combination, hoar-frost, hoar hairs.

hose: lost, though hosier remains, but specialized in *garden-hose*, &c.

hue: not now used of colour.

imbrued (with blood): prob. lost in *brewed*.

jade: almost confined to *jaded*(?).

keel = cool.

list: as in 'as you list'.

mail: now only in combination, coat of mail, &c.

marry!

mated = confused in mind (well lost).

meed: lost in *mead* = meadow (also obs.) and *mead*=*metheglin*.

mete and **metely** = fitting, also **mete** in 'mete it out', both lost in *meet* and *meat*.

mere (*subs.*).

mouse (*verb*): to bite and tear.

mow = a grimace.

muse = to wonder: lost in *amuse* and *Muse*.

neat = ox.

ounce = pard.

pall = to fail.

peak: survives only in 'peak and pine' and in *peaky*.

pelting = paltry, also **pelt** = a skin, lost.

pill = to plunder.

pink = ornamental slashing of dress.

poke = pocket.

poll = to cut the hair.

quarry (as used in sport).

quean = a woman.

rack (of clouds).

raze (to the ground). The meaning being the very opposite of *raise*, the word *raze* is intolerable.

rede = counsel, n.b. change of meaning.

rheum: survives in rheumatic, &c.

scald = scurvy (*adj.*).

sleave = a skein of silk, 'The ravelled sleeve of care', usually misinterpreted, the equivocal alternative making excellent sense.

souse (*verb*): of a bird of prey swooping.

speed: as in 'St. Francis be thy speed' = help, aid.

stale = bait or decoy (well lost).

tarre: to 'tarre a dog on' = incite.

tickle = unstable.

tire = to dress (the hair, &c.).

vail = to let fall.

wreak.

Besides the above may be noted

wont (*sub.*): lost in *won't* = will not.

fair: Though we still speak of 'a fair complexion' the word has lost much of its old use; and the verb **to fare** has suffered; we still say 'Farewell', but scarcely 'he fares ill'; also **to fare forth** is obsolete.

bolt = to sift, has gone out, also **bolt** in the sense of a missile weapon; but the weapon may have gone first; we still preserve it in 'a bolt from the blue', a thunder-bolt, and 'a fool's bolt is soon shot', and we shoot the bolt of a door.

barm: this being the name of an object which would be familiar only to brewers and bakers, probably suffered from the discontinuance of family brewing and baking. It would no longer be familiar, and may possibly have felt the blurring effect of the ill-defined **balm**, which word also seems rarely used. In the South of England few persons now know what barm is.

arch: *adj.*, probably obsolescent.

There are also examples of words with the affix a-, or initials simulating that affix, thus:

aby: lost in *abide*, with which it was confused.

abode = bode (? whether ever in common use).

accite: lost in *excite*.

assay: quite a common word, lost in *say* (?)

atone: lost in *tone*.

and thus *attempt*, *attaint*, *attest*, *avail*, all suffered from *tempt*, *taint*, *test*, *veil*, whereas *attend* seems to have destroyed *tend*.

*Table of homophones that may seem to be presently falling out of use.*¹⁵

ail.
alms.
ascent.
augur (*v.*).
barren.
bate.
bier.
bray (*pound*).
bridal.
broach.
casque.
cede.
cession.
cite.
clime.
corse.
cruse.
dene.
dun (*colour*).
desert.
fain.
fallow.
feign.
fell (*skin*).
flue (*velu*).
fray (*sub.*).
fry (*small-*).
gait.
gambol.
gin (*snare*).
gird (*abuse*).
gore (*blood*).
hart.
horde.

hue (*colour*).
isle.
lea.
lessen.
let (*hinder*).
lief.
main.
march (*boundary*).
meed.
mien.
mote.
mourn.
mute (*of birds*).
neat (*animal*).
ore.
pale (*enclosure*).
pall (*v.*).
pen (*enclose*).
pelt (*skin*).
pile (*hair*).
pink (*v.*).
pulse (*pease*).
quean.
rail (*chide*).
raze.
reave.
reck.
repair (*resort*).
rheum.
rood.
rue.
sack (*v.*).
sage (*adj.*).
sallow (*willow*).
sere.
soar.
spray (*sprig*).
still (*adj.* n.b. *keep still*).
stoup.
surge.
swift.
teem.
toil (*snare*).
vane.
van (*fan*).
vail (*v.*).
wage (*war*).
wain.
ween.
whit.
wight.
wile.
wrack.
wreak.
wot.
aught.

4. That the loss due to homophony threatens to impoverish the language.

New words are being added to the dictionary much faster than old words are passing out of use, but it is not a question of numbers nor of dictionaries. A chemist told me that if the world were packed all over with bottles as close as they could stand, he could put a different substance into each one and label it. And science is active in all her laboratories and will print her labels. If one should admit that as many as ninety-nine per cent. of these artificial names are neither literary nor social words, yet some of them are, since everything that comes into common use must have a name that is frequently spoken. Thus *baik*, *sackereen*, and *mahjereen* are truly new English word-sounds; and it may be, if we succumb to anarchical communism, that margarine and saccharine will be lauded by its dissolute mumpers as enthusiastically as men have hitherto praised and are still praising butter and honey. 'Bike' certainly would have already won a decent place in poetry had it been christened more gracefully and not nicknamed off to live in backyards with cab and bus. The whole subject of new terms is too vast to be parenthetically handled, and I hope that some one will deal with it competently in an early publication of the S.P.E. The question must here remain to be determined by the evidence of the words in the table of obsolesces, which I think is convincing; my overruling contention being that, however successful

we may be in the coinage of new words (and we have no reason to boast of success) and however desirable it is to get rid of some of the bad useless homophones, yet we cannot afford to part with any old term that can conveniently be saved.

We have the best Bible in the world, and in Shakespeare the greatest poet; we have been suckled on those twin breasts, and our children must have degenerated if they need asses' milk. Nor is it only because the old is better than the new that we think thus. If we speak more proudly of Trafalgar than of Zeebrugge, it is not because Trafalgar is so far finer a sounding word than Zeebrugge, as indeed it is, nor because we believe that the men of Nelson's time were better than our men of to-day, we know they were not, but because the spirit that lives on ideals will honour its parents; and it is thinking in this way that makes noble action instinctive and easy. Nelson was present at Zeebrugge leading our sailors, as Shakespeare is with us leading our writers, and no one who neglects the rich inheritance to which Englishmen are born is likely ever to do any credit to himself or his country.

5. That the South English dialect is a direct and chief cause of homophones.

Evidence of the present condition of our ruling educated speech in the South of England I shall take from Mr. Daniel Jones' dictionary,¹⁶ the authority of which cannot, I think, be disputed. It is true that it represents a pronunciation so bad that its slovenliness is likely to be thought overdone, but there is no more exaggeration than any economical system of phonetic spelling is bound to show. It is indeed a strong and proper objection to all such simplifications that they are unable to exhibit the finer distinctions; but this must not imply that Mr. Jones' ear is lacking in delicate perception, or that he is an incompetent observer. If he says, as he does say, that the second syllable in the words *obloquy* and *parasite* are spoken by educated Londoners with the same vowel-sound (which he denotes by ə, that is the sound of *er* in the word *danger*), then it is true that they are so pronounced, or at least so similarly that a trained ear refuses to distinguish them [óblerquy, páersite].

Evidence of Jones' dictionary.

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To this an objector might fairly reply that Mr. Jones could distinguish the two sounds very well if it suited him to do so; but that, as it is impossible for him to note them in his defective phonetic script, he prefers to confuse them. I shall not lose sight of this point,¹⁷ but here I will only say that, if there really is a difference between these two vowels in common talk, then if Mr. Jones can afford to disregard it it must be practically negligible, and other phoneticians will equally disregard it, as the Oxford Press has in its smaller dictionary.

I suppose that thirty years ago it would have been almost impossible to find any German who could speak English so well as to pass for a native: they spoke as Du Maurier delighted to represent them in *Punch*. During the late war, however, it has been no uncommon thing for a German soldier to disguise himself in English uniform and enter our trenches, relying on his mastery of our tongue to escape suspicion; and it was generally observed how many German prisoners spoke English *like a native*. Now this was wholly due to their having been taught Southern English on Mr. Jones' model and method.

Its trustworthiness.

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Again, those who would repudiate the facts that I am about to reveal, and who will not believe that in their own careless talk they themselves actually pronounce the words very much as Mr. Jones prints them,¹⁸ should remember that the sounds of speech are now mechanically recorded and reproduced, and the records can be compared; so that it would betray incompetence for any one in Mr. Jones' position to misrepresent the facts, as it would be folly in him to go to the trouble and expense of making such a bogus book as his would be were it untrue; nor could he have attained his expert reputation had he committed such a folly.

Again, and in support of the trustworthiness of the records, I am told by those concerned in the business that for some years past no Englishman could obtain employment in Germany as teacher of English unless he spoke the English vowels according to the standard of Mr. Jones' dictionary; and it was a recognized device, when such an appointment was being considered, to request the applicant to speak into a machine and send the record by post to the Continent; whereupon he was approved or not on that head by the agreement of the record with the standard which I am about to illustrate from the dictionary.

All these considerations make a strong case for the truth of Mr. Jones' representation of our 'standard English', and his book is the most trustworthy evidence at my disposal: but before exhibiting it I would premise that our present fashionable dialect is not to be considered as the wanton local creator of all the faults that Mr. Jones can parade before the eye. Its qualities have come together in various ways, nor are the leading characteristics of recent origin. I am convinced that our so-called standard English sprang actively to the fore in Shakespeare's time, that in the Commonwealth years our speech was in as perilous a condition as it is to-day, and at the Restoration made a self-conscious recovery, under an impulse very like that which is moving me at the present moment; for I do not look upon myself as expressing a personal conviction so much as interpreting a general feeling, shared I know by almost all who speak our tongue, Americans, Australians, Canadians, Irish, New Zealanders, and Scotch, whom I range alphabetically lest I should be thought to show prejudice or bias in any direction. But this is beyond the present purpose, which is merely to exhibit the tendency which this so-called

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degradation has to create homophones.

As no one will deny that homophones are to be made by mauling words, I will begin by a selection of words from Mr. Jones' dictionary showing what our Southern English is doing with the language. I shall give in the first column the word with its literary spelling, in the second Mr. Jones' phonetic representation of it, and in the third column an attempt to represent that sound to the eye of those who cannot read the phonetic script, using such makeshift spellings as may be found in any novel where the pronunciation of the different speakers is differentiated.

Mauling of words.

*Examples from Mr. Jones' Pronouncing Dictionary.*¹⁹

parsonage.	pɑ:spɪdʒ [-sn-]	pahs'nidge or pahsnidge.
picture.	pɪktʃə	pictsher.
scriptural.	skriptʃərəl	scriptshererl or scriptshrl.
temperature.	temprɪtʃə	tempritsher.
interest.	ɪntrɪst	intrist.
senator.	senɪtə and senətər	senniter and sennertor.
blossoming.	blɒsəmɪŋ	blosserming.
natural.	nætʃrəl	natshrerl or natshrl.
orator.	ɔrətə	orrerter.
rapturous.	ræptʃərəs	raptsherers or raptshrers.
parasite.	pærəsait	parrersite.
obloquy.	ɔbləkwi	oblerquy.
syllogise.	sɪlədʒaɪz	sillergize.
equivocal.	ɪkwɪvəkəl	ikwívverk'l.
immaterial.	ɪmətɪəriəl	immertierierl.
miniature.	mɪnɪtʃə	minnitsher.
extraordinary.	ɪkstrɔ:dnri	ikstrordnry.
salute.	səlu:t [-lju:-]	serloot and serlute.
solution.	səlu:ʃən [-lju:-]	serloosh'n and serlūsh'n.
subordinate (adj.).	səbɔ:dnɪt	serbord'nit.
sublime.	səbləɪm	serblime.

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In culling these flowers of speech I was not blind to their great picturesque merits, but they must not be taken for jokes, at least they must not be thought of as conjuring smiles on the faces of Messrs. Jones, Michaelis and Rippmann: they are deadly products of honest study and method, and serious evidence whereby any one should be convinced that such a standard of English pronunciation is likely to create homophones: and yet in searching the dictionary I have not found it guilty of many new ones.²⁰ For examples of homophones due to our 'standard' speech one might take first the 20 *wh*- words (given on page 14) which have lost their aspirate, and with them the 9 *wr*- words: next the 36 words in table iv and note, which have lost their trilled *R*: and then the 41 words from table vi on page 15; and that would start us with some 100 words, the confusion of which is due to our Southern English pronunciation, since the differentiation of all these words is still preserved in other dialects. The differentiation of these 100 words would of course liberate their twins, so the total number of gains should be doubled.

But number is not so important as the quality and frequency of the words involved, so I will instance one class in detail, namely the words in which *aw* and *or* are confused. Here are a dozen of them:

Example of one class.

- core = caw.
- door = daw*.
- floor = flaw*.
- hoar* = haw.
- lore* = law.
- more = maw*.
- oar, ore = awe*.
- pore = paw.
- roar = raw.
- soar, sore = saw, saw.
- tore = taw.
- yore* = yaw.

Of these 12 words, 6 exhibit stages or symptoms of obsolescence. I should think it extremely unlikely that *yore* has been in any way incommoded by *yaw*; and *flaw*, which is now more or less cornered to one of its various meanings, was probably affected more by its own ambiguities than by *floor*; but others seem to be probable examples: *shaw* and *lore*, and I think *maw*, are truly obsolesces, while *hoar* and *daw* are heard only in combination. *Awe* is heard only in *awful*, and has there lost its significance. I should guess that this accident has strengthened its severity in literature, where it asserts its aloofness sometimes with a full spelling [*aweful*] as in speech two pronunciations are recognized, *awful* and *awf'l*.

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Now how do these words appear in Jones' dictionary? If there is to be any difference between the *aw* and *ore* sounds either the *R* must be trilled as it still is in the north, or some vestige of it must be indicated, and such indication would be a lengthening of the *o* (=aw) sound by the vestigial voicing of the lost trill, such as is indicated in the word *o'er*, and might be roughly shown to the eye by such a spelling as *shawer* for *shore* [thus *shaw* would be ʃɔ: and *shore* would be ʃɔ:ə] and such distinction is still made by our more careful Southern English speakers, and is recognized as an existent variant by Jones.

Since the circumflex accent properly indicates a rise and fall of voice-pitch on a vowel-sound such as almost makes a disyllable of a monosyllable (e.g. in Milton's verse the word *power* may fill either one or two places in the line) I will adopt it here to denote this fuller and differentiating pronunciation of *ore*.

Now to all these words, and to the finals of such words as *ad[ore]*, *impl[ore]*, *ign[ore]*, Jones gives the diphthongal *aw* as the normal South English pronunciation, and he allows the longer *[ore]* sound only as a variant, putting this variant in the second place.

Hence, all these *[ore]* words are being encouraged to cast off the last remnant of their differentiation, which it is admitted that they have not yet quite lost.²¹

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6. That the mischief is being propagated by phoneticians.

The phoneticians are doing useful work in supplying an educational need. By the phonetic system any spoken language can now be learned quickly and easily, just as by the *sol-fa* system the teaching of music was made easy and simple. If a clergyman who had no practical knowledge of music were offered the post of minor canon in a cathedral, he would find it very difficult to qualify himself passably, whereas any village schoolboy could learn all the music necessary for such an office, and learn that solidly too and soundly and durably, in a few lessons, truly in a few hours, by the *sol-fa* method. The principle is the same in music and in speech, namely to have a distinct symbol for every separate sound; in music it is a name, the idea of which quickly becomes indissociable from the note of the scale which it indicates; in phonetics it is a written letter, which differs from the units of our literary alphabet only in this, that it has but one meaning and interpretation, and really is what all letters were originally intended to be. When you see it you know what it means.

The use of phonetics in education.

The principle is but common sense, and practice confirms its validity. I am persuaded that as soon as competition has exposed the advantages which it ensures, not only in the saving of time, but in the rescuing of English children from the blighting fog through which their tender minds are now forced to struggle on the first threshold of life,²² then all spoken languages will be taught on that method. What now chiefly hinders its immediate introduction is not so much the real difficulty of providing a good simple system, as the false fear that all our literature may take on the phonetic dress; and this imagination is frightful enough to be a bugbear to reasonable people, although, so far as one can see, there is no more danger of this result than there is of all music appearing in *sol-fa* notation.

Its general adoption certain.

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Now here is a promising field for adventure. Not only is the creation of a new fount of type an elaborate and expensive process, but the elaboration of a good system and its public recognition when produced involve much time; so that any industrial company that is early in the market with a complete apparatus and a sufficient reputation will carry all before it, and be in a position to command and secure great monetary profit.

Demand of the market.

There is no doubt that the field is now strongly held by the Anglo-Prussian society which Mr. Jones represents.²³

In the preceding section Mr. Jones' dictionary was taken as authority for the actual condition of Southern English pronunciation. It must now be considered in its other aspect, namely as the authoritative phonetic interpretation of our speech; my contention being that it is a wrong and mischievous interpretation.

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It is difficult to keep these two questions quite apart. The first, which was dealt with in Section 5, was that Southern English is actively productive of homophones. This present Section 6 is contending that the mischief is being encouraged and propagated by the phoneticians, and Mr. Jones' books are taken as an example of their method.

The reason why the work of these phoneticians is so mischievous is that they have chosen too low a standard of pronunciation.

Fault of Mr. Jones' method.

The defence that they would make would be something like this.

They might argue with some confidence, and not without a good show of reason, that the actual 'vernacular' talk of the people is the living language of any country: they would allege that a spoken language is always changing, and always will change; that the actual condition of it is the

only scientific, and indeed the only possible basis for any system of tuition; and that it is better to be rather in advance of change than behind it, since the changes proceed inevitably by laws which education has no power to resist, nay, so inevitably that science can in some measure foresee the future.

This would, I suppose, fairly represent Mr. Jones' contention. Indeed, he plainly asserts that his work is merely a record of existing facts, and he even says that he chose Southern English because it is most familiar and observable, and therefore capable of providing him with sufficient phenomena: and he might say that what I call 'low' in his standard is only the record of a stage of progression which I happen to dislike or have not nearly observed. And yet the argument is full of fallacies: and the very position that he assumes appears to me to be unsound. It is well enough to record a dialect, nor will any one grudge him credit for his observation and diligence, but to reduce a dialect to theoretic laws and then impose those laws upon the speakers of it is surely a monstrous step. And in this particular instance the matter is complicated by the fact that Southern English is not truly a natural dialect; Mr. Jones himself denotes it as P.S.P.=Public School Pronunciation, and that we know to be very largely a social convention dependent on fashion and education, and inasmuch as it is a product of fashion and education it is not bound by the theoretical laws which Mr. Jones would attribute to it; while for the same reason it is unfortunately susceptible of being affected by them, if they should be taught with authority. These phoneticians would abuse a false position which they have unwarrantably created. This Southern English, this P.S.P., is a 'fashionable' speech, fashionable that is in two senses; and Mr. Jones would fashion it.

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But I wish to put my case practically, and, rather than argue, I would ask what are the results of learning English on Mr. Jones' system? What would be the condition of a man who had learnt in this way?

judged by practical effects.

I shall assume that the pupil has learnt his pronunciation from the dictionary, the nature of which is now known to my readers: but they should also know that Mr. Jones recognizes and teaches three different styles, which he calls the A, B, and C styles, 'A, the pronunciation suitable for recitation or reading in public; B, the pronunciation used in careful conversation, or reading aloud in private; and C, the pronunciation used in rapid conversation.'

His three styles.

In a polemic against Mr. Jones his adversary has therefore to combat a dragon with three heads, and the heroic method would be to strike all three of them off at one blow. To effect this it seems to me that one has only to remark that a system which is forced to teach a dialect [a dialect, observe, not a language] in three forms where one is sufficient, is *ipso facto* condemned. This objection I will establish presently; at present I am content to confine my attention to one head, for I maintain that in practice those who will take the trouble to learn three forms of one speech must be a negligible number; the practical pupils will generally be content to master one, and that will, no doubt, be the highly recommended style B, and its corresponding dictionary; they will rule out A and C as works of supererogation; and indeed those would be needless if B were satisfactory.

So, then, we are asking what is the condition of a man who has learned the dictionary standard?

In deliberate repetitions.

(1) In common talk if we speak so indistinctly as not to be understood, we repeat our sentence with a more careful articulation. As Sweet used to say, the only security against the decay of language through careless articulation into absolute unintelligibility is the personal inconvenience of having to repeat your words when you are indistinctly heard. 'What' leaps out from the dictionary with a shout to the rescue of all his fellows. And when you have experienced this wacry 'what? what?' oftener than you like, you will raise the standard of your pronunciation (just as you would raise your voice to a deaf listener) merely to save yourself trouble, even though you were insensible to the shame of the affront.

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And this more careful articulation obtains also in all *asseveration*. A speaker who wishes to provoke attention to any particular statement or sentiment will speak the words by which he would convey it more slowly and with more careful articulation than the rest of his utterance.

In asseveration.

Under both these common conditions the man who has learned only the vernacular of Mr. Jones' phonetics has no resource but to emphasize with all their full horrors words like *seprit*, *sin'kerpate*, *din'ersty*, *ernoin't*, *mis'ernthrope*, *sym'perthy*, *mel'ernkerly*, *mel'erdy*, *serspe'ct*, *erno'y*, &c.²⁴, which when spoken indistinctly in careless talk may pass muster, but when accurately articulated are not only vulgar and absurd, but often unrecognizable.

(2) Again, public speakers use a pronunciation very different from that in the dictionary, and Mr. Jones admits this and would teach it *sepritly* as 'style A'. But it is wrong to suppose that its characteristics are a mere fashion or a pedantic regard for things obsolete, or a nice rhetorical grace, though Mr. Jones will have it to be mostly artificial, 'due to well-established, though perhaps somewhat arbitrary rules laid down by teachers of elocution'. The basis of it is the need of being heard and understood, together with the experience that style B will not answer that purpose. The main service, no doubt, of a teacher of elocution is to instruct in the management of the voice

In public speaking.

(clergyman's sore throat is a recognized disease of men who use their voice wrongly); but a right pronunciation is almost equally necessary and important.

Now if public speakers really have to learn something different from their habitual pronunciation, Mr. Jones is right in making a separate style of it, and he is also justified in the degraded forms of his style B, for those are what these speakers have to unlearn; nor is any fault to be found with his diligent and admirable analysis.

These two practical considerations expose the situation sufficiently: we may now face the triple-tongued dragon and exhibit how a single whiff of common sense will tumble all his three heads in the dust.

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The insideoutness, topsy-turviness, and preposterousness of Mr. Jones' method is incredible. In the natural order of things, children would be taught a careful 'high standard' articulation as a part of their elemental training, when in their pliant age they are mastering the co-ordinations which are so difficult to acquire later. Then when they have been educated to speak correctly, their variation from that full pronunciation is a natural carelessness, and has the grace of all natural behaviour, and it naturally obeys whatever laws have been correctly propounded by phoneticians; since it is itself the phenomena from which those laws are deduced. This carelessness or ease of speech will vary naturally *in all degrees* according to occasion, and being dependent on mood and temper will never go wrong. It is warm and alive with expression of character, and may pass quite unselfconsciously from the grace of negligence to the grace of correctness, for it has correctness at command, having learned it, and its carelessness has not been doctored and bandaged; and this ease of unselfconsciousness is one of the essentials of human intercourse: a man talking fluently does not consider what words he will use, he does not often remember exactly what words he has used, nor will he know at all how he pronounces them; his speech flows from him as his blood flows when his flesh is wounded.

The natural right method.

What would Mr. Jones' system substitute for this natural grace? In place of a wide scale of unconscious variation he provides his pupils with 'three styles', three different fixed grades of pronunciation,²⁵ which they must apply consciously as suits the occasion. At dinner you might be called on to talk to a bishop across the table in your best style B, or to an archbishop even in your A1, when you were talking to your neighbours in your best C.—/ Nature would no doubt assert herself and secure a fair blend; but none the less, the three styles are plainly alternatives and to some extent mutually exclusive, whereas natural varieties are harmoniously interwoven and essentially one.

What Mr. Jones would substitute.

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Argumentative analogies are commonly chosen because they are specious rather than just; but there is one here which I cannot forbear. If a system like Mr. Jones' were adopted in teaching children to write, we should begin by collecting and comparing all the careless and hasty handwritings of the middle class and deduce from them the prevalent forms of the letters in that state of degradation. From this we should construct in our 'style B' the alphabet which we should contend to be the genuine natural product of inevitable law, and hallowed by 'general use', and this we should give to our children to copy and learn, relegating the more carefully formed writing to a 'style A, taught by writing masters', explaining that its 'peculiarities' were 'modifications produced involuntarily as the result of writing more slowly or endeavouring to write more distinctly', &c.²⁶

I believe that there has never been in Europe a fluent script so beautiful and legible as that of our very best English writers of to-day. But their æsthetic mastery has come from loving study of the forms that conscious artistry had perfected, and through a constant practice in their harmonious adaptation.

Finally, it may be worth while to raise the question how it can be that a man of Mr. Jones' extreme competence in his science should commit himself to a position that appears so false and mischievous.

The unpopularity of phonetics is not wholly undeserved: from its early elements, the comfortably broad distinctions of convincing importance, it has progressed to a stage of almost infinite differentiations and subtleties; and when machinery was called in to dispose of controversy, a new and unsuspected mass of baffling detail was revealed.

Reason of present discredit of phonetics.

The subject cannot be treated parenthetically, nor am I capable of summarizing it; but it seems clear that the complexity of the science has driven off public sympathy and dashed the confidence of scholars, withdrawing thereby some of the wholesome checks that common sense might else have imposed on its practical exponents. The experts thus left to themselves in despair of any satisfactory solution, are likely enough to adopt the simplifications most agreeable to their present ideas, and measure the utility of such simplifications by the accidental conveniences of their own science, independently of other considerations.

The main practical difficulty which they have to meet in providing a reasonably satisfactory phonetic script or type for the English language is this, that the symbols of their alphabet must not greatly

The practical difficulty.

exceed in number those of the literary alphabet, whereas the sounds that they have to indicate do greatly exceed.

This discrepancy might be overcome by the use of what are called 'diacritical' marks, but here the universal prejudice against accents in English is forbidding, and it is true that even if printers did not rebel against them, they are yet distasteful and deterrent to readers out of all proportion to their complexity.

Mr. Jones no doubt allowed himself as much liberty as he could venture on, but to what has this paucity and choice of symbols led him? It has led him to assert and teach that an unaccented vowel in

The result of Mr. Jones' solution.

English retains no trace of its proper quality²⁷: that is, that you cannot, or at least do not, modify an unaccented vowel; you either pronounce *a, e, o, u*, distinctly, or you must substitute an alien sound,

The true condition of modified vowels, &c.

generally 'er', or in some consonantal positions a short 'i'. Thus we have *parersite, oblerquy, ikse'pt, ikspre'ss, iqua'ter, peri'sherner, perli'ce, spe'sherlize, pin'erkl, Mes'esperta'mier, &c.*, and one of his examples, which he advances with the confidence of complete satisfaction, is the name

Margate, which he asserts is pronounced *Margit*,²⁸ that is, with a short *i*. The vowel is no doubt short, and its shortness is enforced by its being closed by a *t*: but it is not a short *i*, it is an extremely hastened and therefore disguised form of the original and proper diphthong *ei* (heard in *bait* and *gate*); and the true way to write it phonetically would be *ei*, with some diacritical sign to show that it was obscured. There is no long vowel or diphthong in English which cannot in some positions be pronounced short; and when hurried over between accents it is easy to see that there is nothing, except an obstacle of consonants, which can prevent the shortening of any syllable; for long and short are relative, and when you are speaking very slowly 'short' sounds actually occupy as much time as 'long' sounds do when you are speaking quickly. You have therefore only to suppose a speed of utterance somewhat out of scale; and this is just what happens. In the second syllable of *Margate* the diphthong is hastened and obscured, but a trace of its quality remains, and will more distinctly appear as you speak the word slower. And so in the case of unaccented short vowels that are hurried over between the accents in talking, they are disguised and lose quality, but in good speakers a trace of the original sound will remain (as in *parasite* and *obloquy*), where, on the ground of indistinctness, Mr. Jones introduces the symbol of an *alien unrelated* sound, a sound, that is, which is *distinctly wrong instead of being indistinctly right*: and this fault vitiates all his books. Economy of symbols has led him to perversity of pronunciation.²⁹

7. On the claim that Southern English has to represent all British speech.

On this head certainly I can write nothing worth reading. Whether there is any one with so wide a knowledge of all the main different forms of English now spoken, their historic development and chief characteristics, as to be able to summarize the situation convincingly, I do not know. I can only put a few of the most evident phenomena in the relation in which they happen to affect my judgement.

And first of all I put the small local holding which the Southern English dialect can claim on the map of the British Empire. It is plain that with such a narrow habitat it must show proof that it possesses very great relative superiorities before it can expect to be allowed even a hearing: and such a claim must lie in its superiority in some practical or ideal quality: further than that it might allege that it was the legitimate heir of our great literature, and in possession of the citadel, and in command of an extensive machinery for its propaganda.

Now, in my opinion it could not establish any one of these claims except the last, namely its central position and wide machinery.

I do not pretend to foresee the future, nor even to desire it in any particular form; but it seems to me probable that if the 'P.S.P.' continues its downward course as indicated by Mr. Jones, then, unless everything else worsens with it, so that it might maintain its relative flotation in a general confusion, it must fall to be disesteemed and repudiated, and give place to one or more other dialects which, by having better preserved the distinctions of pronunciation, will be not only more convenient vehicles of intercourse, but more truthful and intelligible interpreters of our great literature; and I believe this to be well illustrated by the conditions of our 'S.E.' homophones: and that something better should win the first place, I hold to be the most desirable of possible events. But perhaps our 'S.E.' is not yet so far committed to the process of decay as to be incapable of reform, and the machinery that we use for penetration may be used as well for organizing a reform and for enforcing it. There is as much fashion as inevitable law in our 'P.S.P.' or 'S.E.' talk, and if the fashion for a better, that is a more distinct and conservative, pronunciation should set in, then at the cost of a little temporary self-consciousness we might, in one generation, or at least in two, have things again very much as they were in Shakespeare's day. It is true that men are slaves to the naturalness of what is usual with them, and unable to imagine that the actual living condition of things in their own time is evanescent: nor do even students and scholars see that in the Elizabethan literature we have a perdurable gigantic picture which, among all stages of change, will persistently reassert itself, while any special characteristics of our own day, which seem so unalterable to us, are only a movement, which may no doubt be determining the next movement, but will leave no other trace of itself, at least no

more than the peculiarities of the age of Queen Anne have left to us.

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I have been told that the German experts believe that the Cockney form of English will eventually prevail. This surprising opinion may rest on scientific grounds, but it seems to me that Cockney speech will be too universally unintelligible; and, should it actively develop, will be so out of relation with other and older forms of English as to be unable to compete.

I wish and hope that the subject of this section may provoke some expert to deal thoroughly with it. The strong feeling in America, in Australia, and in New Zealand, to say nothing of the proud dialects of our own islands, is in support of the common-sense view of the matter which I have here expressed.

SUMMARY

When I consented to write this inaugural paper, I knew that my first duty would be to set an example of the attitude which the Society had proposed to take and hopes to maintain.

This Society was called into existence by the widespread interest in linguistic subjects which is growing on the public, and by the lamentable lack of any organized means for focussing opinion. It responds to that interest, and would supply that want.³⁰ There is no doubt that public opinion is altogether at sea in these matters, and its futility is betrayed and encouraged by the amateurish discussions and *obiter dicta* that are constantly appearing and reappearing in the newspapers. Our belief is that if facts and principles were clearly stated and thoroughly handled by experts, it would then be possible not only to utilize this impulse and gratify a wholesome appetite, but even to attract and organize a consensus of sound opinion which might influence and determine the practice of our best writers and speakers.

The Society absolutely repudiates the assumption of any sort of Academic authority or orthodoxy; it relies merely on statement of fact and free expression of educated opinion to assure the verdict of common sense; and it may illustrate this method to recapitulate the various special questions that have arisen from following it in this particular discussion concerning English homophones.

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The main points are of course

- (1) The actual condition of the English language with respect to homophones. [This is an example of statement of fact.]
- (2) The serious nature of their inconvenience.
- (3) The evidence that we are unconsciously increasing them.
- (4) The consequent impoverishment of the language.

From these considerations the question must arise

- (5) Whether it is not our duty to take steps to prevent the continuance and growth of this evil. [To give an example—the word *mourn*. If we persist in mispronouncing this word as *morn*, and make no distinction between *mourning* and *morning*, then that word will perish. We cannot afford to lose it: it is a good example of our best words, as may be seen by looking it up in the concordances to Shakespeare and the Bible: and what is true of this word is true of hundreds of others.]
- (6) It is pointed out that our fashionable Southern English dialect, our Public School Pronunciation, is one chief source of this damage.
- (7) Attention is called to the low standard of pronunciation adopted by our professional phoneticians, and to the falsity of their orthodox teaching.
- (8) The damage to the language which is threatened by their activity is exposed.
- (9) It is questioned how far it is possible to adopt living dialectal forms to save words that would otherwise perish.
- (10) Respect for the traditions of neglected dialects is advocated.
- (11) As to what differentiations of words should be insisted on [e.g. the *lore* = *law* class].
- (12) The necessity of observing vowel distinctions in unaccented syllables, [e.g. Every one now pronounces the *o* in the new word *petrol*, and yet almost every one thinks it impossible to pronounce the *o* in the old word *symbol*; which is absurd.]
- (13) The necessity for better phonetic teaching in our schools.
- (14) The quality of the new words introduced into the language; and the distinction between mere scientific labels, and those names of common new objects which must be constantly spoken.
- (15) The claims of the Southern English dialect to general acceptance is questioned.

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(16) The general consideration that the spread of the English language over the world must accelerate the disuse and loss of the most inconvenient homophones.

These matters invite expert discussion, and it is our hope that every such question will receive due treatment from some one whose knowledge qualifies him to handle it; and that when any principle or detail is definitely recognized as desirable, then the consensus of good writers and speakers will adopt it. This implies wide recognition, support, and co-operation; and though the Society has already gone far to secure this, it may yet seem that the small aristocracy of letters will be insufficient to carry through such a wide reform of habit: but it should be remembered that they are the very same persons whose example maintains the existing fashions. And, again, when it is urged against us that the democratic Press is too firmly established in its traditions to be moved by such an influence, it is overlooked that the great majority of those who write for the Press, and maintain or even create the style by which it holds the public ear, are men of good education, whose minds are thoroughly susceptible to all intellectual notions, and often highly sensitive to æsthetic excellence. They are all of them in a sense trained experts, and though working under tyrannous conditions are no less alive in pride and self respect than those who command more leisure, and they will readily and eagerly follow where their circumstances might forbid them to lead. The conviction too that they are honourably assisting in preserving the best traditions of our language will add zest to their work; while the peculiar field of it will provide a wholesome utilitarian test, which must be of good service to us by checking the affectations and pedantries into which it may be feared that such a society as the S.P.E. would conceivably lapse. Their co-operation is altogether desirable, and we believe attainable if it be not from the first assured.

R.B.

Footnote 1: [\(return\)](#)

Homophone is a Greek word meaning 'same-sounding', and before using the relative word in this double way I have preferred to make what may seem a needless explanation. It is convenient, for instance, to say that *son* and *heir* are both homophones, meaning that each belongs to that particular class of words which without context are of ambiguous signification: and it is convenient also to say that *son* and *sun* and *heir* and *air* are homophones without explaining that it is meant that they are mutually homophonous, which is evident. A physician congratulating a friend on the birth of his first-born might say, 'Now that you have a son and heir, see that he gets enough sun and air'.

Footnote 2: [\(return\)](#)

Such words have no technical class-name; they are merely extreme examples of the ambiguity common to most words, which grows up naturally from divergence of meaning. True homophones are separate words which have, or have acquired, an illogical fortuitous identity.

Footnote 3: [\(return\)](#)

It is probable that in Tyndal's time the awkwardness was not so glaring: for 'beam' as a ray of light seems to have developed its connexion with the eye since his date, in spite of his proverbial use of it in the other sense.

Footnote 4: [\(return\)](#)

In Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary* there is a list of *homonyms*, that is words which are ambiguous to the eye by similar spellings, as homophones are to the ear by similar sounds: and that list, which includes obsolete words, has 1,600 items. 1,600 is the number of homophones which our list would show if they were all only doublets.

Footnote 5: [\(return\)](#)

The following words in List 1 involve *wr* > *w*, write, wrach, wrap, wring, wrung, wreck, wrest, wreak, wrick.

Footnote 6: [\(return\)](#)

Other similar words occurring in other sections are—awe, awl, ought, bawd, fought, gaud, gauze, haw, caw, cause, caught, lawn, paw, saw, sauce, sought, taut, caulk, stalk, alms, balm;—their correspondents being, oar, orle, ort (*obs.*), board, fort, gored, gores, hoar, core, cores, court, lorn, pore, sore, source, sort, tort, cork, stork, arms, barm.

Footnote 7: [\(return\)](#)

Other similar proper names of species, &c., which occur in some one of the other sections of the list: ant, bat, bear, bee, beet, beetle, beech, box, breeze, date, dock, daw, duck, deer, elder, erne, fir, flea, flag, fluke, hare, horse, hawk, hop, caper, carrot, couch, cricket, currant, leech, lichen, mace, maize, mint, mole, pear, peach, pink, pie, pine, plum, plane, pulse, rabbit, rye, rush, rape, rail, reed, roe, roc, rue, sage, seal, sloe, sole, spruce, stork, thyme, char, whale, whin, yew. Also cockle.

Footnote 8: [\(return\)](#)

The homophones sun = son. There is a Greek epigram on Homer, wherein, among other fine things, he is styled,

which Mackail translates 'a second sun on the life of Greece'. But *second son* in English means the second male child of its parents. It is plain that the Greek is untranslatable into English because of the homophone. *The thing cannot be said.*

Donne would take this bull by the horns, pretending or thinking that genuine feeling can be worthily carried in a pun. So that in his impassioned 'hymn to God the Father', deploring his own sinfulness, his climax is

But swear by thyself that at my death Thy Sonne
Shall shine as he shines now,

the only poetic force of which seems to lie in a covert plea of pitiable imbecility.

Dr. Henry Bradley in 1913 informed the International Historical Congress that the word *son* had ceased to be vernacular in the dialects of many parts of England. 'I would not venture to assert (he adds) that the identity of sound with *sun* is the only cause that has led to the widespread disuse of *son* in dialect speech, but I think it has certainly contributed to the result.'

Footnote 9: [\(return\)](#)

There is a coincidence of accidents—that the Arabic sign for zero is the same with our letter O, and that the name of our letter O (= owe) is the same as the present tense of *ought*, which is the vulgar name (for nought) of the Arabic zero, and that its vowel does not occur in the name of any cipher.

Footnote 10: [\(return\)](#)

Wherever this is not so—as in *rhétoric, rhetorical, rhetorician, cómpany, compánion, &c.*—we have a greater freedom in the use of the words. Such words, as Dr. Bradley points out, giving *Cánada, Canáidian* as example, are often phonetic varieties due to an imported foreign syntax, and their pronunciation implies familiarity with literature and the written forms: but very often they are purely the result of our native syllabising, not only in displacement of accent (as in the first example above) but also by modification of the accented vowel according to its position in the word, the general tendency being to make long vowels in monosyllables and in penultimate accents, but short vowels in antepenultimate accents. Thus come such differences of sound between *opus* and *opera, omen* and *ominous, virus* and *virulent, miser* and *miserable, nation* and *national, patron* and *patronage, legal* and *legislate, grave* and *gravity, globe* and *globular, grade* and *gradual, genus* and *general, female* and *feminine, fable* and *fabulous, &c.* In such disguising of the root-sound the main effect, as Dr. Bradley says, is the power to free the derivative from an intense meaning of the root; so that, to take his very forcible example, the adjective *Christian*, the derivative of *Christ*, has by virtue of its shortened vowel been enabled to carry a much looser signification than it could have acquired had it been phonetically indissociable from the intense signification of the name *Christ*. This freedom of the derivative from the root varies indefinitely in different words, and it very much complicates my present lesser statement of the literary advantage of phonetic variety in inflexions and derivatives.

The examples above are all Latin words, and since Latin words came into English through different channels, these particular vowels can have different histories.

Footnote 11: [\(return\)](#)

It would follow that, supposing there were any expert academic control, it might be possible to save some of our perishing homophones by artificial specialization. Such words are needed, and if a homophone were thus specialized in some department of life or thought, then a slight differential pronunciation would be readily adopted. Both that and its defined meaning might be true to its history.

Footnote 12: [\(return\)](#)

A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles, by Otto Jespersen, Heidelberg, 1909. Streitberg's *Germanische Bibliothek*, vol. i, p. 441.

Footnote 13: [\(return\)](#)

To give an example of this. In old Greek *we* and *you* were ημεις and υμεις: and those words became absolutely homophonous, so that one of them had to go. The first person naturally held on to its private property, and it invented *sets* for outsiders. Now the first step towards this absurdest of all homophonies, the identity of *meum* and *tuum*, was no doubt the modification of the true full *u* to *ii*. The ultimate convenience of the result may in itself be applauded; but it is inconceivable that modern Greek should ever compensate itself for its inevitable estrangement from its ancient glories.

Footnote 14: [\(return\)](#)

The words *aural* and *oral* are distinguished in the pronunciation of the North Midlands and in Scotland, and the difference between the first syllables is shown in the Oxford dictionary. In Southern English no trace of differentiation remains.

Footnote 15: [\(return\)](#)

Some of the words in this table are also in the last list. This list is an attempt to tabulate

words falling out of use or seldom heard now in the conversation of average educated persons who talk Southern English or what is called P.S.P. (see p. 38); to some of them the word may be unknown, and if it is known, they avoid using it because it sounds to them strange or affected. It is difficult to *prove* that any particular word is in this condition, and the list is offered tentatively. It is made from Jones' dictionary, which is therefore allowed to rule whether the word is obsolescent rather than obsolete: some of these seem to be truly obsolete. Some will appear to be convincing examples of obsolescence, others not; but it must be remembered that the fact of a word being still commonly heard in some district or trade (though that may seem to show that it is in 'common use') is no evidence that it is not dying out; it is rather evidence that it was lately more living, which is the same as being obsolescent.

Footnote 16: [\(return\)](#)

A Phonetic Dictionary of the English Language, by Hermann Michaelis, Headmaster of the Mittelschule in Berlin, and Daniel Jones, M.A., Lecturer on Phonetics at University College, London, 1913. There is a second edition of this book in which the words are in the accustomed alphabetical order of their literary spelling.

Footnote 17: [\(return\)](#)

I am not likely to forget it or to minimize it, for it is my own indictment against Mr. Jones' system, and since his practice strongly supports my contention I shall examine it and expose it (see p. 43); but the objection here raised is not really subversive of my argument here, as may be judged from the fact that the Oxford University Press has adopted or countenanced Mr. Jones' standard in their small popular edition of the large dictionary.

Footnote 18: [\(return\)](#)

This is a very common condition. The habitual pronunciation is associated in the mind with the familiar eye-picture of the literary printed spelling so closely that it is difficult for the speaker to believe that he is not uttering the written sounds; but he is not competent to judge his own speech. For instance, almost all Englishmen believe that the vowel which we write *u* in *but*, *ugly*, *unknown*, &c., is really a *u*, like the *u* in *full*, and not a disguised *a*; and because the written *s* is sometimes voiced they cannot distinguish between *s* and *z*, nor without great difficulty separate among the plural terminations those that are spoken with an *s* from those that are spoken with a *z*. I was shocked when I first discovered my own delusions in such matters, and I still speak the bad Southern English that I learnt as a child and at school. I can hardly forgive my teachers and would not myself be condemned in a like reprobation.

Footnote 19: [\(return\)](#)

The dictionary allows mitigated variants of some of these words.

Footnote 20: [\(return\)](#)

A fair list might no doubt be made; the most amusing item would be—*Ophelia* = *aphelia*: then *illusion* = *elusion*, *paten* = *pattern*, *seaman* = *seamen*, *phial* = *file*, *custody* = *custardy*, and of course *verdure* = *verger* and *fissure* = *fisher*. It would also allow *partition* = *petition*, *proscribe* = *prescribe*, and *upbraid* = *abrade*! I take these from the first edition.

Footnote 21: [\(return\)](#)

The two editions of Jones' dictionary do not exactly correspond, e.g. in the first edition the words *boar* and *bore* are under *baw*, and no other pronunciation is mentioned. But in the second edition *b[ore]* and *b[oar]* are allowed as variants. In the first edition *four*, *fore* and *for* are all under *faw* [fə:], and I find *pour*, *pore*, and *poor* all under *paw*, though in every case there are variants, and on p. 404 he records that *shore* and *sure* may be pronounced alike. Again, in the first edition, *yerr* [jə:] is one normal for *year* and also dialectal for *ear* (!), while in the second edition only *y[ear]* [ji:] is given for *year*, and *yerr* is not mentioned at all. As I am sure that this sort of stuff must be almost more tedious and annoying to read than it is to write, I desist from further details, but cannot resist the opportunity of pointing out that in their English pronunciation of Latin our classical teachers and professors have wantonly introduced this mischievous homophony of *au* and *or* into Latin, although the proper pronunciation of the 'diphthong' *au* in Latin is not like our *awe*, but like the *ou* of *out*. Thus with them *corda* and *cauda* are similar sounds, and the sacred *Sursum corda* means 'Cock your tail' just as much as it means 'Lift up your hearts'.

Footnote 22: [\(return\)](#)

This is no exaggeration. Let a humane teacher think what an infant's mind is, the delicate bud of intelligence opening on the world, eager to adjust its awakening wonder to the realities of life, absolutely simple, truthful, and receptive, reaching out its tender faculties like the sensitive antennae of a new-born insect, that feel forth upon the unknown with the faultless instinct of eternal mind—one has only to imagine that condition to realize that the most ingenious malignity could hardly contrive anything to offer it so perplexing, cramping, and discouraging as the unintelligible and unreasonable absurdities of English literary spelling. That it somehow generally wrestles through is only a demonstration of the wrong that is done to it; and I would say, better leave it alone to find its own way, better teach it nothing at all, than worry it with the incomprehensible, indefensible confusion of such nonsense.

Footnote 23: [\(return\)](#)

The peril that we are in of having Mr. Jones' degraded pronunciation thus sprung upon us in England and taught in all our schools is really threatening. Indeed, as things are, there is little prospect of escaping from it, supposing the democracy should once awake to the commercial and spiritual advantages of teaching language phonetically: and that would seem to be only a question of time: the demand may come at any moment, and a complete machinery which has been skilfully prepared to meet the demand will offer practical conveniences to outbalance every other consideration.

Even supposing the authorities in the Education Department sufficiently alive to the situation which it is the purpose of this section of my essay to bring to the fore, yet even then, were they all unanimous, they could not give effect to their convictions, because—

They are forbidden to recommend or give preference to any particular book. They may not order or prohibit the use of any book, however good or bad they may know it to be, and they probably desire to avoid the suspicion of favouring the authors of books that have the advantage of national circulation.

However that may be, it is a lamentable situation that our high-salaried Board of Education, composed of the best trained intelligence of the country, should not be allowed to exercise its discretion efficiently. The people, no doubt, cannot be agreed as to the principles on which they desire to be educated, whether political, official, or religious, and they deprecate official control in such matters. Every one objecting to some principle, they consent in requiring that the central authority should have no principle at all; but this lack of principle should not be extended to paralyse action in questions that demand expert knowledge and judgement, such as this question of phonetic teaching—and it shows that the public by grudging authority to their own officers may only fall under a worse tyranny, which they will suffer just because it has no authority.

Footnote 24: [\(return\)](#)

Writing *er*, always unaccented, for ə.

Footnote 25: [\(return\)](#)

Of course Mr. Jones knows that these are not and cannot be fixed. He must often bewail in secret the exigencies of his 'styles'.

Footnote 26: [\(return\)](#)

Phonetic Transcriptions of English, by D. Jones, 1907, Introd., p. v, 'The peculiarities of Style A as compared with Style B are especially marked. These differences are partly natural, i.e. modifications produced involuntarily as the result of speaking more slowly or of endeavouring to speak more distinctly, and partly artificial, i.e. modifications due to the well-established though perhaps somewhat arbitrary rules laid down by teachers of elocution,' &c., and Mr. Jones is quite right in complaining that his pupils make fools of themselves when they try to speak slower.

Footnote 27: [\(return\)](#)

I do not deny that he allows some exceptions: and these, few as they are, concede the principle for which I contend.

Footnote 28: [\(return\)](#)

His own words are, 'Thus Margate trippers now generally speak of Ma:geit instead of Ma:git: teachers in London elementary schools now often say eksept 'except', ekstrə:dinəri for ikstrədni 'extraordinary', often for ɔ:fn 'often'. We feel that such artificialities cannot but impair the beauty of the language.' Dictionary, 1st edition, Preface, p.v.

Footnote 29: [\(return\)](#)

In the first edition of the Dictionary [1913] ə has only one interpretation, the illustration being the *a* of *about*. In the *Phonetic Transcriptions* [1907] it was the *er* of *over*, but in the new Dictionary [1917] ə has three interpretations with the following explanation: 'ə varies noticeably according to its position in the word and in the sentence. In final positions it is often replaced (*sic*) by "ʌ" [= *u* of *up*], in other positions its quality varies considerably according to the nature of the surrounding sounds; the variations extend from almost "ʌ" to the half-close mixed position. Three different values may be heard in the words *china*, *cathedral*: in the latter word the second "ə" has a lower and more retracted tongue-position than the first ə.'

The value of ə when Mr. Jones first substituted it for a disguised unaccented vowel, was that the speaker might know what sound he had to produce. It was wrong, but it was definite. Mr. Jones would now make it less wrong by making it less definite. That is, in the place of something distinctly wrong we are offered something which has an offchance of being nearly right: but as it has entirely ousted and supplanted the original vowel I do not see how there is any means of interpreting it correctly. The *er* of *over* is a definite sound, and to print it where it was out of place was a definite error—to give it three interpretations makes it cover more ground: but its usurpations are still indefensible.

Footnote 30: [\(return\)](#)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ON ENGLISH HOMOPHONES ***

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