

# **Society for Pure English, Tract 3 (1920)**

Society for Pure English

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# Society for Pure English, Tract 3 (1920)

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- A FEW PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS
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- 'SPELLING PRONUNCIATIONS'

Society for Pure English, Tract 3 (1920)  
A Few Practical Suggestions

Produced by David Starner, Barbara Tozier and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team

[Transcriber's notes: Ligature 'oe' is represented by [oe], and the diacritic breve is represented by [x]]

S. P. E

*Tract No. III*

A FEW PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

By

Logan Pearsall Smith

MDCCCCXX

EDITORIAL

CO-OPERATION OF MEMBERS, ETC.

REPORT TO EASTER, 1920

### **A FEW PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS**

The principles of the Society for Pure English were stated in general terms in its preliminary pamphlet; since, however, many questions have been asked about the application of these principles, a few suggestions about special points may be found useful. The Society does not attempt to dictate to its members; it does, however, put forward its suggestions as worthy of serious consideration; and, since they have received the approval of the best scientific judgement, it is hoped that they will be generally acceptable.

Some of them, when blankly stated, may seem trivial and unimportant; but we neither expect nor desire to make any sudden and revolutionary changes. A language is an established means of communication, sanctioned by the general consent, and cannot be transformed at will. Language is, however, of itself always changing, and if there is hesitation between current usages, then choice becomes possible, and individuals

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may intervene with good effect; for only by their preferences can the points in dispute be finally settled. It is important, therefore, that these preferences should be guided by right knowledge, and it is this right knowledge which the Society makes it its aim to provide. While, therefore, any particular ruling may seem unimportant, the principle on which that ruling is based is not so; and its application in any special case will help to give it authority and force. The effect of even a small number of successful interventions will be to confirm right habits of choice, which may then, as new opportunities arise, be applied to further cases. Among the cases of linguistic usage which are varying and unfixated at the present time, and in which therefore a deliberate choice is possible, the following may be mentioned:

### I. *The Naturalization of Foreign Words.*

There is no point on which usage is more uncertain and fluctuating than in regard to the words which we are always borrowing from foreign languages. Expression generally lags behind thought, and we are now more than ever handicapped by the lack of convenient terms to describe the new discoveries, and new ways of thinking and feeling by which our lives are enriched and made interesting. It has been our national custom in the past to eke out our native resources by borrowing from other languages, especially from French, any words which we found ready to our needs; and until recent times, these words were soon made current and convenient by being assimilated and given English shapes and sounds. We still borrow as freely as ever; but half the benefit of this borrowing is lost to us, owing to our modern and pedantic attempts to preserve the foreign sounds and shapes of imported words, which make their current use unnecessarily difficult. Owing to our false taste in this matter many words which have been long naturalized in the language are being now put back into their foreign forms, and our speech is being thus gradually impoverished. This process of de-assimilation generally begins with the restoration of foreign accents to such words as have them in French; thus 'role' is now written 'role\*[A]; 'debris', 'debris'; 'detour', 'detour'; 'depot', 'depot'; and the old words long established in our language, 'levee', 'naivety', now appear as 'levee', and 'naivete'. The next step is to italicize these words, thus treating them as complete aliens, and thus we often see *role*, *depot*, &c. The very old English word 'rendezvous' is now printed *rendezvous*, and 'dilettante' and 'vogue' sometimes are printed in italics. Among other words which have been borrowed at various times and more or less naturalized, but which are now being driven out of the language, are the following: confrere, congee, cortege, dishabille, distrait, ensemble, fete, flair, mellay (now *melee*), nonchalance, provenance, rencontrer, &c. On the other hand, it is satisfactory to note that 'employee' appears to be taking the place of 'employe'.

[Footnote A: For the words marked with an asterisk see notes on page 10.]

The printing in italics and the restoration of foreign accents is accompanied by awkward attempts to revert to the foreign pronunciation of these words, which of course much lessens their usefulness in conversation. Sometimes this, as in *nuance*, or *timbre*\_\* *practically deprives us of a word which most of us are unable to pronounce correctly; sometimes it is merely absurd, as in 'envelope', where most people try to give a foreign sound to a word which no one regards as an alien, and which has been anglicized in spelling for nearly two hundred years.*

Members of our Society will, we hope, do what is in their power to stop this process of impoverishment, by writing and pronouncing as English such words as have already been naturalized, and when a new borrowing appears in two forms they will give their preference to the one which is most English. There are some who may even help to enrich the language by a bolder conquest of useful terms, and although they may suffer ridicule, they will suffer it in a good cause, and will only be sharing the short-lived denunciation which former innovators incurred when they borrowed so many concise and useful terms from France and Italy to enlarge and adorn our English speech. If we are to use foreign words (and, if we have no equivalents, we must use them) it is certainly much better that they should be incorporated in our language, and made available for common use. Words like 'garage' and 'nuance' and 'naivety' had much better be pronounced and written as English words, and there are others, like 'bouleverse' and 'bouleversement', whose partial borrowing might

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well be made complete; and a useful word like *malaise* could with advantage reassume the old form 'malease' which it once possessed.

### II. *Alien Plurals.*

The useless and pedantic process of de-assimilation takes other forms, one of the most common of which is the restoring their foreign plural forms to words borrowed from Greek, Latin, and Italian. No common noun is genuinely assimilated into our language and made available for the use of the whole community until it has an English plural, and thousands of indispensable words have been thus incorporated. We no longer write of *ideae, chori, asyla, musea, sphinges, specimina* for *ideas, choruses, asylums, museums, sphinxes, specimens*, and the notion of returning to such plurals would seem barbarous and absurd. And yet this very process is now going on, and threatens us with deplorable results. *Sanatoria, memoranda, gymnasia* are now replacing *sanatorium, memorandums, and gymnasiums*; *automata, formulae, and lacunae* are taking the place of *automatons, formulas, and lacunas*; *indices* and *apices* of *indexes* and *apexes*, *miasmata* of *miasmas* or *miasms*; and even forms like *lexica, rhododendra, and chimerae* have been recently noted in the writings of authors of repute.

Some of these words are no doubt exceptions. *Memoranda* is preferable when used collectively, but the English plural is better in such a phrase as 'two different memorandums'. *Automata*, too, is sometimes collective; and *lacuna* always carries the suggestion of its classical meaning, which makes half the meaning of the word. So again, when the classical form is a scientific term, it is convenient and well to preserve its differentiation, e.g. *formulae* in science, or *foci* and *indices* in mathematics; but such uses create exceptions, and these should be recognized as exceptions, to a general rule that wherever there is choice then the English form is to be preferred: we should, for instance, say *bandits* and not *banditti*.

### III. *ae* and *oe*.

The use of *ae* and *oe* in English words of classical origin was a pedantic innovation of the sixteenth century: in most words of common use *ae* and *oe* have been replaced by the simple *e*, and we no longer write *praevious, aeternal, aera, aemulate, c[oe]lestial, [oe]conomy, &c.* Since, however, those forms have a learned appearance, they are being now restored in many words which had been freed from them; *medieval* is commonly written *mediaeval*; *primaeval* and *co-aeval* are beginning to make their appearance; *peony* is commonly written *paeony*, and the forms *saecular, chimaera, hyaena*[1] and *praeternatural* have recently been noted. As this is more than a mere change in orthography, being in fact a part of the process of de-assimilation, members of our Society would do well to avoid the use of the archaic forms in all words which have become thoroughly English, and which are used without thought of their etymology. The matter is not so simple with regard to words of Latin or Greek derivation which are only understood by most people through their etymology; and for these it may be well to keep their etymologically transparent spelling, as *aetiology, [oe]strus, &c.* Whether learned words of this kind, and classical names such as *Caesar, AEschylus, &c.*, should be spelt with vowels ligatured or divided (*Caesar, Aeschylus*), is a point about which present usage varies; and that usage does not always represent the taste of the writers who employ it. Mr. Horace Hart, in his *Rules for Compositors and Readers at the University Press, Oxford*, ruled that the combinations *ae* and *oe* should each be printed as two letters in Latin and Greek words and in English words of classical derivation, but this last injunction is plainly deduced from the practice of editors of Latin texts, and is an arbitrary rule in the interest of uniformity: it has the sanction and influence of the Clarendon Press, but is not universally accepted. Thus Dr. Henry Bradley writes, "This question does not seem to me to be settled by the mere fact that all recent classical editors reject the ligatures, just as most of them reject other aids to pronunciation which the ancients had not, such as *j, v*, for consonantal *i, u*. Many printers have conformed the spelling of *English* words in this respect to the practice of editors of Latin texts. I confess my own preference is for adhering to the English tradition of the ligature, not only in English words, but even in Latin or Greek names quoted in an English context. If we write *ae, oe* in *Philae, Adelphoe*, we need the diaeresis in *Aglae, Pholoe*,

and a name like Aeaeta looks very funny in an English context. The editors of Latin texts are perfectly right in discarding the ligatures; but so they are also in writing Iuuenalis; Latin is one thing and English is another.'

[Footnote 1: Shakespeare would have assisted the Hyena in her attempt to naturalize herself in England:

'I will laugh like a Hyen, and that when thou art inclined to sleep.' *A.Y.L.*, IV. i. 156. [ED.]]

#### IV. *Dying Words.*

Our language is always suffering another kind of impoverishment which is somewhat mysterious in its causes and perhaps impossible to prevent. This is the kind of blight which attacks many of our most ancient, beautiful, and expressive words, rendering them first of all unsuitable for colloquial use, though they may be still used in prose. Next they are driven out of the prose vocabulary into that of poetry, and at last removed into that limbo of archaisms and affectations to which so many beautiful but dead words of our language have been unhappily banished. It is not that these words lose their lustre, as many words lose it, by hackneyed use and common handling; the process is exactly opposite; by not being used enough, the phosphorescence of decay seems to attack them, and give them a kind of shimmer which makes them seem too fine for common occasions. But once a word falls out of colloquial speech its life is threatened; it may linger on in literature, but its radiance, at first perhaps brighter, will gradually diminish, and it must sooner or later fade away, or live only as a conscious archaism. The fate of many beautiful old words like *teen* and *dole* and *meed* has thus been decided; they are now practically lost to the language, and can probably never be restored to common use.[2] It is, however, an interesting question, and one worthy of the consideration of our members, whether it may be possible, at its beginning, to stop this process of decay; whether a word at the moment when it begins to seem too poetical, might not perhaps be reclaimed for common speech by timely and not inappropriate usage, and thus saved, before it is too late, from the blight of over-expressiveness which will otherwise kill it in the end.

[Footnote 2: But concerning the words *dole* and *meed* see Tract II *On English Homophones*. Both these words have suffered through homophony. *Dole* is a terrible example. 1, a portion = deal; 2, grief = Fr. deuil, Lat. *dolor*; 3, deceit, from the Latin *dolus*, Gk. [Greek: *dolos*]. All three have been in wide use and have good authority; but neither 2 (which is presumably that which the writer intends) nor 3 can be restored, nor is it desirable that they should be, the sound having been specially isolated to a substantive and verb in the sense of No. 1.

*Meed* is likewise lost by homophony with 1 mead = meadow and 2 mead = metheglin: and it is a very serious loss. No. 1 is almost extinct except among farmers and hay merchants, but the absurd ambiguity of No. 2 is effective.

*Teen*, the writer's third example, has shown recent signs of renewed vitality in literature. [Ed.]]

The usage in regard to these tainted words varies a good deal, though probably not so much as people generally think: some of them, like *delve* and *dwell*, still linger on in metaphors; and people will still speak of *delving* into their minds, and *dwelling* in thought, who would never think of *delving* in the garden, or *dwelling* in England; and we will call people *swine\_\** or *hounds*, *although we cannot use these words for the animals they more properly designate. We can speak of a swift\_\** punishment, but not a swift bird, or airplane, or steamer, and we shun a thought, but not a bore; and many similar instances could be given. Perhaps words of this kind cannot be saved from the unhappy doom which threatens them. It is not impossible, on the other hand, that, by a slight conscious effort, some of these words might still be saved; and there may be, among our members, persons of sufficient courage to suffer, in a pious cause, the imputation of preciousness and affectation which such attempts involve. To the consideration of such persons we could recommend words like *maid*, *maiden*, *damsel*, *weep*, *bide*, *sojourn*, *seek*, *heinous*, *swift*, *chide\_\**, and the many other excellent and expressive old words which are now falling into colloquial disuse.

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There is one curious means by which the life of these words may be lengthened and by which, possibly, they may regain a current and colloquial use. They can be still used humorously and as it were in quotation marks; words like *pelf*, *maiden*, *lad*, *damsel*, and many others are sometimes used in this way, which at any rate keeps them from falling into the limbo of silence. Whether any of them have by this means renewed their life would be an interesting subject of inquiry; it is said that at Eton the good old word *usher*, used first only for humorous effect, has now found its way back into the common and colloquial speech of the school.

### V. *Dialectal and Popular Words.*

Whether words may, by conscious effort, be preserved in colloquial usage is an unsolved question, though perhaps our Society may help to solve it; there is, however, another and more certain benefit which its members, or at any rate such of them as are writers, may confer upon the language. There are many excellent words spoken in uneducated speech and dialect all about us, which would be valuable additions to our standard vocabulary if they could be given currency in it. Many of these are dying words like *bide*, *dight*, *blithe*, *malison*, *vengeance*, and since these are still spoken in other classes, it might be less difficult to restore them to educated speech. Others are old words like *thole* and *nesh* and *lew* and *mense* and *foison* and *fash* and *douce*, which have never been accepted into the standard English, or have long since vanished from it, in spite of their excellence and ancient history, and in spite of the fact that they have long been in current use in various districts. Others are new formations, coined in the ever-active mint of uneducated speech, and many of these, coming as they do full of freshness and vigour out of the vivid popular imagination—words like *harum-scarum*, *gallivant*, *cantankerous*, and *pernickety*—or useful monosyllables and penny pieces of popular speech like *blight* and *nag* and *fun*—have already found their way into standard English. But there are many others which might with advantage be given a larger currency. This process of dialectal regeneration, as it is called, has been greatly aided in the past by men of letters, who have given a literary standing to the useful and picturesque vocabulary of their unlettered neighbours, and thus helped to reinforce with vivid terms our somewhat abstract and faded standard speech. We owe, for instance, words like *lilt* and *outcome* to Carlyle; *croon*, *eerie*, *gloaming* have become familiar to us from Burns's poems, and Sir Walter Scott added a large number of vivid local terms both to our written and our spoken language. In the great enrichment of the vocabulary of the romantic movement by means of words like *murk*, *gloaming*, *glamour*, *gruesome*, *eerie*, *eldritch*, *uncanny*, *warlock*, *wraith*—all of which were dialect or local words, we find a good example of the expressive power of dialect speech, and see how a standard language can be enriched by the use of popular sources. All members of our Society can help this process by collecting words from popular speech which are in their opinion worthy of a larger currency; they can use them themselves and call the attention of their friends to them, and if they are writers, they may be able, like the writers of the past, to give them a literary standing. If their suggestions are not accepted, no harm is done; while, if they make a happy hit and bring to public notice a popular term or idiom which the language needs and accepts, they have performed a service to our speech of no small importance.

L.P.S.

### NOTES TO THE ABOVE

*Role.* The italics and accent may be due to consciousness of *roll*. The French word will never make itself comfortable in English if it is homophonous with *roll*.

*Timbre.* This word is in a peculiar condition. In the French it has very various significations, but has come to be adopted in music and acoustics to connote the quality of a musical sound independent of its pitch and loudness, a quality derived from the harmonics which the fundamental note intensifies, and that depends on the special form of the instrument. The article *Clang* in the Oxford Dictionary quotes Professor Tyndall regretting that we have no word for this meaning, and suggesting that we should imitate the awkward German *klang-farbe*. We have no word unless we forcibly deprive *clangour* of its noisy associations. We generally

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use *timbre* in italics and pronounce it as French; and since the word is used only by musicians this does not cause much inconvenience to them, but it is because of its being an unenglish word that it is confined to specialists: and truly if it were an English word the quality which it denotes would be spoken of more frequently, and perhaps be even more differentiated and recognized, though it is well known to every child. Now how should this word be Englished? Is the spelling or the pronunciation to stand? The English pronunciation of the letters of *timbre* is forbidden by its homophone—a French girl collecting postage—stamps in England explained that she collected *timberposts* —, whereas our English form of the French sound of the word would be approximately *tamber*; and this would be not only a good English—sounding word like *amber* and *clamber*, but would be like our *tambour*, which is *tympanum*, which again IS *timbre*. So that if our professors and doctors of music were brave, they would speak and write *tamber*, which would be not only English but perfectly correct etymologically.

But this is just where what is called 'the rub' comes in. It would, for a month or two, look so peculiar a word that it might require something like a *coup d'etat* to introduce it. And yet the schools of music in London could work the miracle without difficulty or delay.

*Swine*. Americans still use the word *pig* in its original sense of the young of the hog and sow; though they will say *chickens* for *poultry*. In England we talk of pigs and chickens when we mean swine and poultry. Chaucer has

His swyn his hors his stoor and his pultreye.

The verb *to pig* has kept to its meaning, though it has developed another: the substantive probably got loose through its generic employment in composite words, e.g. guinea—pig, sea—pig, &c.; and having acquired a generic use cannot lose it again. But it might perhaps be worth while to distinguish strictly between the generic and the special use of the word *pig*, and not call a sow a pig, nor a hen a chicken. So *hog* and *sow* might still have their *pigs* and be all of them *swine*.

*Swift*. Perhaps it is going too far to say that 'swift' is colloquial only in metaphorical applications, we might speak of 'a swift bowler' without exciting surprise; but it is expedient to restore this word to general use, and avoid the use of *fast* for denotation of speed. 'To stand fast' is very well, but 'to run fast' is thoroughly objectionable. Such a use destroys the sense of firmness which the word is needed and well qualified to denote.

*Chide*. This word probably needs its past tense and participle to be securely fixed before it will be used. It is perhaps wholly the uncertainty of these that has made the word to be avoided. *Chid* and *chidden* should be taught, and *chode* and *chided* condemned as illiterate.

#### NOTE ON 'DYING WORDS'

Diderot in his *Lettre sur les Sourds et Muets* deplores the loss of good old terms in the French of his day; he writes:

'Je blame cette noblesse pretendue qui nous a fait exclure de notre langue un grand nombre d'expressions energiques. Les Grecs, les Latins qui ne connoissoient gueres cette fausse delicatesse, disoient en leur langue ce qu'ils vouloient, et comme ils le vouloient. Pour nous, a force de raffiner, nous avons appauvri la notre, &n'ayant souvent qu'un terme propre a rendre une idee, nous aimons mieux affoiblir l'idee que de ne pas employer un terme noble.[3] Quelle perte pour ceux d'entre nos Ecrivains qui ont l'imagination forte, que celle de tant de mots que nous revoyons avec plaisir dans Amyot & dans Montagne. Ils ont commence par etre rejettes du beau style, parce qu'ils avoient passe dans le peuple; & ensuite rebutes par le peuple meme, qui a la longue est toujours le singe des Grands, ils sont devenus tout—à—fait inusites.'... [ED.]

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[Footnote 3: *Noble. Genteel* would not be a fair translation, but it gives the meaning. Littré quotes: 'Il ne nommera pas le boulanger de Cresus, le palefrenier de Cyrus, le chaudronnier Macistos; il dit grand panetier, ecuyer, armurier, avertissant en note que cela est plus *noble*.']

\* \* \* \* \*

### CO-OPERATION OF MEMBERS

The method by which this Society proposes to work is to collect expert opinion on matters wherein our present use is indeterminate or unsatisfactory, and thus to arrive at a general understanding and consensus of opinion which might be relied on to influence practice.

This method implies the active co-operation of the members of the Society, who, it is presumed, are all interested in our aims; and the purpose of our secretary's paper (printed above) is to suggest topics on which members might usefully contribute facts and opinions.

The committee, who have added a few notes to the paper, offer some remarks on the topics suggested.

1. Whether it is advisable to Anglicize the spelling of certain French words, like *timbre*, in order to promote their assimilation. A paper dealing with this question, giving as full a list as possible of the *words that are at present in a precarious condition*, and proposing in each case the curative spelling, is invited; and any single practical contribution to the subject will be welcome.

2. A full list of foreign nouns that are uncertain of their Englished plurals is required. The unreadiness to come to a decided opinion in doubtful cases is due to the absence of any overruling principle; and the lack of a general principle is due to ignorance of all the particulars which it would affect. Inconsistent practice is no doubt in many cases established irrevocably, and yet if all the words about which there is at present any uncomfortable feeling were collected and exhibited, it would then probably appear that the majority of instances indicated a general rule of propriety and convenience, and this would immediately decide all doubtful cases, and these, when once recognized and established in educated practice, would win over many other words that are refractory in the absence of rule. What exceptions remained would be tabulated as definitely recognized exceptions.

3. Besides the class of words indicated in Mr. Pearsall Smith's paper, there is another set of plural forms needing attention, and that is the Greek words that denote the various sciences and arts; there is in these an uncertainty and inconsistency in the use of singular and plural forms. We say Music and Physics, but should we say Ethic or Ethics, Esthetic or Esthetics? Here again agreement on a general rule to govern doubtful cases would be a boon. The experience of writers and teachers who are in daily contact with such words should make their opinions of value, and we invite them to deal with the subject. The corresponding use of Latin plurals taking singular verbs, as *Morals*, should be brought under rule.

4. The question of the use of *ae* (*ae*) and *oe* ([*oe*]). Our Society from the first abjured the whole controversy about reforms of spelling, but questions of literary propriety and convenience must sometimes involve the spellings; and this is an instance of it. On the main question of phonetic spelling the Society would urge its members to distinguish the use of phonetic script in *teaching*, from its introduction into English *literature*. The first is absolutely desirable and inevitable: the second is not only undesirable but impracticable, though this would not preclude a good deal of reasonable reform in our literary spelling in a phonetic direction. Those who fear that if phonetics is taught in the schools it will then follow that our books will be commonly printed in phonetic symbols, should read Dr. Henry Bradley's lecture to the British Academy 'On the relations between spoken and written language' (1913), and they will see that the Society's Tract II, on 'English

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Homophones', illustrates the unpractical nature of any scheme either of pure phonetics in the printing of English books, or even of such a scheme as is offered by 'the Simplified Spelling Society'; because the great number of homophones which are now distinguished by their different spellings would make such a phonetic writing as unutilitarian as our present system is: moreover, if it were adopted it would inevitably lead to the elimination of far more of these homophones than we can afford to lose; since it would enforce by its spelling the law which now operates only by speech, that homophones are self-destructive.

5. Mr. Pearsall Smith has returned to the question of dialectal regeneration mentioned in Tract I, in which we invited contributions on the subject. In response we had a paper sent to us, which we do not print because, though full of learning and interesting detail, it was a curious and general disquisition calculated to divert attention from the practical points. What the Society asks for is not a list of lost words that are interesting in themselves: we need rather definite instances of good dialect words which are not homophones and which would conveniently supply wants. That is, any word proposed for rehabilitation in our practical vocabulary should be not only a good word in itself, but should fall into some definite place and relieve and enrich our speech by its usefulness. It is evident that no one person can be expected to supply a full list of such words, but on the other hand there must be very many of our members who could contribute one or two; and such contributions are invited.

Exempli gratia. Here are two words with very different titles and claims, *nesh* and *hyppish*.

*Nesh*, which has two columns in the Oxford Dictionary, begins in A.D. 888, and is still heartily alive in Yorks. and North Derbyshire, where it is used in the sense of being *oversensitive to pain and especially to cold*. In this special signification, to which it has locally settled down after a thousand years of experience, it has no rival; and its restoration to our domestic vocabulary would probably have a wholesome moral and physical effect on our children.

*Hyppish* is the Englished form of hypochondriacal, its suffix carrying its usual diminutive value, so that its meaning is 'somewhat hypochondriacal'. Berkeley, Gray, and Swift used *hyps* or *the hyp* for hypochondriasis, and the adjective was apparently common. It would seem that *hypochondria* was then spoken, as *hypocrisy* still is, with the correct and pleasant short vowels of the Greek prefix, not as now with a long alien diphthong *haipo-*. *It was presumably this short y that accidentally killed hyppish; for the word hipped was used of a horse lamed in the hip, and alongside of this hipped, and maybe attracted by it, an adjective hypt arose. When once hyp and hypt were confounded with hip and hipped, hyppish would suffer and lose definition. But hypt and hipped combined forces, and were probably even from the first in their present uncertain condition, for when nowadays a man says that he is hipped, he has no definite notion of what he means except that he is in some way, either in his loins or mind incapacitated and out of sorts. Whether hypt and hipped have mortally wounded each other or are still fighting in the dark may be open to discussion: hyppish has now a fair field, and if people would know what the word means, it might be restored, like nesh, to useful domestic activity.*

6. The example given of the word *fast* on p. 12 suggests another matter to which attention might be paid. If one looks up any word in the Oxford Dictionary, one will be almost distressed to see how various the significations are to which it is authoritatively susceptible. A word seems to behave like an animal that goes skirting about discontentedly, in search of a more congenial habitation. It is sometimes successful, and meets with surprising welcome in some strange corner where it establishes itself, forgetful of its old home: sometimes, like the bad spirit in the gospel, it will return to the house whence it came forth. It is, of course, natural and essential to a living language that such shades and varieties of meaning should evolve themselves, although they are incidentally a source of ambiguity and subtle traps for careless logic; but when these varieties so diverge as to arrive ultimately at absurdities and contradictions, then it is advisable to get rid of them. In such extreme cases the surgeon's knife may sometimes save life; it is the only cure; and *to use a word in a deforming or deformed sense should be condemned as a solecism*. Contributions, stating examples of this with the proposed taboo, are invited.

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7. This last fault, of damaging a word by wrong use, might come under the general head of 'Abuse of words'. This is a wide and popular topic, as may be seen by the constant small rain of private protests in the correspondence columns of the newspapers. The committee of the S.P.E. would be glad to meet the public taste by expert treatment of offending words if members would supply their pet abominations. There was a good letter on the use of *morale* in the *Times Literary Supplement* on February 19. The writer, a member of our Society, permits us to reprint it here as a sample of sound treatment.

“MORAL(E)

'Tis the sport to have the engineer hoist with his own petard, and the purizing (so to speak) of the purist has been a tempting game since Lucian baited Lexiphanes; may I yield to the temptation? During the war our amateur and other strategists have suppressed the English word *morale* and combined to force upon us in its stead the French (or Franco–German?) *moral*. We have submitted, as to Dora, but with the secret hope, as about Dora, that when the war's tyranny was overpast we might be allowed our liberty again. Here are two specimens, from your own columns, of the disciplinary measures to which we have been subject: 'He persistently spells *moral* (state of mind of the troops, not their morality) with a final *e*, a sign of ignorance of French which is unfortunately so often the mark of the classical scholar'; and again, 'The purist in language might quarrel with Mr. —'s title for this book on the psychology of war, for he means by *morale* not "ethics" or "moral philosophy", but "the temper of a people expressing itself in action". But no doubt there is authority for the perversion of the French word.'

To such discipline we have all been laudably amenable, and *morale* has seldom been seen in the London papers since 1914; but it, and not *moral*, is the English word; we once all wrote it without thinking twice about the matter; even in war–time one met it in the local newspapers that had not time to keep up with London's latest tricks, and in those parts of the London Press itself that had to use a tongue understood of the people. It is very refreshing to see that *morale* is now beginning to show itself again, timidly and occasionally, even in select quarters. The fact is, these literary drill–sergeants have made a mistake; the English *morale* is not a 'perversion of the French word'; it is a phonetic respelling, and a most useful one, of a French word. We have never had anything to do with the French word *morale* (ethics, morality, a moral, &c.); but we found the French word *moral* (state of discipline and spirit in armies, &c.) suited to our needs, and put an *e* on to it to keep its sound distinct from that of our own word *moral*, just as we have done with the French *local* (English *locale*) and the German *Choral* (English *chorale*), and as, using contrary means for the same end of fixing a sound, we have turned French *diplomate* into English *diplomat*. Our English *forte* ('Geniality is not his *forte*,' &c.) is altered from the French *fort* without even the advantage of either keeping the French sound or distinguishing the spoken word from our *fort*; but who proposes to sacrifice the reader's convenience by correcting the 'ignorant' spelling? In the light of these parallels is it not the patrons of *moral* who deserve the imputation of ignorance rather than we common folk? We do not indeed profess to know what *moral* and *morale* mean in French, but then that knowledge is irrelevant. They do not know the true English method of dealing with borrowings from French; and that knowledge is highly relevant.

A fair summary of the matter is perhaps this. The case for the spelling *moral* is that (1) the French use the word *moral* for what we used to call *morale*, and therefore we ought to do the same; and (2) the French use *morale* to mean something different from what we mean by it. The case against *moral* is (1) that it is a new word, less comprehensible to ordinary people, even now, after its war–time currency, than the old *morale*; (2) that it badly needs to be dressed in italics owing to the occasional danger of confusion with the English word *moral*, and that such artificial precautions are never kept up; (3) that half of us do not know whether to call it m[ə]o'ral, mor[ə]a'l, or morah'l, and that it is a recognized English custom to resolve such doubts by the addition of—e or other change of spelling. And the right choice is surely to make the English word *morale*, use ordinary type, call it morah'l, and ignore or abstain from the French word *morale*, of which we have no need.

### Society for Pure English, Tract 3 (1920)

The risk of confusion, merely mentioned above, perhaps deserves a paragraph to itself. If we reinstate the once almost universal *morale*, we need no italics, and there is no fear of confusion; if we adopt *moral*, we need italics, and there is no hope of getting them; it is at present printed oftener without than with them. The following five extracts, in some of which the English adjective *moral*, and in some the French noun *moral*, is meant, are printed here exactly as they originally appeared, that is, with *moral* in the same type as the rest, and they are enough to suggest how easy it is for real doubts to arise about which word is being used—'An astounding increase in the moral discipline and patriotism of German soldiers.' Has, or has not, a comma dropped out after *moral*? 'It is, indeed, a new proof of the failing moral and internal troubles of the German people.' Moral and internal? or moral and troubles? 'A true arbitrator, a man really impartial between two contendants and even indifferent to their opposing morals.' 'The Russian army will recover its moral and fighting power.' 'The need of Poland, not only for moral, but for the material support of the Allies.'

H. W. FOWLER.”

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## 'SPELLING PRONUNCIATIONS'

Many writers on English pronunciation are accustomed to pour indiscriminating censure on the growing practice of substituting for the traditional mode of pronouncing certain words an 'artificial' pronunciation which is an interpretation of the written form of the words in accordance with the general rules relating to the 'powers' of the letters. This practice is especially common among imperfectly educated people who are ambitious of speaking correctly, and have unfortunately no better standard of 'correctness' than that of conformity with the spelling. I remember hearing a highly-intelligent working-class orator repeatedly pronounce the word *suggest* as 'sug jest'. Such vagaries as this are not likely ever to be generally adopted. But a good many 'spelling-pronunciations' have found their way into general educated use, and others which are now condemned as vulgar or affected will probably at some future time be universally adopted. I do not share the sentimental regret with which some philologists regard this tendency of the language. It seems to me that each case ought to be judged on its own merits, and by a strictly utilitarian standard. When a 'spelling-pronunciation' is a mere useless pedantry, it is well that we should resist it as long as we can; if it gets itself accepted, we must acquiesce; and unless the change is not only useless but harmful, we should do so without regret, because the influence of the written on the spoken form of language is in itself no more condemnable than any other of the natural processes that affect the development of speech. There are, however, some 'spelling-pronunciations' that are positively mischievous. Many people, though hardly among those who are commonly reckoned good speakers, pronounce *forehead* as it is written. To do so is irrelevantly to call attention to the etymology of a word that has no longer precisely its etymological sense. When the thing to be denoted is familiar, we require an *identifying*, not a *descriptive* word for it; and we obey a sound instinct in disguising by a contracted pronunciation the disturbing fact that *forehead* is a compound.

On the other hand, a 'spelling-pronunciation' may conduce to clearness, and then it ought to be encouraged. I have elsewhere advocated the sounding of the initial *p* in learned (not in popular) words beginning with *ps*; and many other similar reforms might with advantage be adopted. There are also other reasons besides clearness which sometimes justify the assimilation of sound to spelling. Thus the modern pronunciation of *cucumber* (instead of 'cowcumber') gets rid of the ridiculous association with the word *cow*; and only a fanatical adherent of the principle 'Whatever was is right' would desire to revive the obsolete form.

H.B.