

[Maurice Harrison: see Bulletins.]

A TEACHERS' MANUAL
to accompany the S. S. S. Series of
READERS AND STORY BOOKS FOR INFANTS
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THIS manual is written for teachers who are prepared to give consideration to the use of simplified English spelling in the first stages of teaching reading and writing. Its purpose is to explain the principles underlying the use of simplified spelling in the infant school. The children who are taught by this means will turn from simplified spelling and the story books published by the Simplified Spelling Society to normal English spelling within twelve months of beginning to learn to read.

SPELLING REFORM.

It will not be out of place, however, to mention in passing some of the advantages which may be expected to accrue from the general use of a systematic spelling. Ease and confidence in speech would be promoted by spelling which was a guide to the pronunciation of uncommon words, and greater facility and readiness in writing would follow. Misspellings are very common even among adults and deter those prone to them from attempting to express themselves in writing. It is doubtful whether anybody, even the most scholarly, never consults a dictionary in order to assure himself of the spelling of a word. This is a ridiculous position to be in when there is at our disposal an alphabet which, with all its imperfections, makes possible the spelling of words in a logical and systematic way. The only disadvantage that the ordinary man would notice, if spelling were reformed, would be a temporary inconvenience in adapting himself to something new and therefore strange. It would not even be necessary for older people to learn to write the new system. They would read it without any trouble in a very short time and young people, who were taught the systematic method from their earliest days, would similarly have no difficulty in reading the old books written in the old form, although they would certainly wonder how the form ever came to be tolerated.

The Simplified Spelling Society has published a number of books and pamphlets, of which there is a list on the cover of this manual, and in these has answered all the arguments that have been raised against the simplification of English spelling. These answers comprise the carefully considered opinions of men, eminent in many walks of life, and of scholars, well-known for their knowledge and research in the study of language and phonetics.

CONVENTIONAL SPELLING AND CHILDREN.

Naturally, conventional spelling presents much less difficulty in school to bright children than to the less able. The bright child has little difficulty in learning to read at a very early age and, if opportunity to handle appropriate books has been provided during the period from babyhood to infancy, he should be acquiring very evident skill by the time that he is six years old. Conventional spelling nevertheless puts unnecessary difficulties in his way. His ability to recognise new words fails through no fault of his own and he has to break the sequence of his reading to seek aid. Sometimes in a puzzled way he asks why the irregular spelling has an unexpected pronunciation, but, fortunately for his teachers, he can usually be satisfied with the explanation that spelling is sometimes queer. The bright child has made progress sufficiently quickly and has the power of

imagination which enables him, in spite of the stoppages, to look forward to the interesting activity of reading so that his interest does not wane, and he will not put his book aside wearily when the hindrances to his reading are met. When he writes, he uses at first spelling forms which very nearly coincide with those suggested by the Simplified Spelling Society. If these childish spellings are accepted, he is encouraged to continue the attempt to express himself in writing, and dexterity quickly comes; but, if he is constantly reprimanded for mistakes, discouragement can overcome even the not easily quelled activity of the bright child.

For the duller child the outlook is much more dreary than for his brighter brother. The hindrances which irregular spelling puts in the way are more redoubtable for him. He also starts off with a desire to read the stories which his elders have told him and which he knows are hidden behind the symbols before him, but he will never at an early age pick up a book written in conventional spelling and read with comprehension. It is slow work even to read the words which are spelt according to the rules and it is difficult for him to grasp the meaning behind these easy words. Stoppages, when the irregularly spelt words are met, make comprehension of the whole sentence impossible. His brighter brother when he has once met LAUGH will probably guess ROUGH if no one is near to be questioned. If help is not available he will not be deterred. Having once had help with ABOVE the bright child will know the word when next he sees it and will guess LOVE, COME, COVER and even MOVE. The duller child is unlikely to guess the different words by analogy and will often fail to recognise the same irregularly spelt words on a later occasion.

THE LOGIC OF THE CHILD.

Children are extremely logical and their interest can only be aroused in an activity which has purpose and value, and by that I mean purpose and value from the child's point of view. Babies develop speech when it becomes evident to them that speech has a value and is helpful in obtaining things which they want. A baby soon forgets a new word if no notice is taken of him when he uses it. In the same way infant children develop skill in reading when it becomes clear to them that by reading they are able to get pleasure from the books which are put in their hands. Children, whose interest in books has been excited by colourful pictures and by hearing stories read, are zealous to possess themselves of the skill to read, but their zeal soon dwindles if a monotonous and irksome drudgery becomes the habitual accompaniment of books. The book is associated in their minds with this drudgery. What should be a happy activity becomes a task and the first spontaneous desire to read is, especially where dull children are concerned, often quenched forever, and often that first desire and excitement, which could have grown into a love of books and creative self-expression, can never be aroused again. When a child shows a desire to make things with tools, the wise teacher does not give him tools difficult to use nor a difficult medium in which to work, which is easily broken and spoilt. The child is given simple tools and material with which he can reach early success. By this means his self-confidence grows. He early achieves a goal and his interest is stimulated; his progress towards more difficult goals is accelerated.

Ability to read and write are of such vast importance to the full development of the child, since through them alone can he hope to gain access on a wide scale to the thoughts and ideals of his fellow men, that it is not too much to say that to put any unnecessary deterrent or hindrance in the way of learning to read and write is a highly culpable act.

The simplification of English spelling may be regarded as the provision of a simple tool appropriate to the child. We are accustomed to provide simple tools throughout the school curriculum, tools graded to the stage of achievement reached by children. We see this quite clearly where painting, handwork, physical training, mathematics and all other subjects except reading and writing are concerned. We have, however, become so habituated to the chaotic spelling of the English language, and we have become so accustomed to regarding ability to use this ridiculous and

chaotic system as a mark of learning and culture, that we have been blinded to the need for simplifying it, even where young children are concerned.

Experiment has shown that children use simplified spelling forms with ease far more quickly than conventional forms. This rapid progress make it possible for them, at a very early stage in the process of handling books, to read for themselves. The very fact that the simplified spelling books can be written without the simplification of *language*, needed to avoid strangely spelt words, makes the book sound more realistic to the child and therefore more interesting. The greater speed achieved in reading a book, which uses all the words normally heard in speech, gives the child that sense of achievement which encourages his interest and arouses him to effort. The avoidance of criticism because of mistakes which are not explicable, the fact that he does things correctly first time, strengthens his confidence.

THE BASIS OF THE PLAN.

Educationists organise school games in order to promote physical fitness, quickness of decision and deft movement. Boys and girls do not, however, play games in order to achieve these things; for them the game is an end in itself. The wise teacher knows how quickly the school games can become a task if organisation becomes too pronounced, and how easily a situation can be reached where a child will avoid the school games to play the same games elsewhere, without any facilities but also without supervision and instruction. Once real love of a game has developed and a certain aptitude been attained, then the child is prepared to receive instruction in the nicer points, but the first steps comprise only spontaneous and untutored enjoyment in activity. Teachers of art have within recent years made a similar discovery in regard to children's art. The child, who loves to draw at home at his leisure, is often bored by instruction in school and quickly loses interest. Before perspective and colour can be taught, a very definite desire to improve his skill in an activity which gives him pleasure must be aroused. Otherwise, the child sees no point in the acquisition of skill. Encourage love of an activity and, when the love is safely formed, the child in his own good time will seek guidance in order to improve his skill and to satisfy his own widening aims and his own more lively self-criticism.

So with reading and writing, and it may well be with all the other humanistic arts as well. Strangely enough, we have made this discovery with regard to literature in the later stage of school life before we have made it in the infant stage. The reading lesson in which 30 or 40 children keep the same place on the same page of a particular book, each reading a paragraph in turn, is passing.

No more unnatural inhibition was ever placed on the mentally alert child, who loves to read a story, than that system under which most of my generation suffered, and indeed, under which the more audacious dared to speed ahead of the class, reckless of the inevitable retribution. The day may soon be seen when we cease to instil in our children between the ages of 11 and 16 a hatred of Shakespeare and Sheridan, of Addison and Dickens, of Wordsworth and Tennyson, which they are lucky to rid themselves of in later years. The most successful literature classes I have known in some years' work as a teacher of English were those where children were allowed to read books selected by themselves at their own speed. I have known not one but many parents, who have expressed their amazement when their sons, who rarely before looked at a book, began to take home library books, including the English classics, such as "The Cloister and the Hearth," "A Tale of Two Cities," "Lorna Doone," and to tell their parents of the delightful things in W. H. Hudson and Kipling and Locke and Chesterton. The transformation has again and again been no more than an affair of weeks. The moral is plain, reading must be a joyful activity rather than a subject of instruction.

This fact is equally true of the very young child as of the older pupil. When the infant has learnt to recognise letters and to attach to them certain sounds, when he can work out for himself the

sounds of new words, then he should be given his head with books. Slowness in reading is at first inevitable, but if the movement along the line of print seems slow to the adult it is he who is impatient, not the child. The child is quite content with his slow reading, and his rather toneless repetition of the words he reads is not a token of lack of comprehension. It would be wrong to interrupt him for he is making his first conquests in the realms of human thought outside his personal experience, and these first faltering steps, if encouraged and if all needless obstacles that hinder are removed, will, with rising confidence and increasing skill, rapidly develop. But the urge to make this progress must be within the child. No external exhortation can achieve half so much as his own purposive effort, promoted by his own spontaneous interest.

The obstacles that hinder his first faltering steps are many and needless. Every spelling anomaly, every word the form of which does not reasonably indicate its sound according to simple alphabetical rules, is such a trap. Every observant parent knows how children delight in exhibiting a newly acquired skill. It would be a happy day for all tiny English children if every word they met were written in a sensible spelling, so that they could surprise their parents by reading unhesitatingly the newspaper headlines and the advertisements which they passed in the streets.

How often have proud youngsters read to their parents the words on such signs as BUS STOP, KEEP LEFT, to complete only half of the next they meet, KEEP RIGHT, and then to dismiss the last difficult word with a diffident half smile. The game never works properly for long.

The same sense of defeat, of inexplicability, is met in every line of every book they try to read unless, as in so many schoolbooks, the vocabulary has been mutilated in an effort to avoid irregular spellings until it assumes the stereotyped infant reader pattern. With a reasonable spelling system, infant books could be written in the same words that one uses when telling a story to children. By the use of great ingenuity we have produced infant readers which avoid "the cat sat on the mat" phraseology, but we have only improved on that phraseology, we have not rid ourselves of it.

SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL EXPERIMENTS.

In common with all reforms the advent of spelling reform is slow, but that is no reason why the advantages of simplified spelling for very young children should not be applied. Experiments in schools have shown that children can be given their earliest introduction to books by the use of simplified spelling and that later (before the end of the infant school stage) they can be introduced to and master conventional spelling and gain months on their fellows who see only the old difficult system.

Some years ago the Simplified Spelling Society issued a number of infant school readers using a rationalised spelling and these were used experimentally in the teaching of children in a number of schools in Dundee, London, Leeds, Manchester, Durham, Birmingham, Hull and other places in Scotland, Yorkshire and Herefordshire. Teachers, who were interested in the question, co-operated with the Society. Most of these experiments ended owing to lack of official support, the paucity of books in the new spelling and changes of staff in the schools concerned. During the experiments, however, not a single head teacher failed to report advantages arising from the use of simplified spelling. Here are extracts from some of the reports:

"At the end of six months, children who had been in regular attendance were able to read in Simplified Spelling as difficult matter as is usually read by pupils at the end of the infant school course."

"The saving of time is considerable." (This point occurs often in the reports.)

"There is increased fluency in reading, as there is no hesitancy, and it is found that quite ambitious words can be introduced. . . The child is enabled to possess an enlarged vocabulary, an aid to self-expression both orally and in writing."

It was proved that a later transition to normal spelling was simple, and that children first taught by the simplified method had advantages in reading the normal spelling over others who had seen no other than normal spelling. From a school where a group of children was split, one part receiving their first lessons from a simplified reader, the other from an ordinary reader, came the following report.

"The Simplified Spelling pupils, taken at random from a group of new pupils, after ten months' instruction in Simplified Spelling and four months in the conventional spelling, could read the latter as well and spell as well as the pupils who had worked at it exclusively for nineteen months. The balance of advantage was altogether on the side of the children who had been taught on the new lines. They had had a better training in the relations of sound and symbol; they had acquired a better and more natural utterance and expression, and had laid a more solid foundation for the subsequent cultivation of good, clear speech."

His Majesty's Inspector reported of one school:

"The children (i.e. those taught by Simplified Spelling) at the end of the year are much better readers than they used to be under the old system."

At another school:

"In six months, not only were twenty-two out of the twenty-five children reading fluently, but they had approached a clearness of speech and a fluency and originality of expression hitherto unapproached."

At another:

"At the end of six weeks . . . they were two or three months ahead of what they would be under normal spelling."

The catalogue could be prolonged, but for sixpence the complete story of the experiment can be read in **S.S.S. Pamphlet No. 7**

The clue to it all seems to lie in this report from one head teacher:

"The children soon discover their own power of building new words . . . they delight in exercising this power, because they are never disappointed by being wrong, and they are never afraid to attempt to pronounce an unfamiliar word for the same reason."

SIMPLIFICATION OF CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES.

The idea of simplifying children's earlier activities has already been mentioned. Children do not begin their craftwork with tools difficult to use and with the making of complicated models; the simplest of both are used. We do not even begin our reading lessons in the conventional spelling with long words and complicated sentences. We say such attempts would be too difficult, which is in part another way of saying that achievement would be impossible and therefore any interest not to be expected. The editors of the comic papers and other of the cheaper children's periodicals have long known the attraction of simplified spelling. Their commercial instinct has developed a method which the educationalist has regarded as tawdry. It is tawdry in the commercialised form, but the underlying principle is sound. How many teachers have ever paused to think that the comic paper's WOT for WHAT is a true rendering in the commonest letter values of the pronunciation?

Admittedly, the cheap paper's spelling simplification is unscientific and haphazard and entirely inappropriate for school use. The Simplified Spelling Society's system of spelling is the product of the scientific work of scholars; it is systematic and simple. It looks strange at first, but not to children.

THE SCHEME.

The essentials of the Simplified Spelling Society's scheme for teaching reading are as follows. The child is introduced to the letters of the alphabet in the form of wooden cut-outs, single letters printed on cards and through all the normal play activities which the infant teacher is accustomed to use. He learns the sound signified by each. He will soon learn to form single syllable words with his wooden letters, particularly if the vowels are distinctly coloured and if he is shown how to intersperse the consonants with the coloured vowels. He will find the game of making syllables and pronouncing them interesting for a time. Then other steps commonly used with the "look and say" method are applied, such as, showing flash cards bearing common words which the child is taught to recognise on sight. This stage familiarises him with the idea of connecting the written signs with *significant* sounds, and this realisation is a big step for the child, which is often delayed beyond the stage of syllable construction with wooden letters. The digraphs formed with H and E can then be taught to the children who have mastered the sounds of the single letters. This, at this point in their ripening knowledge, is a fairly simple step. H added to certain consonants and E to certain vowels changes their sound, e.g., S, SH; E, EE. The remaining digraphs AU, NG, NK, OI, OO, OU, UU, WH can be left to the last stage and explained even as they are met in the readers.

A number of illustrated readers has been prepared for class or group reading to give practice in the way that is commonly followed in the phonic method of teaching reading. Except that the pitfalls that arise from spelling anomalies are removed, there is nothing new up to this point.

But instead of following on with one reader after another, a number of infant story books have been prepared. These are short, well-printed and colourfully illustrated. They include children's stories from world-wide sources, fairy stories, stories from folk-lore and legend and history. Their matter is simplified to bring it within the young child's understanding, but no words are avoided because of any spelling difficulty attached to them. Thus, one of the very early readers can use words like ENJIN (engine) and STAESHON (station) and Bizy (busy). As soon as a child is able to pick his way through the readers, he should be encouraged to choose books from the classroom library and to read them. Already, before he could read them, he will have admired their pictures and asked hosts of questions about them if given the opportunity. The pictures are calculated to excite enquiry and to provide much material for discussion. In this way, without painful drudgery, the child quickly makes books his own, feels a sense of his power to grapple with them. There is no discouragement to the love of books—they are easy and enchanting at once. This early use of a library is only possible with simplified spelling and is an important factor in the S.S.S. system of teaching.

When the teacher feels that this desire to know books has been immovably implanted, then she can explain that grown-ups use strange spelling forms and that many words are not spelt in grown-up books as they are in the story books. The children will accept this. The introduction to normal spelling can then be made with readers of the normal type and the brightest children may even be given ordinary story books suitable for children of their age. The new problem which they are called upon to face will not now deter them for they have had experience of the value of being able to read, and the worthwhileness of the effort necessary to master the complexities of conventional spelling is clear to them.

This last is the only good basis on which interest can be maintained in any activity, the realisation of the ultimate value of the activity.

Concerning this change-over, the following quotation from the report of the headmaster of a Scottish school is of interest ([S.S.S. Pamphlet No. 7](#), Intermediate School, Bridge of Allan).

"This transition - dreaded as a period of difficulty-really occurred naturally, and with no special difficulty. The teacher hurried into my room to say that she found the pupils reading from one of the Reading Sheets (illustrated), which hung in a corner, their idea being to get some explanation of the picture. In their minds reading was not a labour for the sake of learning to read, but for the sake of the content of the reading matter; therefore they were eager to read everything in print.

"A moment's reflection will show why there should have been no fear of the transition. For at the period of the transition their intelligence had been much developed, and the words encountered in ordinary spelling were all carefully chosen words of one syllable, spelt phonetically. The teacher merely explained that the class had hitherto spelt words in an easy way, and that now they were going to spell just like grown-ups. That alike flattered and pleased them.

"By Easter (i.e., after seven months' tuition), the experiment was over, and the children passed on to the First Infant Reader (no Primer) a full term ahead. Never in any previous year had this book been attempted till the beginning of the second year of school life. His Majesty's Inspector again visited the School at the end of June, 1920 - and after examining the teachers' records and testing fully every branch of the class work, he reported as follows:-

" 'At one school the attempt is being made to teach the initiatory stages of reading by means of Simplified Spelling, the text book used being that published by the Simplified Spelling Society. The plan adopted is to use this book for the first six months of school life, and then to pass on to books in the ordinary spelling.

This transition is clearly the critical stage, and it may be said, as the result of experience, that it has caused no loss of time. For, though no extra time has been given to reading, the children at the end of the year are much better readers than they used to be under the old system, both of their text books and of unseen matter. The confusion that might have been apprehended had not been produced.' "

THE CHANGE TO CONVENTIONAL SPELLING.

There will be no harm done if the child is made aware, as soon as printed forms begin to have meaning, that there are two methods of spelling, the easy one which he is learning and a more complicated method in which are written the books and papers used outside the classroom. The child will be quite happy to learn something which is unknown to his parents, particularly when he appreciates that he is going to learn the two methods of spelling.

The age at which the complete change-over to conventional spelling can be made will vary. The brightest children will be ready in three to six months, perhaps less than that in exceptional cases.

Less bright children will require a lengthy happy time with their simplified spelling stories before an unquenchable determination to read is established. Normally educable children should make the change-over within a year of their first beginning to read.

WRITING.

Progress in writing will accompany progress in reading, but the advantages over the old system will be even more marked. The spelling written by most 5 and 6 year old children is even now closely akin to Simplified Spelling. When taught only conventional spelling the child finds difficulty in reproducing the anomalies, and long after he reads,

A horse comes into its field to eat grass,

he writes (with variations),

A hors cumz into its feld to eet gras.

This example is from the school book of a bright child, aged 6 years 2 month, with an intelligence quotient, of 118. Compare the simplified version,

A hors kumz into its feeld to eet gras.

I regard it as inadvisable to attempt any spelling corrections, except when the spelling is basically illogical, until the changeover to conventional usage has been made. After that point, encouragement to use the "grown-up" forms may gradually be introduced. The child must, however, not be deterred from self-expression in writing by being told that his spelling is wrong, provided it is logical and systematic during infant school life, that is, up to 8 years of age generally. He has already been told that his is not the usual way, and that the "grown-up" way is the way he will have to learn to write. He will quite early acquire many conventional forms from his reading and he should, of course, be encouraged to use these as early as he shows any inclination.

Mention must here be made of one unavoidable ambiguity of the S.S.S. spelling, that is, the representation of the unstressed English "obscure" vowel. This vowel causes grave difficulty in conventional spelling. Careful and lengthy consideration was given to this issue by the Simplified Spelling Society, but ultimately it was decided that the vowel should be represented in the new spelling as in the old. Two reasons for the decision may be quoted. In slow and precise speech the unstressed "obscure" vowel is often given full value and it often, too, regains its full value in forms derived from the simple form, e.g., pedant, pedantic; industry, industrious; dictator, dictatorial; idol, idolatry; different, differential. DIFFERENT has two unstressed vowels, and it will not be uncommon (in fact, it is common now with conventional spelling) for a child to spell the word DIFRUNT. Misspellings of the obscure vowel need cause no worry until a very late stage when the derivatives are well known.

Constant reading will gradually influence the visual memory, and the resultant extending use of conventional forms in writing will cause the growth of manual habits until the "ideographic" stage of writing is reached. This should become clearly apparent about 8 years and paramount by ii.

The "bad speller," that is, the child with a weak visual memory, or less ready in the formation of manual habits, must be watched for at all times and treated with sympathy. I look forward to the day when no child will lose marks in an examination for misspelling any ideograph, the written form of which fails to represent its sound. Intelligent use of words should be the aim, not the exact copying of the order of letters. Tolerance by examination authorities will soon bring in its train tolerance by the business world. There is no reason whatever for regarding ability to memorise and use illogical spelling forms as a mark of education. Such ability is naturally common among men and women who are much engaged in reading and writing. It is no indication in itself of good reading and good writing, nor of clear thinking.

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