

# SECTION ON EDUCATION AND LEGISLATION, AMERICAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION

## A BAD SPELL, OR WHO MIXED THE LETTERS?\*

BY CHARLES H. LAWALL.

The spelling of English words is an art rather than a science. Rules are of little use. Good spellers are usually those who have a natural aptitude for arranging the letters of words in the form commonly accepted as correct. This aptitude may be developed and brought to a higher degree of accuracy, even in those who do not have it naturally, by paying attention to certain fundamentals which are involved.

These fundamentals should be, but commonly are not, taught in the early years of school life. They include the training of the eye, the ear and the mind so as to produce a composite effect in the direction of accuracy of the arrangement of the letters of words in conformity with customs existing in any given locality. There are seven large dictionaries of the English language, three of which, Stormonths, the Imperia! and the Oxford, are commonly used in England; the other four, Worcester's, Webster's, the Century and the Standard, are more frequently consulted in the United States.

All of these authorities do not agree in the spelling of every word, but the exceptions and usages are usually those of groups of words, such as those ending in or (our), as color (colour), ize (ise) in authorize (authorise), etc.

Simplified or phonetic spelling has also brought about some modifications in what is believed to be the interests of efficiency. Commendable as these changes may be, they have never become popular, probably on account of the shock to the sensibilities of those who have learned to spell in the old-fashioned way. As an example of what would happen if the suggestions of the Board for Simplified Spelling were universally and immediately adopted, the following paragraph will serve. It is made up from words included in one of the official lists of proposed changes:

"Scholars are slo to spel according to the new rules announst in this cuntry. The od looking words hav caused shril lafter from those who see caos in the change and will not dein to use them unless forst. A fotograf of a blacbord ful of these words is hideus."

Some are unkind enough to say that Artemus Ward and Josh Billings have been followed in making the selections.

Spelling is largely a matter of visualization. Good spellers are usually found among those who are great readers and particularly those who read for profit rather than for pleasure.

One of the features of many drug journals is the section or column allotted to humorous orders. The humor in these usually arises in the effort of the customer to spell the name of the article as it sounds to him. The clue to the inter-

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pretation of these orders is usually found by repeating the order phonetically until the sounds resemble the name of something that is likely to be wanted. Subsequent interrogation of the customer usually changes the guess into a certainty. Such classic examples as "rose of spulement" for corrosive sublimate and "ogsalagaset" for oxalic acid are of the first degree of simplicity. Others are more obscure, yet when finally deciphered, are found to have the fundamental resemblance in sound to the name of the article desired, as referred to above.

This perennial source of amusement to the pharmacist is one of the compensations of being a victim to the long hours and many vexations of the business. How many drug clerks or even graduate pharmacists would make equally creditable attempts with the information at hand? To illustrate the point that a certain degree of familiarity with the word must exist so as to stimulate the power of visualization spoken of and as an example of what pharmacy students can do in the matter of phonetic spelling when their knowledge is vague and not accurate, the following examples are given of the attempts to render Quevenne's Iron into an intelligible form. The question asked the class was this: "What is the synonym of *Ferrum Reductum*?" This was the result of the efforts of the class:

Quebenzed	Iron	Quivence	Iron
Quivenz	Iron	Queevins	Iron
Quivens	Iron	Quevenens	Iron
Quevens	Iron	Quinvennes	Iron
Quinellays	Iron	Queveens	Iron
Quaevens	Iron	Quevenns	Iron
Quevenne's	Iron	Quevens	Iron
Quivennes	Iron	Queevens	Iron
Quevenes	Iron	Goenvennes	Iron
Quivenes	Iron	Quevenze	Iron
Quevenz	Iron	Queveenes	Iron
Kinzins	Iron	Quesevinis	Iron
Quiveens	Iron	Queen's	Iron
		Quivins	Iron

There is no particular discredit or disgrace attached to the foregoing examples. No attempt is made to teach spelling in the ordinary pharmaceutical curriculum. The large proportion of students who failed to spell the name correctly is a fair index of the proportion of careless or inaccurate observers in any class of equal size. To one who knows the correct form many of these are as funny as any misspelled order handed over the counter. In both cases the same underlying factor is apparent, *i. e.*, unfamiliarity with the subject coupled with a bold attempt at bluff.

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Safeguard American men against unfair competition and they will take care of themselves. . . . If you make the processes by which small men are undersold in particular markets criminal, then you have freed America, and I for my part am willing to stop there and see who has the best brains.—*Woodrow Wilson.*