

*A MODIFIED ALPHABET FOR ENGLISH.*

*Sounds and Signs: a Criticism of the Alphabet with Suggestions for Reform.* By Archer Wilde. Pp. 180. (London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1914.) Price 4s. 6d. net.

THE main object of this book is to advocate modifications in our present alphabet, so as to make it suitable for representing English sounds. On plates facing pp. 142 and 144 the suggested alphabet is portrayed; the capitals are practically identical with the small letters, but slightly more ornate. A characteristic is that no letter projects above or below the line; nor are parts of each letter thicker or thinner than others; the character is what is termed "Doric." The uniformity in height of the letters makes it possible to bring the lines of print closer together, and so to save space. But, in the opinion of the reviewer, legibility is thereby sacrificed; Russian type, in which the general effect is that of printing in capitals, is not so quickly read by Russians as is English or French by Englishmen or Frenchmen. In the example given on p. 20, of printing in Doric capitals, the effect is to dazzle the eyes; it is not easy reading. The author is not sanguine as to the adoption of his scheme; but he opens the interesting question whether if our alphabet is to be modified, convenience is to be increased by carefully choosing the form of the letters.

He is a strong advocate of spelling reform, and looks on the proposals of the Simplified Spelling Society as good, having regard to the restrictions with which they have limited themselves, viz. no accents; no new letters; and as little change as may be, provided consistency is attained. The system of Ellis and Pitman, phonotype as it was called, narrowly escaped achieving success in the 'seventies; had Ellis's health not broken down, and had his type not been destroyed by a fire, it is not unlikely that steps might have been taken to introduce its use into schools. The type is easily read; it is also easily written, for the script hand is not difficult; and there is a saving of nearly 20 per cent. in space compared with ordinary spelling and alphabet. One of the most remarkable pieces of evidence in its favour is an account of an experiment by an Edinburgh schoolmaster, Mr. Williams, who "proved that children averaging five years of age could learn to read printed books in phonetic type in one-third or one-fourth the time in which children of six or seven years of age could, without the intervention of the phonetic system, learn to read the common 'Romanic' books; and when these

younger children had been one session (between ten and eleven months) learning to read through the phonetic system, they could read books printed in the 'Romanic' type quite as well as the elder class which had been engaged during two sessions, or double the time, learning to read without the intervention of the phonetic system."

A considerable amount of space is occupied in a discussion of the English phonetic alphabet; that is, what English sounds should be characterised by separate characters. The point of view is that of a southern Englishman; it is too often forgotten that among English speakers they are in a small minority. A large majority, for instance, retain at all events some reminder of a trill at the end of the word "star," although in America, if the South be excluded, the "r" may be described as a buzz, rather than a trill.

In Mr. Wilde's vowel system different symbols are given to the "a" in "alms" and the "a" in "at," and quite correctly; the difficulty arises when it is realised that it is indifferent whether the first or second sound of the "a" be used in such words as "castle" or "dance." And this involves the question of a standard pronunciation, about which few people will agree. In the reviewer's opinion (to take the instance given), it is better to retain the one symbol "a" for both sounds, leaving it to individuals to pronounce the "a" as they are accustomed to do. Again, many English speakers make no distinction between the two sounds of "oo" in "boot" and "foot"; here, again, it would appear advisable to let one symbol represent both sounds.

This book is well written, and puts a case for a view of spelling reform which is not usually considered; if it should commend itself to the public to adopt new characters, no decision ought to be taken without attention to what Mr. Wilde has brought forward.

W. R.

*THE INDIAN ORIGIN OF THE MAORI.*

*Who are the Maoris?* By Alfred K. Newman. Pp. 303+plates. (Christchurch, Melbourne, and London: Whitcombe and Tombs, Ltd., n.d.) Price 7s. 6d. net.

THE origin of the Polynesians has long been discussed by more or less qualified persons, and a general agreement has been arrived at. Mr. A. K. Newman takes up the problem where it had been left by Mr. Percy Smith, the author of "Hawaiki," and adduces a great deal of evidence to prove that the cradle-land of the race was northern India—a view, by the way, which has