

Events . . .

CAN OUR BABEL OF TONGUES BE SYSTEMATIZED?

REFERRING to the results obtained by the use of the Cherokee alphabet of Oklahoma, the Cree alphabet of Canada, and others as proof that one can be taught to "write, print, and read his own language" in an astonishingly short time and calling attention to the fact that expert linguists, as reported by Lepsius, found "only about 50 primary vocal sounds employed in 600 languages and dialects, including those of Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Western Hemisphere," R. L. Owen, former senator from Oklahoma, proposes a "global alphabet" that would reduce to one speech the multitudinous languages of the world.

Forced as we now are to communicate with nations, peoples, and tribes whose tongues we do not understand, Mr. Owen, in the twinkling

of an eye, so to speak, would change all that by teaching the English language to the whole world. There would be no such confusion as now exists in the teaching of English, with its enigmatic spellings and silent letters. The 41 "phonetic" symbols of the global alphabet each representing "one immutable sound" would cover every word in Webster's Unabridged. The name of each letter is identical with the sound it stands for, and, according to Mr. Owen, the language that requires more than 40 phonetic letters is rare. "All the modern languages combined do not include over 58 distinct, primary, elemental, vocal sounds." He goes on to say:

In phonetic spelling by syllables, spelling presents no difficulty and requires only the memory of the 41 letters. . . . The phonetic spelling of the

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global alphabet with accurate pronunciation would stabilize speech. . . .

In applying this system to writing a foreign language, the sounds of the letters or symbols should be expressed in terms of the words employed in the foreign language using the system. Probably every single sound in English has a corresponding sound in Chinese or Russian, . . . [but] this system has provided 16 unallocated letters which can be employed to print 16 additional, elemental sounds or tones. . . .

The Global Alphabet opens wide the door to illiterates.

The Global Alphabet comprises a mechanical agency through which to make effective the dream of the great men now leading the people of the United Nations in a struggle for peace, abundance, good will, justice, and happiness. The Four Freedoms, the Atlantic Charter . . . could be quickly put before the world by this system.

The experience of Turkey in changing to the Roman alphabet and then adopting a strictly phonetic spelling of Turkish words is interesting in this connection. Turkey has been remarkably successful in reducing illiteracy by this means.