A New Pronoun.

C C CONVERSE

The Critic: a Literary Weekly, Critical and Eclectic (1884-1885); Aug 2, 1884; 31;
American Periodicals Series Online
pg. 55

various kinds, at home and abroad, my first attempt in this regard being to find some non-English word possessed of the proper significance, that would readily fall into line with our common speech. My failure in this attempt was complete. I then essayed numberless English word clippings, hoping to make the elision, or contraction, of some one English word serve its purpose. This attempt likewise resulted in failure. Finally, by cutting off the last two letters of the English word that and the last letter of the word one, and uniting their remaining letters in their original sequence in these two words, I produced that word now proposed for the needed pronoun—

THON;

to the th in which would give the same sound as in they. This pronoun’s three cases will naturally suggest themselves to its use as being nominative, thon; possessive, thons; objective, thon. Note its literal and euphonic resemblance to the other pronouns, and that its final consonant has a neutral savour significant of its purport.

One thing I surely may be permitted to say in defence of this word, that it is simply an abbreviation, made in a spirit of sincere respect for the beautiful symmetry of the English tongue, and a due reverence for etymologic consistency; and that it is the expression of an honest attempt in the department of word-invention, which every user of our language, though writing never so little, is encouraged to enter by the numberless evidences, abounding throughout the entire range of its vocabulary, since its inception, of the inventive spirit under whose influence words have shaped themselves more and more so as to equal in speed of utterance one’s mental action. I could also urge the imperative need I have experienced as a lawyer, when making certain written or spoken statements, by reaching some part thereof where such a pronoun as this must appear, else I must recast the offending sentence on the spot, or plunge on defiantly through some common, yet hideous, solecism.

The acknowledgment of a need for such a pronoun as this being universal, any argument in advocacy of it clearly would be a work of supererogation; and, as illustrations of its use doubtless will present themselves to every reader of this letter, I will give but one or two myself: If Mr. and Mrs. A. were joint clients of mine in a suit at law, I might address a note thus: ‘If Mr. or Mrs. A. came to the courthouse on Monday next I will be there to meet thon.’ Or, suppose Mr. A. and Mrs. A. quarrel with each other and each comes to me, without the other’s knowledge thereof, for advice in the premises, and I do the unprofessional act of effecting their mutual forgiveness and reconciliation; if I afterward undertake to describe to my wife the happy reunion of Mr. and Mrs. A. I may use this sentence: ‘Then loving words for each other burst from their lips, each excusing the other and blaming—you cannot say himself or herself because one is a man and the other is a woman, but you can finish this sentence with this new pronoun—thon.’ Use of it will so individualize and pronominalize (so to speak) this word as to show its manifest grammatical distinction from the words that and one of which it is born; and the mental process by which it leads its user to the noun it represents will, I think, be found to be easy and natural, it not being an arbitrary sign.

Erie, Pa., July 23, 1884,

C. C. Converse.