

INTRODUCTION.

their taking the pronunciation of London, or some dialect or local practice in that city, for the *best usage*. The propagation of such a dialectical or peculiar practice would of course destroy the uniformity of any other practice, in other parts of England or in this country.

2. The difficulty or rather impracticability of representing sounds, and nice distinctions of sound, on paper; especially in unaccented syllables.

3. The partiality of authors for the practice of particular speakers, either stage players or others, which would lead them to denominate that the *best practice*, which had been adopted by their favorites.

4. A spirit of fastidious hypercriticism, which has led writers to make nice distinctions, that are liable to be disputed, and which tend only to perplex the inquirer, and generate uncertainty or diversity, where no essential difference had previously existed in practice. This spirit is continually producing new books and new schemes of orthoepy, and every additional book serves only to increase the difficulty of uniting opinions and establishing uniformity.

This view of the subject is probably the most favorable that can be presented. The real fact seems to be this; these men have taken for the standard, what they were pleased to call the *best usage*, which, in many cases, is a local usage or some favorite peculiarity of particular speakers, at least if they have had any authority at all; or they have given the pronunciation which happened to please their fancy, though not authorised by usage. In this manner, they have attempted to bend the common usage to their particular fancies.

It has been in this manner, by presenting to the public *local or particular practice*, or mere innovation, for a standard, instead of general or national usage, that the authors above mentioned have unsettled the pronunciation of many words and introduced diversities of practice. These attempts to obtrude *local usage* on the public, and bend to it the general or national usage, are the boldest assumptions of authority in language that the history of literature has ever exhibited. In England however these pretensions to direct the pronunciation of the nation have less effect than they have in the United States, for this obvious reason, that in England pronunciation is regulated almost exclusively by the practice of the higher classes of society, and not by books; hence if books do not exhibit the customary pronunciation, the purity of notation is easily detected, and the work which offers it is neglected. But in this country, where the people resort chiefly to books for rules of pronunciation, a false notation of sounds operates as a deception and misleads the inquirer. How long the citizens of this country will submit to these impositions, time only can determine.

The English language, when pronounced according to the genuine composition of its words, is a nervous, masculine language, well adapted to popular eloquence; and it is not improbable that there may be some connection between this manly character of the language and the freedom of the British and American constitutions. There may perhaps act and react upon each other mutually, as cause and effect, and each contribute to the preservation of the other. At the same time, the language is, by no means, incapable of poetical sweetness and melody. The attempts to refine upon the pronunciation, within the last half century, have, in my opinion, added nothing to its smoothness and sweetness, but have very much impaired its strength of expression as well as its regularity. The attempts to banish the Italian sound of *a* and to introduce the sound of *e* before *i* and *u*, as in *kind*, *guard*, *duty*, &c. ought to be resisted, as injurious to the manly character of the genuine English pronunciation.

In order to produce and preserve a tolerable degree of uniformity, and the genuine purity of our language, two things appear to be indispensable, viz.

1. To reject the practice of noting the sounds of the vowels in the unaccented syllables. Let any man, in genteel society or in public, pronounce the distinct sound of *a* in the last syllable of *important*, or the distinct sound of *e* in the terminations *less* and *ness*, as in *hopeless*, *happiness*, and he would pass for a most elegant speaker. Indeed so different is the slight sound of *a* from that of *e*, which is directed in books of orthoepy, that no man can possibly acquire the nicer distinction of sounds, by means of books; distinctions which no characters yet invented can express. Elegant pronunciation can be learned only by the ear. The French and Italians, whose languages are so popular in Europe, have never attempted to teach the sounds of their letters by a system of notation, embracing the finer sounds of the vowels.

2. To preserve purity and uniformity of pronunciation, it is necessary to banish from use all books which change the orthography of words to adapt the pronunciation to the fashion of the day. The scheme now pursued is

the most mischievous project for corrupting the language, that human ingenuity ever contrived. By removing the landmarks of language, all the fences which can secure the purity and regularity of the language, from uneducated depredations without end are demolished, the chief use and value of alphabetical writing are destroyed, and every thing is given to chance and to caprice.

In determining the pronunciation of words in this work, I have availed myself of the most respectable English authorities, as well as of my own personal observations in both countries, and of the observations of American gentlemen of erudition who have visited England. In selecting from a mass of contradictory authorities, I may not, in all cases, have adopted the best pronunciation; but I have spared no pains to execute this part of the work with fidelity.

In general, the rules I have prescribed to myself are these. 1. The usage of respectable people in England and the United States, when identical in the two countries, settled and undisputed. This rule comprehends most of the words in the language. 2. When usage is unsettled or uncertain, I have adjusted the pronunciation to the regular, established analogies of the language, as far as these can be definitely ascertained; having however, in accentuation, some regard to euphony, or the prosaic melody which proceeds from a due succession of accented and unaccented syllables.

There are some words, differently pronounced by respectable people, in which no decisive reasons appear for preferring one mode of pronouncing them to another; either might be adopted, without any injury to melody or analogy. I see no particular reason, why *patent* should have its first vowel short, and *matron*, *in particular*, and *patrician*, the first vowel long. Much less do I approve the reasons assigned for making *the* a short in *matronal*, and not in *matronly*, or short in *patronal*, and not in *patroness*. The reasons assigned by Walker appear to me to be absolute trifling. The rule of uniformity is paramount to every other, excepting that of general undisputed custom; and when the practice is unsettled, it seems to be the duty of the lexicographer to be guided by that rule, for his authority may lead to the uniformity desired.

In a few instances, the common usage of a great and respectable portion of the people of this country accords with the analogies of the language, but not with the modern notation of English orthoepists. In such cases, it seems expedient and proper, to retain our own usage. To renounce a practice confessedly regular for one confessedly anomalous, out of respect to foreign usage, would hardly be consistent with the dignity of lexicography. When we have principle on our side, let us adhere to it. The time cannot be distant, when the population of this vast country will throw off their leading strings, and walk in their own strength; and the more we can raise the credit and authority of principle over the caprices of fashion and innovation, the nearer we approach to uniformity and stability in practice.

It is difficult, if not impracticable, to reconcile the opinions of a nation, in regard to every point, either of orthography or pronunciation. Every attempt that has yet been made, in regard to the English language, has served only to increase the difficulty; and as a gentleman remarked to me in London, a convention of learned men could not effect the object, for no two men would think alike on the subject.

The language of a nation is the common property of the people, and no individual has a right to make innovations upon its principles. As it is the medium of communication between men, it is important that the same *written words* and the same *oral sounds* to express the same ideas, should be used by the whole nation. When any man therefore attempts to change the established orthography or pronunciation, except to correct palpable errors and produce uniformity, by recelling wanderers into the pale of regular analogies, he offers an indignity to the nation. No local practice, however respectable, will justify the attempt. There is great dignity, as well as propriety, in respecting the universal and long established usages of a nation. With these views of the subject before me, I have been led to reject all modern innovations, which violate the established principles and analogies of the language, and destroy or impair the value of alphabetical writing. I have therefore endeavored to present to my fellow citizens the English language, in its genuine purity, as we have received the inheritance from our ancestors, without removing a landmark. If the language is fatally destined to be corrupted, I will not be an instrument of the mischief.

ETYMOLOGY.

Irregular as is the orthography of the English Language, and unsettled or corrupt as is the pronunciation, there is nothing either in English or in any other language, which I have any knowledge of, which exhibits so strikingly the low state of philology as the etymological deductions of words, or the history of their origin, affinities and primary signification. To enable the young inquirer to estimate the erudition, correctness, or negligence of writers on this subject, and to awaken more attention to this branch of learning, I will state briefly the results of my researches and the opinions which I have been compelled to form on the merits of the principal treatises on this subject. And if these opinions or this statement should be charged to egotism, or any over-weening confidence, I must have suffered so much myself by misplaced confidence in the erudition of writers; I have so often embraced errors

*The French language, by the loss or imperfect use of articulations, though rendered easy in utterance, has become so feeble in sound as to be unfit for bold, impressive eloquence. From the specimens which I witnessed in the Chamber of Deputies in Paris, I should suppose the orator must depend almost entirely on his own animation and action for success in popular speaking, with little or no aid from the strength and beauty of language. The language of popular eloquence should be neither the mouthing cant of the stage, nor the miming affectation of dandies, nor the baby talk of the nursery. Such was not the language of Demosthenes nor of Cicero; and such may never be the language of the British Chatham, and of the American Ames.