

INTRODUCTION.

different sounds, in different languages, serve to enlarrass the reader who understands only his own.

The irregularities in the English orthography have always been a subject of deep regret, and several attempts have been made to banish them from the language. The first attempt of this kind was made by Sir Thomas Smith, Secretary of State, to Queen Elizabeth; another was made by Dr. Gill, a celebrated master of St. Paul's School in London; another by Charles Butler; several attempts were made in the reign of Charles I.; an attempt was made by Elphinstone, in the last century; and lastly, another effort was made by Dr. Franklin. The latter gentleman compiled a dictionary on his scheme of reform, and procured types to be cast, which he offered to me, with a view to engage me to prosecute his design. This offer I declined to accept; for I was then, and am still convinced, that the scheme of introducing new characters into the language, is neither practicable nor expedient. Any attempt of this kind must certainly fail of success.

But that some scheme for expressing the distinct sounds of our letters by visible marks, ought to be adopted, is a point about which there ought to be, and I trust there can be, but one opinion. That such a scheme is practicable as well as expedient, I should presume to be equally evident. Such is the state of our written language, that our own citizens never become masters of orthography, without great difficulty and labor; and a great part of them never learn to spell words with correctness. In addition to this, the present orthography of some classes of words leads to a false pronunciation.

In regard to the acquisition of our language by foreigners, the evil of our irregular orthography is extensive, beyond what is generally known or conceived. While the French and Italians have had the wisdom and the policy to refine and improve their respective languages, and render them almost the common languages of all well-bred people in Europe; the English language, clothed in a barbarous orthography, is never learned by a foreigner but from necessity; and the most copious language in Europe, embodying an uncommon mass of science and erudition, is thus very limited in its usefulness. And to complete the mischief, the progress of arts, science and christianity among the heathen, and other rude or unevangelized nations, is most sensibly retarded by the difficulties of mastering an irregular orthography.

The mode of ascertaining the proper pronunciation of words by marks, points and trifling alterations of the present characters, seems to be the only one which can be reduced to practice. This mode resembling the use of points in the Hebrew, has been adopted by some of the nations on the continent; and I have pursued it, to a certain extent, in designating distinctions in the sounds of letters, in this work. The scheme I have invented is not considered as perfect; but it will accomplish some important purposes, by removing the most numerous classes of anomalies. With this scheme, the visible characters of the language will present to the eye of a reader the true sounds of words; and the scheme itself is so simple, that it may be learned in a few moments. To complete a scheme of this kind, a few other alterations would be necessary, but such as would not materially change the orthography, or occasion the least difficulty to the learner or reader.

After these alterations, there would remain a few words whose anomalies may be considered as incorrigible, such as *know, gnave, rough, &c.*, which may be collected into tables and easily learned, and all the other irregularities may be so classed under general rules, as to be learned with very little labor.

The adoption of this or any other scheme for removing the obstacles which the English orthography presents to learners of the language, must depend on public opinion. The plan I have adopted for representing the sounds of letters by marks and points, in this work, is intended to answer two purposes. First, to supersede the necessity of writing and printing the words a second time in an orthography adapted to express their pronunciation. The latter method pursued by the English orthoepists, as applicable to the most words, is I think not only unnecessary but very inexpedient. The second purpose is, to exhibit to my fellow-citizens the outline of a scheme for removing the difficulties of our written orthography, without the use of new characters; a scheme simple, easy of acquisition, and sufficient to answer all the more important purposes of a regular orthography.

PRONUNCIATION.

As our language has been derived from various sources, and little or no systematic effort has been made to reduce the orthography to any regularity, the pronunciation of the language is subject to numerous anomalies. Each of our vowels has several different sounds; and some of the consonants represent very different articulations of the organs. That part of the language which we have received from the Latin, is easily subjected to a few general rules of pronunciation. The same is the fact with most of the derivatives from the Greek. Many words of French origin retain their French orthography, which leads to a very erroneous pronunciation in English; and a large portion of our monosyllabic words of Saxon origin are extremely irregular both in orthography and pronunciation.

If we can judge, with tolerable certainty, from the versification of Chaucer, the pronunciation of words must have been, in many respects, distinct in his age, from that of the present day; particularly in making a distinct

syllable of *e* final, and of the termination *ed*. But no effort was probably ever made to reduce the pronunciation of our words, till the first settlement in England, which was settled by various nations, there are numerous dialects or diversities of language, still retained by the great mass of the population.

The first settlers of New England, were almost all of English origin, and coming from different parts of England, they brought with them some diversities of language. But in the infancy of the settlements, the people lived in towns adjacent or near to each other, for mutual aid and protection from the natives; and the male inhabitants of the first generation frequently assembled for the purpose of worship or for government. By the influence of these and other causes, particularly by that of common schools, the diversities of language among our citizens have been gradually lost; so that in this part of the United States, there can hardly be said to exist a difference of dialect.

It is to be remarked further, that the first ministers of the gospel, who migrated to this country, had been educated at the English universities, and brought with them all the learning usually acquired in those institutions, and the English language as it was then spoken. The influence of these men, who were greatly venerated, probably had no small effect in extinguishing differences of speech.

Hence it has happened that the traditional pronunciation of the language of well-educated people has been nearly the same in both countries, to this day. Among the common people, whose pronunciation in all countries is more or less corrupt, the diversities in this country are far less numerous than in England.

About fifty or sixty years ago, Thomas Sheridan, an Irish gentleman, who had been the pupil of an intimate friend of Dean Swift, attempted to reduce the pronunciation of English words to some system, and to introduce it into popular use. His analysis of the English vowels is very critical, and in this respect, there has been little improvement by later writers, though I think none of them are perfectly correct. But in the application of his principles, he failed of his object. Either he was not well acquainted with the best English pronunciation, or he had a disposition to introduce into use some peculiarities, which the English did not relish. The principal objection made to his scheme is that he gives to the sound of *sh*, in *shadistic, superb*, and other words where it is followed by *u* long. These he pronounces *shooderific, shooperb, shooperfluty*, &c. This pronunciation of *s* corresponding to the Sclerotic *sh*, he probably learnt in Ireland, for in the Irish branch of the Celtic, *s* has often the sound of *sh*. Thus *sean*, old, is pronounced *shean*. This pronunciation was no sooner published, than condemned and rejected by the English.

Another most extraordinary innovation of Sheridan was, his rejection of the Italian sound of *a*, as in *father, calm, ask*, from every word in the language. Thus his scheme gives to *a* in *barren, the same sound as in barren, barrel, ball, to a* in *fat, pass, mane, pant, the same sound as in fat, passion, massacre, pin, fancy*. Such a gross deviation from established English usage was of course condemned and rejected.

In his pronunciation of *ti* and *ci*, before a vowel, as in *partiality, omniscience*, Sheridan is more correct than Walker, as he is in some other words; such for example as *bench, teach, book, took*, and others of the same class.

Sheridan also contributed very much to propagate the change of *tu* into *chu*, or *tshu*; as in *natursh, cultush, virtush*. This innovation was vindicated on the supposed fact, that the letter *u* has the sound of *yu*; and *naturp, cultup, virtup*, in a rapid enunciation, become *natursh, &c.* And to this day, this error respecting the sound of *u* is received in England as truth. But the fact is otherwise, and if not, it does not justify the practice; for in usage, *u* is short in *nature, culture, as in tun*; so that on the principles of Sheridan himself, this letter can have no effect on the preceding articulation.

This innovation however has prevailed to a considerable extent, although Sheridan subjected the change of *tu* to no rule. He is consistent in applying the same rule equally to *tu*; whether the accent follows the *t* or not. If *tu* is to be changed to *tshu*, in *future*, and *perpetual*, it ought to undergo the same change in *futurity*, and *perpetuity*; and Sheridan, in pronouncing *tutor, tutelage, tumult*, as if written *tshooter, tshootelage, tshoomult*, is certainly consistent, though wrong in fact. In other words, however, Sheridan is inconsistent with himself; for he pronounces *multishood, rectishood, servishood*, while *habitude, benitude, certitude, deceptitude, gratitude*, &c. retain the proper sound of *t*.

Walker's rule for changing *tu* to *chu*, only when the accent precedes, is entirely arbitrary, and evidently made by him to suit his own practice. It has however the good effect of reducing the *chus*, and removing the outrageous anomalies of *tshooter, tshoomult*, &c.

There are many other words which Sheridan has marked for a pronunciation, which is not according to good usage, and which the later orthoepists have corrected. In general, however, it may be asserted that his notation does not warrant a tenth part as many deviations, from the present respectable usage in England, as Walker's; yet as his Dictionary was republished in this country, it had no small effect in corrupting the pronunciation of some classes of words, to the purpose of its introduction, and not yet extinct. What the present effect of Sheridan's scheme of pronunciation was in England, I am not able to determine. But I have had information from the late venerable Dr. Johnson of Stratford, and from the late Dr. Hubbard of New Haven.