

INTRODUCTION.

giving *e* its proper sound. These differences, and many others, run through their works, and appear in a large portion of all the words in the language.

Now it is probable that all these gentlemen pronounced these words alike, or so nearly alike that no difference would be noticed by a bystander. The mischief of these notations is, that attempts are made to express minute distinctions or shades of sound, so to speak, which cannot be represented to the eye by characters. A great part of the notations must, necessarily, be inaccurate, and for this reason, the notation of the vowels in unaccented syllables should not be attempted. From a careful attention to this subject, I am persuaded that all such notations are useless, and many of them mischievous, as they lead to a wrong pronunciation. In no case can the true pronunciation of words in a language be accurately and completely expressed on paper; it can be caught only by the ear, and by practice.

As Walker's pronunciation has been represented to the people of this country as the *standard*, I shall confine my remarks chiefly to his work, with a view to ascertain its merits, and correct any erroneous impressions which have been received from such representations.

1. The first class of words which I shall mention, is that in which a has what is called, its Italian sound, as we pronounce it in *father, psalm, calm*. From a hasty enumeration of words of this class, I find there are two or three hundred in number, in which Walker gives to *a* its short sound, as in *fat, bat, fancy*, when, in fact, the most respectable usage in England, as well as in the United States, gives that letter its Italian sound. This error Jones and Perry have corrected. To be correct in this class of words, we have only to retain the customary pronunciation of the northern States.

2. The notation of the sound of *oo* by Walker is wrong in most or all the words in which *oo* are followed by *k*, and in some others. Notwithstanding the distinction between the long and short sound of *oo* is clear and well established in a great number of words, yet he assigns the short sound to eight words only, *viz. wool, wood, good, head, foot, stand, understood, and withstood*. Principles 397. It seems inconceivable that a man, bred or resident in London, should assign to *oo* in *book, cook, took*, and other like words, the same sound as in *cool, boom, boot, food*. Jones and Perry have corrected this notation, and given the pronunciation according to good usage, and just according to our customary pronunciation. While in England, I did not hear a single word of this class pronounced according to Walker's notation.

3. To the letters *ch* in *bench, bunch, clench, drench, inch, tench, wench*, and many other words, Walker gives the French sound, that is, the sound of *sh*, instead of *ch*, as *bench, inch, &c.* It would seem by this and other examples of wrong notation, that the author had been accustomed to some local peculiarities, either in London where all kinds of dialects are heard, or in some other place. In this instance, he gives to these words a pronunciation different from that of other orthoepists, and one which I have never heard either in England or in this country. His notation is palpably wrong, as our customary pronunciation is universally correct.

4. It has been already remarked, that Walker's notation of the sound of *i* and *y* short, in unaccented syllables, which he directs to be pronounced like *e* long, in *me, mete*, is contrary to all good usage, and is rejected by every other orthoepist, except Jameson. Walker admits *i* to be short when followed by a consonant in the same syllable. Thus the first *i* in *ability* is short, but the second *i* and the *y* are long *e*, *abielecte*. Now observe the consequence. In the plural, *abilities*, according to his rule, must be pronounced *abielectes*; but the word is never thus pronounced; universally it is pronounced *abilties*; the last vowel sound is in practice immediately followed by a consonant, and by his own rule must be short. Then the result is, *y* in *ability* is long *e*, but *ie* in the plural is short *i*. And for this change of sound no provision is made in Walker's scheme, nor in any other that I have ever seen.

5. In the analysis of the sounds of our letters, Walker alleges the diphthong *ou, ow*, to consist of the broad *a*, or *ae*, and the Italian sound of *u*. According to his scheme, about, abound, round, now, vote, are to be pronounced *abouant, abowant, rawund, noww, vovw*. But whoever heard this pronunciation? The fact is not so; the broad sound of *a* is *not* the initial sound of this diphthong; it is not commenced as deep in the throat, or with the same aperture as *ae*; it is a sound that can be learned only by the ear. The pronunciation of this diphthong is uniform in both countries.

6. In noting the sound of the unaccented vowels, and those which have the secondary accent, there are mistakes without number, in all the schemes which I have seen, and one continued series of differences between the orthoepists. The following is a specimen.

Sheridan.	Walker.	Jones.
Deliverence.	Deliverance.	Deliverance.
Dignitary.	Dignitate.	Dignitary.
Anser.	Ansur.	Ansur.
Assembledh.	Assembladje.	Assembladzh.
Average.	Average.	Averedzh.
Barren.	Barren.	Barren.
Penal.	Penal.	Penul.
Pennens.	Pennaise.	Pennouse.

Sheridan.	Walker.	Jones.
Pennytenshel.	Pennetenshal.	Pennytenshal.
Pennytensherry.	Pennytenshare.	Pennytenshary.
Pennysid.	Pennusidje.	Pennusidje.
Proksymet.	Proksomat.	Proksymet.
Proflyet.	Proflacet.	Proflyet.
Pennent.	Pennetrant.	Pennetrant.
Akkuzaturry.	Akkuzature.	Akkuzaturry.
Akkymunny.	Akkremone.	Akkrymunny.
Allymunny.	Allemunne.	Allymunny.
Seremunny.	Seremone.	Serymony.

I take no notice of the different letters by which these writers express the same sound, one using *e* where another uses *y*, but of the different sounds which they give to the vowels in the second, third, or last syllable. Now, I appeal to any person who has a tolerably correct ear, whether it is the sound of *a* that is uttered by good speakers, or any speakers in *deliverance* and *dignitary*? Is it the sound of *a* that we hear in the last syllable of *penance, penetrant, and assemblage*? Do we hear in the last syllable of *profligate, the short a*, as in *fat*? So far from it, that a public speaker, who should utter the sound of *a* so that it should be distinctly recognized in any polite audience, would expose himself to ridicule. The sound of the fast vowel approaches to that of *e* or *u*, and the notation of Sheridan is nearest the truth. But any notation is worse than useless; for without it, there would be no difference in customary pronunciation.

To show the utter impracticability of expressing the unaccented vowels, in all cases, with precision, let the reader observe Walker's notation of *a* in the word *moderate* and its derivatives. In the adjective and verb, the *a* is long, as in *fat*; in *moderately* and *moderateness*, it is short, as in *fat*. This is certainly incorrect notation; no good speaker ever pronounces these words *moderately, moderateness*. In addition to this, the *a* in the verb *moderate* is more distinctly pronounced than it is in the adjective, in which it has rather the sound of *e* short, *moderel*; at least the sound is more nearly that of *e* than of *a*. And this distinction of sound, between letters in the same word, when an adjective, and when a verb, occurs in a multitude of cases; a distinction for which no provision is made in any system of orthoepy that I have seen, and one which must be left to the cognizance of the ear alone.

There is another class of vowel sounds that comprises too many inaccuracies to be overlooked. This is the class in which the first syllable has an unaccented *e*, as in *debate*. In all words of this kind, Walker directs the letter *e* to have its long sound, as in *me, mete*. Then, become, bedeck, begin, debate, debar, declare, elect, legitimate, mechanic, medicinal, memorial, necessity, peculiar, petition, rebuke, recant, relate, secure, select, velocity, &c. are to be pronounced become, bedeck, begin, debate, debar, declare, elect, legitimate, mechanic, medicinal, memorial, necessity, peculiar, petition, rebuke, recant, relate, secure, select, velocity, &c.

According to this notation, the first vowel *e* in *evil, even*, and in *event*, is to have the same sound, being all marked with the same figure. Now, let me ask, where a speaker can be found who pronounces these words in this manner? Who ever heard of such a pronunciation? This notation is erroneous and mischievous, as it is inconsistent with the regular accent, which carries the stress of voice forward to the next syllable, and must, necessarily, leave the first vowel with the feeble sound of short *i* or *y*. This short sound is that which we always hear in such words.

The like error occurs in Walker's notation of *i* in *direct, diminish*, and many other words. Walker himself, under *despatch*, calls the sound of *e* the short *i*, but under rule 197, says this sound of *i* cannot be properly said to be short, as it is not closed by a consonant; yet it has half its diphthongal sound, the sound of *e*!! This reason that *ore* is not short, because the sound is not closed by a consonant, is entirely groundless, and contradicted by the universal pronunciation of thousands of English words. To direct such words to be pronounced *deereet, deeminish*, is execrable. This error corresponds with that specified under No. 4, supra.

Thus, there is neither uniformity nor consistency among the orthoepists in the notation of the unaccented vowels; and it is hardly possible there should be, for many of the sounds are so slight, in ordinary pronunciation, that it is almost impossible for the ear to recognize the distinctions, and absolutely impossible to express them on paper. In truth, as Dr. Ash remarks, in a dissertation prefixed to his Dictionary, the sounds of the five vowels, in unaccented, short, and insignificant syllables, are nearly coincident; and it must be a nice ear that can distinguish the difference of sound in the concluding syllable of *altar, offer, manner, autumn, suffer*. It is for this reason that the notation of such vowels at all savors of hypercritical fastidiousness, and by aiming at too much nicety and exactness, tends only to generate doubts and multiply differences of opinion. If the accent is laid on the proper syllable, and the vowel of that syllable correctly pronounced, the true pronunciation of the word will follow of course; at least, the pronunciation is more likely to be right than wrong, and no mistake will occur, which shall be an object of notice.

Nor can I approve the practice of writing all words, in different characters, to express their pronunciation, as if their proper letters were so many