

## INTRODUCTION.

simple sounds, or combinations of sounds, which are unknown in English, and of which the peculiarities may be hard to appreciate and describe. Long-continued acquaintance with a language always shows an observer to have been more or less in the wrong in his first ideas of its phonology or sound-system. Then, the English alphabet is rather scanty, and very much confused in its usages, so that one is puzzled as to how he shall best adapt it to represent any strange tongue to which he wishes to apply it.

There is no absolute way out of these difficulties. They can only be lightened, not got rid of altogether. The fundamental rule for dealing with them is that every observer be as careful as possible, and always consistent with himself in the use of whatever system he may adopt; taking pains also to explain as well as he can what he intends by the signs he uses.

But some ways of using the English letters are much preferable to others, both in themselves and because of their accordance with ways already adopted by collectors and scholars; and it is very desirable to suggest a general alphabet for collectors, which they shall be counseled to learn to understand and use. And since any one is greatly helped in analyzing and noting the sounds of a strange language by having paid a little attention to the general system of the alphabet, and the relation of the ordinary sounds to one another, it is proposed, instead of merely setting up an alphabet, to give along with it some very simple and elementary explanations of the sounds noted, or notions of phonology; having in view especially the sounds of the English language.

### VOWELS.

The vowel sounds which are found most widely among human languages are the five occurring in these English words:

*far, they, pique, note, rule.*

Each of these sounds is represented in English by a number of letters or combinations of letters, from two up to a dozen or so. It is proposed to take for their signs the vowel-letters by which they are written in the words above given; namely,

$\overset{a}{f}ar$      $\overset{e}{t}hey$      $\overset{i}{p}ique$      $\overset{o}{n}ote$      $\overset{u}{r}ule.$

The reason is that these are the signs which originally had the five values in question, and which have them still in most languages outside of English—for example, in Italian and German, and, less uniformly, in French. They are generally called the "continental" signs, as being so used in all Europe except the British Isles.

Any given vowel-sound is apt to be found in the same language having two different quantities, one long and one short. Often there is also a slight difference of quality or tone added to that of quantity. This difference of tone between the long and short values of what is nearly the same sound is greater in English than in almost any other language. The corresponding shorter sound to the long *e* of *they* is the sound in *then* or *head*; the short sound to *pique* is that in *pick*; the short sound to *rule* is that in *pull*. But the English has no real short *o*, except in the "Yankee" pronunciation of a few words like *house*, *whole*, *name*. Nor has it a real short sound corresponding to the *a* of *far* and *father*; the so-called "short *o*" of *not* and *what* and their like is our nearest approach to it, and near enough to bear being called a short *a*.

The usual way, all over the world, to distinguish the long and short values of vowels is to write a horizontal mark (the "macron") over the long vowel, and a crescent (the "breve") over the short. Thus we might signify the five short vowels, treated of above, in this manner:

$\overset{a}{\text{what}}$      $\overset{e}{\text{then}}$      $\overset{i}{\text{pick}}$      $\overset{o}{\text{whole}}$      $\overset{u}{\text{pull}}.$

The relations of quantity are so different in different languages that it may be best left, probably, to the judgment of the collector whether he will mark the long values of the vowels with the *macron*, or the short with the *breve*; to do both would generally be needless. Unless, indeed (as is the case in some Indian languages; there be three grades of quantity to distinguish, a drawn out or a protracted long, a medium or ordinary long, and a short; in that case both signs would have to be used, the medium quantity only being left unmarked).

Then there are three other simple vowel-sounds in English, for which it is not so easy to provide the most appropriate and acceptable signs.

One of these is the sound in *over*, *ought*, *all*, *bird*, and so on. It is a tone intermediate between the *a* of *far* and the *o* of *note*, and the *u*-sound of *not* or *what* comes just about as near to being its corresponding short as to being that of *a* (*far*). It may be as well written by *a* as by any other sign, and this is its proposed representative.

The second is the sound in *out*, *son*, *son*, and so on, the one which we usually call "short *u*," or "flat *a*"; it is an intermediate between *a* (of *far*) and *e* (of *they*). This it is proposed to write *u* (nearly following the German fashion).

The third is the sound which we have in words like *but*, *son*, *blond*. It is often called the "neutral vowel," because in its utterance the organs of the mouth are nearly in the indefinite position of simple breathing. It is nearly like the German *ö* and the French *eu*, but not the same with either. As it is called by us "short *u*," and, to one accustomed to English, seems most naturally represented by a *u*, the sign *u* has been here adopted for it.

The peculiar sound of the French *ü* in *tu*, *pure*, *mür*, etc., or of the German *ü* in *kü*, *küssen*, etc., will, whenever found, be best written with the German sign *ü*. It is made by a combination of the tongue-position by which *i* (*pique*) is uttered with the lip-position by which *u* (*rule*) is uttered.

We have, then, the four additional vowels—

$\overset{a}{a}ll$      $\overset{u}{u}t$      $\overset{u}{b}ut$      $\overset{ü}{[k]ü}ssen$  (*mür*).

Their long and short values may be distinguished by the same added marks as those of the other vowels, if it should be necessary to do so.

What we call the "long *i*" of *note*, *isle*, etc., is really a compound sound, a diphthong, beginning with *a* (*far*) and running down and ending with *i* (*pique* or *pick*). It is, therefore, to be written with *ai*.

The sound in *hour*, *our*, etc., is in a precisely similar manner a compound, beginning with *a* (*far*) and running down to *u* (*rule* or *full*). It is accordingly to be represented by *au*.

If such a diphthong as ours in *hour* or *boy* is met with it must of course be represented by *ai*, the signs for its two parts.

What we call "long *u*," as in *our*, *pure*, *our*, *four*, etc., is clearly a double sound, precisely that of *ou*, and can never be written with one character in any phonetic alphabet; its proper representative is *ou*.

We have, then, finally, the diphthongs—

$\overset{ai}{a}i$      $\overset{au}{a}u$      $\overset{di}{d}i$   
*mine*    *down*    *bell*.

The nasal vowels will be spoken of further on.

The scheme of representation of vowel sounds thus drawn out is believed to be as good as any that is attainable without departing too far from English usages, or bringing in strange and complicated signs, for which types are not to be found in ordinary printing offices. It will, of course, seem a little strange at first to one accustomed to English ways; but there must be a consistent system followed, and that excludes the acceptance of English ways. A little careful practice will give ready command of the scheme of signs. It is proposed as a basis, a model which is to be adhered to as closely as circumstances shall allow, in representing the strange sounds that may be met with in practice. Its use will not take away the necessity of careful description, nor will it answer all purposes. A language may, for example (like French and German), distinguish two *e*-sounds, a closer (French *é*) and an opener (French *è* or *ê*, akin respectively with our *i* (*they*) and *e* (*then*), but not, like these, differing in quantity, as long and short. In such a case it will be best to use *e* for the opener sound; and we may also need an *e*-for an opener *e*, and even an *i*-for an opener *i* (taken with our short *i* of *pick*). And there may be varieties of the "neutral vowel" for which the German *ö* will be a convenient sign.