

Report on the desirability of organizing phonetic work at McGill.

This memorandum gives expression to the views of the writer as an individual member of the Faculty of Arts and Science; it does not proceed from any department as such. In bringing up this matter of phonetic training for consideration the writer has been led exclusively by his desire to serve the interests of the University and by his conviction that good pronouncing habits on the part of the students, both as regards the mother tongue and foreign languages, cannot be secured unless some special provision is made for expert phonetic guidance and training.

I assume that it is admitted that there is room for much improvement in the pronunciation of many of our students. I also take it for granted that pronunciation is considered one of the most important aspects of language study. As far as the mother tongue is concerned, it expresses and gives social standing, culture, prestige, power. In learning a foreign language it is as essential as grammatical accuracy and literary form. When a person is called upon to express himself, or to read in a foreign language, *a* faulty pronunciation will often elicit secret contempt or commiseration on the part of the informed listener, if it does not subject the speaker to open ridicule. Moreover, a full literary appreciation in any language is possible only if the student has acquired the phonetic and rhythmical sense peculiar to the language concerned. Metrics and versification are phonetic in origin and ⁱⁿ nature. ~~In~~ the teaching of both mother tongue and foreign languages a teacher with a poor pronunciation communicates his defects to hundreds of pupils.

The causes of a faulty pronunciation are fundamentally the same whether the mother tongue or a foreign language is involved. They are either of a physiological nature, or mere habits ~~contra~~cted as a result of special environmental influences. In this respect a comparative understanding of the speech habits conventionalized in different languages is of the greatest value. But this is not always possible, and for practical purposes it is sometimes more advantageous to keep the various languages apart.

In regard to the mother tongue, English, a distinction must be made between those students who were brought up in genuine English speaking surroundings and those