

Phonography—What it is.

The system of short-hand known as Phonography, was invented in the year 1837, by Mr. Isaac Pitman, of Bath, Eng. The word Phonography is derived from the Greek words 'phone,' and 'grapho,' voice or sound writing. To express its brief character, as compared with long-hand phonography, it is sometimes called "phonetic short-hand."

Phonography, or writing by sound is the only true and philosophical method of putting our thoughts upon paper. Nothing more is required to prove this proposition than merely to call attention to the fact that there are forty different sounds heard in speaking the English language, while we have, by the old method, but 26 letters to represent them! The consequence is that many of the 26 letters have to stand for four to seven different sounds; and when we add to this, that the same sound is represented, in many more instances, by from six to twenty different letters, we need not wonder at the years of patient toil which are required for a child to learn to read and write—at the blunders and bad spelling among grown up people—or at the difficulty which foreigners experience in attempting to master our absurd orthography.

As an illustration of the number of sounds represented by some of our letters, take the following words, in which o stands for seven different sounds, viz: *ode, woman, women, do, hop, work, glove.* In the following instances, the long sound of o is represented by twenty one different combinations of letters: *note, boat, pour, though, beau, throw, sew, woman, oh, owe, hauteur, haulboy, folks, depot, door, foe, Cockburn, Grosvenor, Pharaoh, sword, oglio.* A foreigner, studying our language, if asked to spell the single word *no*, might spell it in no less than twenty different ways, each justified by the spelling of some other word in which the sound of o occurs, and then not spell it right. Add to this the three different ways of representing the first letter of the word, viz: *n, ng, kn*, and this little word of two letters may be spelled in sixty different ways before the correct method is arrived at.

If this (which is but a sample of our whole absurd orthography) is not enough to condemn the old 26-letter alphabet, as a basis for a philosophical and permanent system of short-hand writing, we confess we do not know what would be. Isaac Pitman looked at the matter somewhat as follows:—Suppose a man of intelligence, not knowing anything of our present (the old) method of spelling and writing, were to set himself about the task of representing our language upon paper by means of some system of writing which would be constantly used by millions of people for generations to come. We may well imagine his first inquiry to be: How many different sounds are used in spelling the language.—With considerable study and care he would finally discover the number to be (including diphthongs) forty. "For each of these, then," he would say, "I must have a separate character or letter."

The next inquiry would be—"What kind of signs shall be used?" In view of the great amount of writing to be performed by the millions speaking the English language, for hundreds of years to come, he concludes that the characters ought to be simple, so as to be easily learned, easily remembered, and easily and rapidly written. That point decided upon, he proceeds to analyze the sounds, and to divide them into vowels and consonants,—the former being mere grunts, requiring scarcely the moving of the lips or teeth; and the latter being made almost wholly by contact of the lips, teeth and tongue. (In the instruction books the vowels and consonants are further divided into long and short, spoken and whispered, etc., into which it is not necessary to enter here.) To represent the vowels, Mr. Pitman took simple dots and dashes, and for the consonants, the simplest geometrical signs, straight and curved. A single straight *hair* stroke, one eighth of an inch in length, was made to represent four different letters by the position in which it was written, viz: perpendicular, inclining to the right, to the left, and horizontal. Then a *heavy* mark; of the same sort, is made to represent four more letters, in the same manner. Then follow curved lines, heavy and light, which, placed in the same positions as the straight lines, represent the remaining fifteen consonants. The vowels are represented by dots and dashes being placed in different positions in relation to the consonants, being divided into *heavy* and *light*, to represent the long and short sounds.

We shall conclude this portion of our subject by an extract from an article in the "Ladies Repository," written by Rev. D. D. WILSON, D. D., and Professor of Languages in a college in R. I., the name of which elips our memory:

"Phonography is, according to the measure of human approximation, a perfect alphabet. Its letters are the briefest and simplest possible marks, and soon exhausted; the author doubles the number by adopting for each form the hair mark and the heavy stroke. By this means, with various superadded inventions of abbreviation, we soon arrive at the most finished of short hands. Next, as each elemental sound is represented by but one letter, and each has but one sole sound, no word can be spelled, written or read but one possible way. Does not the sole possible spelling result of necessity? Like Hogarty's learning, it comes by nature." By a cunning provision, sounds similar to the cure are represented by characters of equal similarity, so that, if a slight inaccuracy occur it makes a word so similar to the true one that you easily recognize what is meant."

ITS UTILITY.

Volumes might be written in demonstration of the great utility of Phonography. We confine our attention, however, mainly to individual opinions and testimonies. With reference to the advantages which we have experienced in its use, however, we scarcely know how to speak. If we do not owe our whole mental existence to Phonography, we certainly do owe our present position in the world, and our present attainments, entirely to the study of this great time-and-labor-saving, thought-catching art. Perhaps we are somewhat enthusiastic in its praise, but we have good reason to be. Did we know of a certainty that we were to live forty years longer in the world and gain our living by intellectual labor of almost any sort, we could not consent to part with a knowledge of Phonography for several thousand dollars. Scarce a day passes but we have occasion to make use of it more or less. In reporting for our weekly Journal—the "Oshawa Vindicator"—we could not dispense with its services; and for the information of our brethren of the press we ought mention one way of using

it in business, which would save considerable time in preparing packages of papers for the mails, were it adopted in all the newspaper offices in the country. It is this: When we get all the papers of each package addressed; we jot down, in a second of time upon the last paper, the name of the post office, county, and country, if necessary, to which the package is to be sent, and go on addressing the next one. An assistant proceeds to wrap up the packages, taking them from the pile, one by one, and addressing them, in plain long-hand, on the out side of the wrapper. In a short time we expect to reap more advantages from it than we have hitherto been able to, namely, by writing nearly all our editorial articles in short-hand. Several of our apprentices are learning the art, and in a few weeks more, will be able to 'set up' from Phonographic 'copy.'

We now proceed to quote from the testimony of others, making such a selection as will present the case in a variety of aspects.

"Our living stock of thoughts need no longer trudge it slowly and wearily down the pen and along the paper, hindering each other, as they struggle through the strait gate of the old handwriting; our troops of feelings need no more crawl, as snails crawl, to their station on the page, regiments after regiments, sawing their way bravely forward, to fill paragraph after paragraph; and writing, once a trouble, is now at breathing ease. Our kind and loving thoughts, warm and transparent, liquid as melted from the hot heart, shall no longer grow opaque and freeze with a tedious dribbling from the pen, but the whole soul may now pour itself forth in a sweet shower of words. Phonoty and Phonography will be of a use in the world not dreamt of but by a few."—*The Evangel of Love*, by HEARY STURTON.

"Aside from the evident advantage derived from a vast saving of time, both in correspondence and composition, it has been found to prove of such great benefit to the memory, stimulating it to increased exercise, that that alone would compensate for the slight labor of its acquisition. It has been found to be a saving of John Quincy Adams, capable of adding an additional store. The person who learns Phonography thoroughly is enabled to put into his own possession a much greater supply of information, and this he secures from practice in recollecting the thoughts of others."—J. W. STONE, M. D., Boston, Mass.

PHONOGRAPHY FOR SCHOOLS.

"The young should learn this art and use it as a means of intellectual culture not unprofitably might it prove a key wherewith to unlock a well-timbered cupboard!—I am glad to find Phonography among the regular studies at the High School of this city. Why should not so useful an art be introduced and taught in the Grammar, and even Primary Schools?"—B. F., in the *Philadelphian Register*.

"The cause of education, as I apprehend, is deeply interested in the dissemination of Phonography, and if it shall result in the teaching of this art in the District Schools as well as in the High School of this city, it will be productive of an amount of good not readily estimated. The introduction of it into these seminaries, as a regular branch of learning will not only familiarize the pupils with the elementary sounds of our language, and accustom them to the habit of analysis—so important for the purposes of comprehension—but will furnish them with an easy and rapid mode of recording thought, useful in acquiring other knowledge—valuable for their own purposes through life and upon which many of them may rely for support in cases of emergency."—TOWNSEND STARRS, *Philadelphian*, Pa.

"Youths at school should be taught this art. Those intended for the learned professions would save five-sixths of the time and labor attendant on the use of the tedious long-hand. Youths who are to fill situations in counting-houses, offices, etc., should be made acquainted with this art, as they would find their services of greater value to their employers, could they write drafts of letters, documents, and take orders as fast as they were dictated."—*Springfield Republican*, O.

"I consider the art as one of the most valuable inventions of our day. It should be taught in the common schools as one of the best possible aids in obtaining a subsequent education. At the higher instruction of our academies, colleges and professional schools is given by lectures—lectures which are forgotten in a month after delivery. Why should not every student take down at least the principles, parts of the lectures in Phonographic notes?"—Rev. THOMAS HILL, *Waltham, Mass.*

Phonography is regularly taught in the Waltham Common Schools.