

Greece, and how they took root in the fertile intellects of that garden of sciences, and along with the tide of conquest, or prior to it, went the Grecian alphabet, then so termed, to Rome and so on down to the present time. It is the same alphabet all through, being inverted, transposed, and anagramatized in its application as national distinctions deposed or the caprice of the learned dictated. The cuneiform inscriptions of Assyria, the figures of Arabia, the Peruvian knots, and the Egyptian hieroglyphics with which the hundred gates of Ancient Thebes were marked, have all done much in constituting a medium for the communication of thought and constructing a chain of history, but their circumlocution circumscribed their extension and influence, and they exist now only in history. It is the Phœnician alphabet enlarged that has extended beyond a parallel, penetrated primeval forests and fearlessly entered the Indian's wigwam, witnessed the world's progress and painted its most graphic scenes for our edification.

Such then is our language, in a written form, apparently a gradual formation exclusively designed for humanity, for the brutes, though they commune with each other by incoherent sounds, are denied the art—by instinct or otherwise—of preserving the vague emissions. Seeing that written is but the reflex of spoken language and its fixed type, to facilitate the conversion of the latter into the former, it would seem that the execution of the one should be equivalent to the utterances of the other. In other words, that in the disposition of an Omniscient Creator, speaking and writing were specially bestowed on man to be used in consort, and that this can not be effectually done while speaking preponderates over writing in facility of execution in the ratio of six to one. This is in the main attributable to the circuitous method adopted to accomplish it. We will commence at the root of the evil. It is a well known fact that the greatest obstacle which foreigners have to surmount in the acquisition of the English language is its incongruous orthography. They soon learn the words and their meanings, but they are loth to commit themselves by hazarding the pronunciation. Imagine a Spaniard attempting to pronounce such words as *nature*, *subtle*, *hiccough*, and these are not exceptional words. He is told that m-a-t-u-r-e spells mature, and why not nature be pronounced similarly. In the English language are twenty-six letters, three of which, g, c and x, are redundant, to represent thirty-four distinct sounds, so that eleven sounds either go unrepresented or two or more letters are combined to supply the deficiency. Presuming all words to have but one way of pronunciation, the discrepancy between the number of signs and the number of sounds is laudable enough, but when we find that out of the 80,000 words in the dictionary there are 364 homonyms—words of double orthography—it makes the language more a problem than ever. The license used in spelling is owing to the license in pronunciation, there being no fixed principles, repeated changes are inevitable. Worcester has over a dozen ways of spelling *mosquito*, a word that, instead of engaging the learned attentions of lexicographers and orthoepists, might be correctly spelled and pronounced by any school boy were the phonetic element recognised. The important vowels *a* and *e* instead of having one sound each are expressed in sixteen and seventeen sounds respectively, and a similar absurdity is apparent more or less throughout the alphabet. "It is not a discovery of to-day," Ben. Franklin said, referring to the introduction of phonetic spelling, sooner or later it must be done or our writing will become the same as the Chinese, as to the difficulty of learning and using it, and Sheridan in 1780 issued a dictionary with a view to establish a plain and permanent standard of pronunciation. Lindley Murray says, in his grammar, that a perfect alphabet would contain just the same number of signs as there are articulate sounds in the language. A very high authority, Dr. Latham, lays down six admirable rules for spelling and pronunciation, recognising the spelling by sound in its entirety, any not to use *a* one way in hat and another way in hate, or *b* as in bed and otherwise as in dumb. Dr. Trench, who rejects the admission of the principle, says: "Custom is lord;" well, custom has run counter to common sense, and excessive familiarity has created a film over our reforming vision; but because our fathers traversed the lakes in sloops and the land in coaches and canal boats is no reason why we should refuse to avail ourselves of steam locomotion. To animadvert upon an evil for which there is no remedy would be futile and unsatisfactory. The remedy is extant, but a bigoted conservatism is in the way. Rapid strides have been effected and improbable results ensued since the supplanting of the Platonic by the Baconian philosophy in everything but the relations of writing to speech. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, and Sir John Mandeville transcribed his travels as facile as the majority of the people of the 19th century do their correspondence. This dogged observance and blind reverence for the past is incompatible with our ingenious progressive nature, as is also our adherence to what is incompetent to fulfil the requirements of business and society. The remedy referred to lies in the adoption of short-hand or phonography, by which every sound framed by the mouth for the expression of

words or syllables has its representative symbol—firm and unmistakeable, a knowledge of which symbol once acquired indexes its pronunciation. The phonographic alphabet contains 34 signs composed of dots and the smallest geometrical forms—straight lines, curves and circles—to represent an equal number of sounds. This number embraces all the sounds in the English language, and hence a combination of signs represents a combination of sounds, and a single sign a single sound. Phonography originated with Isaac Pitman of Bath, England, in 1837, and since that time has spread with unexampled rapidity throughout Anglo-Saxondom, notwithstanding there is still but a mere tithe of the writing population employ it. Its use has been almost confined to professionals, who, by making a virtue of necessity, have adopted it in preference to any other system. Shorter methods of writing than our ordinary long-hand are numerous both anterior as well as posterior to Pitman. He did not emerge from the cradle a perfect author of a perfect system, but labored, like other mortals, over systems before him, analysing, comparing and arranging for years until he deemed his work of sufficient utility to warrant a successful reception at the hands of the public. We have accounts of over 200 systems having been in use at various times, but all more or less founded on our imperfect alphabet, and consequently ambiguous and circuitous. His system has the three cardinal advantages of brevity, facility and legibility, a trio of qualities that would have ensured the success of any system. But none of his antecedents had embodied these indispensable qualifications in their methods. If they secured brevity they endangered legibility and *vice versa*.

And now, in conclusion, as there are thousands of living testimonials to the efficiency, the beauty and adaptiveness of Pitman's short-hand in Great Britain and America, it recommends itself to the attention of those interested in the diffusion of letters—to those self-applying persevering youths who would strike out a path to eminence for themselves, and to those parents anxious for the success of their children. Many men of influence and position in the neighboring Union have made phonography their passport, and a list might be enumerated containing many names of Senators, Judges, &c. The desire to write fast is natural, and the necessity to write fast is imperative and the ability to read what is written completes the science. Who has not listened with rapture to some brilliant soul-stirring sentence or some glowing panegyric—some beautiful sentiment or some seathing invective, and wished for the means of arresting it from oblivion? Who does not resolve every new year to keep a diary, but the tediousness of the operation overcomes the interest and the record expires with the first month? The limits of this notice forbid anything like an exposition of its advantages. To the merchant, the lawyer and the divine, it is of incalculable benefit, while it is not less so to anybody and everybody employing our common long-hand. This is unquestionably an age of progress, when the refulgent beams of the sun of true philosophy scatter the accumulated mist of servile ages and awaken the nations to a sense of their power. Old customs now live only on their merits. Their ancestral potency is found to be an illusion when tried by the standard of practical ability. A great man once said: "To save time is to lengthen life;" What better exemplification of the aphorism could be had than in the acquisition of short-hand? It is a great art designed for a great purpose, and whether the tardiness in regard to it dies with the present generation or not phonography will eventually find its level among the sciences, become a branch of scholastic education, and, as it grows in age and extent, deserve and elicit the admiration of an intelligent humanity. J. T.

#### IV. Selections from the Press.

##### 1. COMMERCIAL COLLEGES IN CANADA.

We have no desire to disparage any really useful institution, nor to interfere in any way with the working of the educational establishments lately established in some cities of Canada under the above title. Everything that will help young men to the acquisition of knowledge is desirable, and any means that can be devised whereby the *raw edge*, so to speak, can be taken off the lads who enter mercantile or banking offices, will, no doubt, be welcomed by those who have the subsequent training of them.

We have nothing, therefore, to say against the system, still less have we fault to find with any particular college.

But we have a word to say about the work they propose to do, and the time they propose to do it in, and we wish particularly to address our observations to the young men of our country districts, many of whom get a dislike to the hard work of farming, and cast a longing eye to the towns, the mercantile life of which seems to them an Elysium.

The work the colleges propose to do, is to teach book-keeping and business correspondence, and this in several and distinct