

WALKER'S PRONOUNCING DICTIONARY
OF
THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.



W.Banks & Son Edin^o

WALKER'S A

PRONOUNCING DICTIONARY

OF

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE:

WITH

THE KEY,

AND UPWARDS OF

10,000 ADDITIONAL WORDS AND PHRASES

IN DAILY USE,

RECENTLY INTRODUCED INTO THE LANGUAGE.

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A

PREFACE.

Few subjects have of late years more employed the pens of every class of critics, than the improvement of the English Language. The greatest abilities in the nation have been exerted in cultivating and reforming it; nor have a thousand minor critics been wanting to add their mite of amendment to their native tongue. Johnson, whose large mind and just taste made him capable of enriching and adorning the Language with original composition, has condescended to the drudgery of disentangling, explaining, and arranging it, and left a lasting monument of his ability, labour, and patience; and Dr. Lowth, the politest scholar of the age, has veiled his superiority in his short Introduction to English Grammar. The ponderous folio has gravely vindicated the rights of analogy; and the light ephemeral sheet of news has corrected errors in Grammar, as well as in Politics, by slyly marking them in Italics.

Nor has the improvement stopped here. While Johnson and Lowth have been insensibly operating on the orthography and construction of our Language, its pronunciation has not been neglected. The importance of a consistent and regular pronunciation was too obvious to be overlooked; and the want of this consistency and regularity has induced several ingenious men to endeavour at reformation; who, by exhibiting the regularities of pronunciation, and pointing out its analogies, have reclaimed some words that were not irrecoverably fixed in a wrong sound, and prevented others from being perverted by ignorance or caprice.

Among those writers who deserve the first praise on this subject, is Mr. Elphinston; who, in his Principles of the English Language, has reduced the chaos to a system; and, by a deep investigation of the analogies of our tongue, has laid the foundation of a just and regular pronunciation.

After him, Dr. Kenrick contributed a portion of improvement by his Rhetorical Dictionary; in which the words are divided into syllables as they are pronounced, and figures placed over the vowels, to indicate their different sounds. But this gentleman has rendered his Dictionary extremely imperfect, by entirely omitting a great number of words of doubtful and difficult pronunciation—those very words for which a Dictionary of this kind would be most consulted.

To him succeeded Mr. Sheridan, who not only divided the words into syllables, and placed figures over the vowels as Dr. Kenrick had done, but, by spelling these syllables as they are pronounced, seemed to complete the idea of a Pronouncing Dictionary, and to leave but little expectation of future improvement. It must, indeed, be confessed, that Mr. Sheridan's Dictionary is greatly superior to every other that preceded it; and his method of conveying the sound of words, by spelling them as they are pronounced, is highly rational and useful.—But here sincerity obliges me to stop. The numerous instances I have given of impropriety, inconsistency, and want of acquaintance with the analogies of the Language, sufficiently show how imperfect * I think his Dictionary is upon the whole, and what ample room was left for attempting another that might better answer the purpose of a Guide to Pronunciation.

The last writer on this subject is Mr. Nares, who, in his Elements of Orthœpy, has shown a clearness of method and an extent of observation which deserve the highest encomiums. His Preface alone proves him an elegant writer, as well as a philosophical observer of Language; and his Alphabetical Index, referring near five thousand words to the rules for pronouncing them, is a new and useful method of treating the subject; but he seems, on many occasions, to have mistaken the best usage, and to have paid too little attention to the first principles of pronunciation.

Thus I have ventured to give my opinion of my rivals and competitors, and I hope without envy or self-conceit. Perhaps it would have been policy in me to have been silent on this head, for fear of putting the public in mind that others have written on the subject as well as myself: but this is a narrow policy, which, under the cover of tenderness to others, is calculated to raise ourselves at their expense. A writer who is conscious he deserves the attention of the Public (and unless he is thus conscious he ought not to write) must not only wish to be compared with those who have gone before him, but will promote the comparison, by informing his readers what others have done, and on what he founds his pretensions to a preference; and if this be done with fairness and without acrimony, it can be no more inconsistent with modesty, than it is with honesty and plain dealing.

The work I have offered on the subject has, I hope, added something to the public stock: it not only exhibits the principles of pronunciation on a more extensive plan than others have done, divides the words into syllables, and marks the sounds of the vowels like Dr. Kenrick, spells the words as they are pronounced like Mr. Sheridan, and directs the inspector to the rule by the word like Mr. Nares; but, where words are subject to different pronunciations, it shows the reasons from analogy for each, produces authorities for one side and the other, and points out the pronunciation which is preferable. In short, I have endeavoured to unite the science of Mr. Elphinston, the method of Mr. Nares, and the general utility of Mr. Sheridan; and, to add to these advantages, have given critical observations on such words as are subject to a diversity of pronunciation, and have invited the inspector to decide according to analogy and the best usage.

But to all works of this kind there lies a formidable objection; which is, that the pronunciation of a Language is necessarily indefinite and fugitive, and that all endeavours to delineate

* See Principles, No. 124, 126, 129, 386, 454, 462, 479, 480, 530; and the words *Assume*, *Codde*, *Covetous*, *Frequence*, *Matronal*, *Satiety*, &c.

or settle it are vain. Dr. Johnson, in his Grammar, prefixed to his Dictionary, says: "Most of the writers of English Grammar have given long tables of words pronounced otherwise than they are written; and seem not sufficiently to have considered that, of English, as of all living tongues, there is a double pronunciation; one, cursory and colloquial; the other, regular and solemn. The cursory pronunciation is always vague and uncertain, being made different in different mouths, by negligence, unskilfulness, or affectation. The solemn pronunciation, though by no means immutable and permanent, is yet always less remote from the orthography, and less liable to capricious innovation. They have, however, generally formed their tables according to the cursory speech of those with whom they happened to converse, and, concluding that the whole nation combines to vitiate language in one manner, have often established the jargon of the lowest of the people as the model of speech. For pronunciation the best general rule is, to consider those as the most elegant speakers who deviate least from the written words."

Without any derogation from the character of Dr. Johnson, it may be asserted, that in these observations we do not perceive that justness and accuracy of thinking for which he is so remarkable. It would be doing great injustice to him, to suppose that he meant to exclude all possibility of conveying the actual pronunciation of many words that depart manifestly from their orthography, or of those that are written alike, and pronounced differently: and inversely. He has marked these differences with great propriety himself, in many places of his Dictionary; and it is to be regretted that he did not extend these remarks farther. It is impossible, therefore, he could suppose, that, because the almost imperceptible glances of colloquial pronunciation were not to be caught and described by the pen, that the very perceptible difference between the initial accented syllables of *money* and *monitor*, or the final unaccented syllable of *finite* and *infinite*, could not be sufficiently marked upon paper. Cannot we show that *cellar*, a vault, and *seller*, one who sells, have exactly the same sound; or that the monosyllable *ful*, and the first syllable of *fulminate* are sounded differently, because there are some words in which solemnity will authorize a different shade of pronunciation from familiarity. Besides, that colloquial pronunciation which is perfect, is so much the language of common speaking, that, perhaps, there is no more difference than between the same picture painted to be viewed near and at a distance. The symmetry in both is exactly the same; and the distinction lies only in the colouring. The English Language, in this respect, seems to have a great superiority over the French, which pronounces many letters in the poetic and solemn style, that are wholly silent in the prosaic and familiar. But if a solemn and familiar pronunciation really exists in our language, is it not the business of a grammarian to mark both? And if he cannot point out the precise sound of unaccented syllables, (for these only are liable to obscurity,) he may, at least, give those sounds which approach the nearest, and by this means become a little more useful than those who so liberally leave every thing to the ear and taste of the speaker.

The truth is, Dr. Johnson seems to have had a confused idea of the distinctness and indistinctness with which, on solemn or familiar occasions, we sometimes pronounce the unaccented vowels; and with respect to these, it must be owned, that his remarks are not entirely without foundation. The English Language, with respect to its pronunciation, is evidently divisible into accented and unaccented sounds. The accented syllables, by being pronounced with greater force than the unaccented, have their vowels as clearly and distinctly sounded as any given note in music; while the unaccented vowels, for want of the stress, are apt to slide into an obscurity of sound, which, though sufficiently distinguishable to the ear, cannot be so definitely marked out to the eye by other sounds as those vowels that are under the accent. Thus some of the vowels, when neither under the accent, nor closed by a consonant, have a longer or a shorter, an opener or a closer sound, according to the solemnity or familiarity, the deliberation or rapidity of our delivery. This will be perceived in the sound of the *e* in *emotion*, of the *o* in *obedience*, and of the *u* in *monument*. In the hasty pronunciation of common speaking, the *e* in *emotion* is often shortened, as if spelt *im-mo-tion*; the *o* in *obedience* shortened and obscured, as if written *ub-be-dience*; and the *u* in *monument* changed into *e*, as if written *mon-ne-ment*; while the deliberate and elegant sound of these vowels is the long open sound they have, when the accent is on them, in *equal*, *over*, and *unit*: but *a*, when unaccented, seems to have no such diversity; it has generally a short obscure sound, whether ending a syllable, or closed by a consonant. Thus the *a* in *able* has its definite and distinct sound; but the same letter in *tolerable* goes into an obscure indefinite sound approaching the short *u*; nor can any solemnity or deliberation give it the long open sound it has in the first word. Thus, by distinguishing vowels into their accented and unaccented sounds, we are enabled to see clearly what Dr. Johnson saw but obscurely; and by this distinction entirely to answer the objection.

Equally indefinite and uncertain is his general rule, that those are to be considered as the most elegant speakers who deviate least from the written words. It is certain, where custom is equal, this ought to take place; and if the whole body of respectable English speakers were equally divided in their pronunciation of the word *busy*, one half pronouncing it *beu-ze*,† and the other half *bis-ze*, that the former ought to be accounted the most elegant speakers: but till this be the case, the latter pronunciation, though a gross deviation from orthography, will still be esteemed the more elegant. Dr. Johnson's general rule, therefore, can only take place where custom has not plainly decided; but, unfortunately for the English Language, its orthography and pronunciation are so widely different, that Dr. Watts and Dr. Jones lay it down as a maxim in their Treatises on Spelling, that all words which can be sounded different ways must be written according to that sound which is most distant from the true pronunciation; and consequently, in such a Language, a Pronouncing Dictionary must be of essential use.

But still it may be objected to such an undertaking, that the fluctuation of pronunciation is so great as to render all attempts to settle it useless. What will it avail us, it may be said, to know the pronunciation of the present day, if in a few years it will be altered? And how are

† Principles, No. 88, 515.

‡ Principles, No. 178.