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 sincerely 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 Orthoepy, 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 colour 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

*) See Principles, No. 124, 126, 129, 506, 516, 462, 479, 480, 550; and the words ASSUME, COLLECT, COVEY, DONATIVE, EUPHRAEK, SATIETY, etc. and the inseparable preposition DIS.
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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 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 syllables 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 full, 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 solemn 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 prose 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 those 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, can not 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 emotique is often shortened, as if spelt im-mo-tion; the o in obedience shortened and obscured, as if written ub-be-di-ence; and the u in monument changed into e, as if written mon-e-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:

*) See the words Collect, Command, Despatch, Domestick, Preface, Occasion.
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 bew-ze **), and the other half biz-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 we to know even what the present pronunciation is, when the same words are often differently pronounced by different speakers, and those, perhaps, of equal numbers and reputation? To this it may be answered, that the fluctuation of our Language, with respect to its pronunciation, seems to have been greatly exaggerated ***)). Except a very few

*) Principles, No. 88.; 545.

**) Principles, No. 178.

***) The old and new Ars Sic, with all the various dialects, must have occasioned infinite irregularity in the pronunciation of the Greek tongue; and if we may judge of the Latin pronunciation by the ancient inscriptions, it was little less various and irregular than the Greek. Aulus Gelius tells us, that Nigidius, a grammarian who lived a little more than a century before him, accented the first syllable of Valeri; but, says he,
single words, which are generally noticed in the following Dictionary, and the words where e comes before r, followed by another consonant, as merchant, service, etc. the pronunciation of the language is probably in the same state in which it was a century ago; and had the same attention been then paid to it as now, it is not likely even that change would have happened. The same may be observed of those words which are differently pronounced by different speakers: if the analogies of the language had been better understood, it is scarcely conceivable that so many words in polite usage would have a diversity of pronunciation, which is at once so ridiculous and embarrassing; nay, perhaps it may be with confidence asserted, that if the Language were sufficiently known, and so near at hand as to be applicable, on inspection,

"si quis nunc Valerium appellans, in caso vocandi, secundum id preceptum Nigidii aczerit primum, non aberit quin rideatur." Whoever now should place the accent on the first syllable of Valerius, when a vocative case, according to the precept of Nigidius, would set every body a laughing. Even that highly polished language the French, if we may believe a writer in the Encyclopédie, is little less irregular in this respect than our own.

"Il est arrive," says he, "par les alterations qui se succèdent rapidement dans la manière de prononcer, et les corrections qui s'introduisent lentement dans la manière d'écrire, que la prononciation et l'écriture ne marchent point ensemble, et que quoiqu'il y ait chez les peuples les plus polis de l'Europe, des sociétés d'hommes de lettres chargés de les modérer, de les accorder, et de les rapprocher de la même ligne, elles se trouvent enfin à une distance inconcevable; en sorte que de deux choses, dont l'une n'a été imaginaire dans son origine que pour représenter fidèlement l'autre, celle-ci ne diffère guère moins de celle-là, que le portrait de la même personne peinte dans deux âges très-éloignés. Enfin l'inconvenienc s'est accrue à un tel excès qu'il n'est plus y remédier. On prononce une language, on écrit une autre: et l'on s'accoutume tellement pendant le reste de la vie à cette bizarrerie qui a fait verser tant de larmes dans l'enfance, que si l'on renonçoit à sa mauvaise orthographe pour une plus voisine de la prononciation, on ne reconnoîtroit plus la langue parlée sous cette nouvelle combinaison de caractères. S'il y en a qui ne pourroient se succéder sans une grande fatigue pour l'organe, ou, ils ne se rencontrent point, ou ils ne durent pas. Ils sont échappés de la language par l'euphonie, cette loi puissante, qui agit continuellement et universellement, sans égard pour l'étymologie et ses défenseurs, et qui tend sans interruption à amener des êtres qui ont les mêmes organes, le même idiome, les mêmes mouvements présents, à-peu-près à la même prononciation. Les causes dont l'action n'est point interrompue, deviennent toujours les plus fortes avec les tems, quelque foibles qu'elles soient en elles-mêmes, et il n'y a presque pas une seule voyelle, une seule diphthongue, une seule consonne, dont la valeur soit tellement constante que l'euphonie n'en puisse disposer, soit en altérant le son, soit en supprimant.

I shall not decide upon the justness of these complaints, but must observe, that a worse picture could scarcely be drawn of the English, or the most barbarous language of Europe. Indeed a degree of versatility seems involved in the very nature of language, and is one of those evils left by Providence for man to correct: a love of order, and the utility of regularity, will always incline him to confine this versatility within as narrow bounds as possible.
to every word, that not only many words which are wavering between contrary usages would be settled in their true sound, but, that many words, which are fixed by custom to an improper pronunciation, would by degrees grow regular and analogical; and those which are so already would be secured in their purity by a knowledge of their regularity and analogy.

But the utility of a work of this kind is not confined to those parts of language where the impropriety is gross and palpable: besides such imperfections in pronunciation as disgust every ear not accustomed to them, there are a thousand insensible deviations, in the more minute parts of language, as the unaccented syllable may be called, which do not strike the ear so forcibly as to mark any direct impropriety in particular words, but occasion only such a general imperfection as gives a bad impression upon the whole. Speakers, with these imperfections, pass very well in common conversation; but when they are required to pronounce with emphasis, and for that purpose to be more distinct and definite in their utterance, here their ear fails them: they have been accustomed only to loose, cursory speaking, and, for want of firmness of pronunciation, are like those painters who draw the muscular exertions of the human body without any knowledge of anatomy. This is one reason, perhaps, why we find the elocution of so few people agreeable when they read or speak to an assembly, while so few offend us by their utterance in common conversation. A thousand faults lie concealed in a miniature, which a microscope brings to view; and it is only by pronouncing on a larger scale, as public speaking may be called, that we prove the propriety of our elocution. As, therefore, there are certain deviations from analogy which are not at any rate tolerable, there are others which only, as it were, tarnish the pronunciation, and make it less brilliant and agreeable. There are few who have turned their thoughts on this subject, without observing that they sometimes pronounce the same word or syllable in a different manner; and as neither of these manners offend the ear, they are at a loss to which they shall give the preference: but as one must necessarily be more agreeable to the analogy of the language than the other, a display of these analogies, in a Dictionary of this kind, will immediately remove this uncertainty: and in this view of the variety we shall discover a fitness in one mode of speaking, which will give a firmness and security to our pronunciation, from a confidence that it is founded on reason, and the general tendency of the language. See Principles, No. 530, 547, 551, etc.

But, alas! reasoning on language, however well founded, may be all overturned by a single quotation from Horace:

"Quem penes arbitrium est, et jus et norma loquendi."
This, it must be owned, is a succinct way of ending the controversy; and by virtue of this argument, we may become critics in language, without the trouble of studying it: not that I would be thought, in the most distant manner, to deny that custom is the sovereign arbiter of language; far from it. I acknowledge its authority, and know there is no appeal from it. I wish only to dispute, where this arbiter has not decided; for, if once custom speak out, however absurdly, I sincerely acquiesce in its sentence.

But what is this custom to which we must so implicitly submit? Is it the usage of the multitude of speakers, whether good or bad? This has never been asserted by the most sanguine advocates of its authority. Is it the usage of the studious in schools and colleges, with those of the learned professions, or that of those who, from their elevated birth or station, give laws to the refinements and elegancies of a court? To confine propriety to the latter, which is too often the case, seems an injury to the former; who, from their very profession, appear to have a natural right to a share, at least, in the legislation of our language, if not to an absolute sovereignty. The polished attendants on a throne are as apt to depart from simplicity in language as in dress and manners; and novelty, instead of custom, is too often the jus et norma loquendi of a court.

Perhaps an attentive observation will lead us to conclude, that the usage, which ought to direct us, is neither of these we have been enumerating, taken singly, but a sort of compound ratio of all three. Neither a finical pronunciation of the court, nor a pedantic Graecism of the schools, will be denominated respectable usage, till a certain number of the general mass of speakers have acknowledged them; nor will a multitude of common speakers authorize any pronunciation which is reprobated by the learned and polite.

As those sounds, therefore, which are the most generally received among the learned and polite, as well as the bulk of speakers, are the most legitimate, we may conclude that a majority of two of these states ought always to concur, in order to constitute what is called good usage.

But though custom, when general, is commonly well understood, there are several states and degrees of it which are exceedingly obscure and equivocal; and the only method of knowing the extent of custom in these cases, seems to be an inspection of those Dictionaries which professedly treat of pronunciation. We have now so many works of this kind, that the general current of custom, with respect to the sound of words, may be collected from them with almost as much certainty as the general sense of words from Johnson. An exhibition of the opinions of orthoepists about the sound of words always appeared to me a very rational method of determining what is called custom. This
method I have adopted in the following work; and if I have sometimes dissented from the majority, it has been either from a persuasion of being better informed of what was the actual custom of speaking, or from a partiality to the evident analogies of the language.

And here I must entreat the candid reader to make every reasonable allowance for the freedom with which I have criticised other writers on this subject, and particularly Mr. Sheridan. As a man, a gentleman, and a scholar, I knew Mr. Sheridan, and respected him; and think every lover of elocution owes him a tribute of thanks for his unwearied addresses to the Public, to rouse them to the study of the delivery of their native tongue. But this tribute, however just, does not exempt him from examination. His credit with the world necessarily subjects him to animadversion, because the errors of such a writer are dangerous, in proportion to his reputation: this has made me zealous to remark his inaccuracies, but not without giving my reasons; nor have I ever taken advantage of such faults as may be called inadvertencies*). On the same principles I have ventured to criticise Dr. Johnson**), whose friendship and advice I was honoured with, whose memory I love, and whose intellectual powers impress me with something like religious veneration and awe. I do not pretend to be exempt from faults myself; in a work like the present, it would be a miracle to escape them; nor have I the least idea of deciding as judge, in a case of so much delicacy and importance as the pronunciation of a whole people; I have only assumed the part of an advocate, to plead the cause of consistency and analogy, and, where custom is either silent or dubious, to tempt the lovers of their language to incline to the side of propriety: so that my design is principally to give a kind of history of pronunciation, and a register of its present state; and, where the authorities of Dictionaries or Speakers are found to differ, to give such a display of the analogies of the language as may enable every inspector to decide for himself.

With respect to the explanation of words, except in very few instances, I have scrupulously followed Dr. Johnson. His Dictionary has been deemed lawful plunder by every subsequent lexicographer; and so servilely has it been copied, that such words as he must have omitted merely by mistake, as Predilection, Respectable, Descriptive, Sulky, Inimical, Interference, and many others, are neither in Mr. Sheridan’s, Dr. Kenrick’s, nor several other Dictionaries.

* The inspector will be pleased to take notice, that my observations on Mr. Sheridan’s Dictionary relate to the first edition, published in his lifetime, and the second, sometime after his death: whatever alterations may have been made by his subsequent editors, I am totally unacquainted with.

**) See Sceptic, Scirrus, Cool, Further, etc.