

**A HISTORY OF ENGLISH SOUNDS FROM  
THE EARLIEST PERIOD: INCLUDING AN  
INVESTIGATION OF THE GENERAL LAWS  
OF SOUND CHANGE, AND FULL WORD  
LISTS; SERIES D. MISCELLANEOUS**

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A history of English sounds from the earliest period: including an investigation of the general laws of sound change, and full word lists; Series D. Miscellaneous by Henry Sweet

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**HENRY SWEET**

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INVESTIGATION OF THE GENERAL LAWS OF SOUND  
CHANGE, AND FULL WORD LISTS.

BY

HENRY SWEET, ESQ.,

MEMBER OF COUNCIL OF THE PHILOLOGICAL AND EARLY ENGLISH TEXT SOCIETIES,  
EDITOR OF THE OLD ENGLISH VERSION OF GREGORY'S CURA PASTORALIS.

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## CONTENTS.

	PAGE
PREFACE, ADDRESSED TO MEMBERS OF THE ENGLISH DIALECT SOCIETY. BY THE REV. W. W. SKEAT . . . . .	v
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
GENERAL LAWS OF SOUND CHANGE . . . . .	6
GENERAL ALPHABETICS . . . . .	19
QUANTITY AND QUALITY IN THE TEUTONIC LANGUAGES . . . . .	24
OLD ENGLISH PERIOD . . . . .	26
MIDDLE ENGLISH PERIOD—	
ORTHOGRAPHY . . . . .	37
VOWEL-LEVELLING . . . . .	38
GENERAL LAWS OF VOWEL CHANGE IN THE MODERN TEUTONIC LANGUAGES . . . . .	40
CLOSE AND OPEN EE AND OO . . . . .	48
UNACCENTED E . . . . .	52
DIPHTHONGS . . . . .	52
CONSONANT INFLUENCE . . . . .	53
MODERN PERIOD—	
LOSS OF FINAL E . . . . .	55
EARLY MODERN PERIOD . . . . .	57
QUANTITY . . . . .	61
CONSONANT INFLUENCE . . . . .	61
TRANSITION PERIOD . . . . .	62
LATE MODERN PERIOD . . . . .	66
QUANTITY . . . . .	67
CONSONANT INFLUENCE . . . . .	67
LATEST MODERN PERIOD . . . . .	69
DIPHTHONGIZATION . . . . .	70
SHORT VOWELS . . . . .	73
QUANTITY . . . . .	73
CONSONANT INFLUENCE . . . . .	74
NOTES ON THE CONSONANTS . . . . .	75
WORD LISTS . . . . .	82
ALPHABETICAL INDEX TO THE LISTS . . . . .	139
SUPPLEMENTARY LISTS OF IRREGULARITIES . . . . .	146
NOTES TO THE WORD LISTS . . . . .	151
ON THE PERIODS OF ENGLISH . . . . .	157
CONCLUDING REMARKS . . . . .	161



## PREFACE.

ADDRESSED TO MEMBERS OF THE ENGLISH DIALECT SOCIETY.

THE History of English Sounds, by Mr. Henry Sweet, was originally written for the London Philological Society, in further illustration of the great work on Early English Pronunciation by Mr. Alexander J. Ellis. Upon application to the Council of the Philological Society, and to the author, permission was at once obtained for making arrangements whereby additional copies of the work should be struck off for the use of members of the English Dialect Society. The importance of it to all who study English sounds, especially such sounds as are frequently well preserved in some of our provincial dialects, will soon become apparent to the careful reader. But as there may be some amongst our members who may not be aware of what has been lately achieved in the study of phonetics, a few words of introduction may not be out of place here.

I have more than once received letters from correspondents who boldly assert that, of some of our dialectal sounds, no representation is possible, and that it is useless to attempt it. Against such a sweeping denunciation of the study of phonetics it would be vain to argue. It may be sufficient merely to remark that precisely the same argument of "impossibility" was used, not so many years ago, against the introduction of the use of steam locomotives upon railways. The opinions of such as are unable to imagine how things which



they cannot do themselves may, nevertheless, be achieved by others, will not be much regarded by such as desire progress and improvement.

It may, however, be conceded that no system of symbols existed which was of sufficient scientific accuracy until the publication of Mr. Melville Bell's singular and wonderful volume entitled—"Visible Speech: the Science of Universal Alphabets: or Self-Interpreting Physiological Letters for the Printing and Writing of all Languages in one Alphabet; elucidated by Theoretical Explanations, Tables, Diagrams, and Examples." Now in this system none of the usual alphabetical characters appear at all, nor is the alphabet founded upon any one language. It is a wholly new collection of symbols, adapted for all or most of the sounds which the human voice is capable of producing, and is founded upon the most strictly scientific principles, each symbol being so chosen as to define the disposition of the organs used in producing the sound which the symbol is intended to represent. How this wonderful result has been achieved, the reader may easily discover for himself, either by consulting that work, or another by the same author which every one interested in the study of phonetics is earnestly recommended to procure, at the cost of only *one shilling*. The title of this latter work, consisting of only sixteen pages in quarto, is:—English Visible Speech for the Million, etc.; by Alex. Melville Bell. London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co.; London and New York: Tribner & Co. A fair and candid examination of this pamphlet will shew the reader, better than any detailed description can do, how the study of sounds has been rendered possible. Every work on phonetics will, no doubt, always be based upon, or have reference to, Mr. Bell's system, and therefore it is the more important that, at the very least, the existence of it should be widely known.

The work of Mr. Ellis is entitled:—On Early English Pronunciation, with especial reference to Shakspeare and Chaucer, by Alexander J. Ellis, F.R.S. The first two parts were published in 1869 by three societies in combination, viz. the Philological Society, the Early English Text Society, and the Chaucer Society; and the third part, by the same societies, in 1870. The work is not yet completed, and the fourth part, not yet published, will contain a full account of our modern English provincial dialects, shewing their distribution and connections. Mr. Ellis employs a system of symbols called *palaeotype*, but, as every one of these has its exact equivalent in Mr. Bell's system, it admits of the same degree of accuracy, and has the advantage of being wholly represented by ordinary printing-types.

The next system is that invented by Mr. Ellis for the *special* representation of English dialectal sounds, and denominated *Glossic*.<sup>1</sup> By the kindness of the author, a copy of the tract upon Glossic is in the hands of every member of our Society. The attention of readers is directed to page 11 of that tract, where the thirty-six vowels of Mr. Bell's Visible Speech have their equivalent values in Glossic properly tabulated.

In Mr. Sweet's volume, now in the reader's hands, the corresponding table of vowel-sounds is given at page 5, and one principal object of this short Preface is to shew how Mr. Sweet's symbols and the 'Glossic' symbols agree together, and how, again, each table agrees with that of Mr. Bell.

I shall refer, then, to the three tables as given at p. 5 of Mr. Sweet's book, at p. 11 of the Glossic tract, and at p. 8 of Visible Speech for the Million. See also p. 14 of Mr. Ellis's Early English Pronunciation.

<sup>1</sup> The system called *Glossotype*, illustrated at p. 16 of Mr. Ellis's Early English Pronunciation, may be considered as now *cancelled*, and superseded by *Glossic*.

Mr. Ellis and Mr. Sweet agree with Mr. Bell in their use of the terms *High*, *Mid*, and *Low*; in their use of the terms *Back*, *Mixed*, and *Front*; and in their use of the terms *Wide* and *Wide-round*. The only difference is that Mr. Sweet uses the term *Narrow* instead of *Primary* (see page 4, note 1), and also uses the more exact term *Narrow-round* in place of what Mr. Ellis calls *Round* simply. As Mr. Sweet has numbered his sounds, it is easy to tabulate the correspondence of the systems in the following manner. I denote here Mr. Sweet's sounds by the number only, and include the Glossic symbol within square brackets, in the usual manner.

1. [uə].	4. [ea].	7. [rɛ].		10. [U].	13. [ɪ].	16. [i].
2. [UU].	5. [v].	8. [aɪ].		11. [aa].	14. [A'].	17. [ɛ].
3. [ua].	6. [uə].	9. [AE].		12. [AII].	15. [E'].	18. [A].
19. [oo].	22. [uɪ].	25. [uɛ].		28. [oo].	31. [uo'].	34. [UE].
20. [oa].	23. [oə].	26. [EO].		29. [AO].	32. [ao'].	35. [OE].
21. [ac].	24. [aɪ].	27. [eo'].		30. [o].	33. [e'].	36. [oe'].

Now it should be clearly understood that these two systems are both perfectly exact, because both refer to the same positions of the organs of voice; but, as soon as these sounds come to be described by illustrative examples, a few slight apparent discrepancies arise, solely from a difference of individual pronunciation, even in the case of common 'key-words.' I believe I am correct in saying that even Mr. Bell's 'key-words' do not represent to everybody the exact sounds intended, but are better understood by a North-country man than by a resident in London. Mr. Ellis describes this difficulty in the following words: "At the latter end of his treatise Mr. Melville Bell has given in to the practice of key-words, and assigned them to his symbols. Let the reader be careful not to take the value of his symbol from his own pronunciation of the key-words, or from any other person's. Let him first determine the value of the symbol from the