

**MIND YOUR H'S  
AND TAKE CARE OF  
YOUR R'S**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649247073

Mind your h's and take care of your r's by Charles William Smith

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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MIND YOUR H's  
AND  
TAKE CARE OF YOUR R's.  
—  
EXERCISES  
FOR  
*Acquiring the Use & Correcting the Abuse*  
OF THE  
LETTER H.

WITH OBSERVATIONS AND ADDITIONAL EXERCISES ON  
THE LETTER R.

By CHARLES WILLIAM SMITH,

PROFESSOR OF ELOCUTION,

Author of "Clerical Elocution," "Common Blunders in Speaking and Writing Corrected,"  
&c.

"'Twas whisper'd in heaven, 'twas mutter'd in hell,  
And e'en caught faintly the sound as it fell:  
On the confines of earth 'twas permitted to rest,  
And the depths of the ocean its presence confess'd.  
'Twill be found in the sphere when 'tis riven asunder,  
Be seen in the lightning, and heard in the thunder.  
'Twas allotted to man with his earliest breath,  
Attends at his birth, and awaits him in death:  
It presides o'er his happiness, honour, and health,  
Is the prop of his home, and the end of his wealth.  
Without it the soldier and seaman may roam,  
But woe to the wretch who expels it from home.  
In the whispers of conscience its voice will be found,  
Nor e'en in the whirlwind of passion be drown'd.  
'Twill not soften the heart, and tho' deaf be the ear,  
'Twill make it acutely and instantly hear.  
But in the shade let it rest, like a dull-eye'd flower—  
Oh! breathe on it softly, it dies in an hour." BRAUN.

LONDON:  
LOCKWOOD & CO., 7, STATIONERS' HALL COURT.  
—  
1866.

Letters for the Author are requested to be sent, under cover, to the care of Mr. GEORGE WARSON, Printer, 5, Kirby Street, Hatton Garden, London, E.C.

*Entered at Stationers' Hall.*

EXERCISES  
FOR  
ACQUIRING THE USE  
AND  
CORRECTING THE ABUSE  
OF THE  
ASPIRATE.

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Of the numerous vices of pronunciation which mar the general delivery of the English language, and make it, perhaps, the most ill-spoken language in the world, the abuse of the aspirate is at once the most common, the most vulgar, and the least excusable. I say the least excusable because it does not arise from any organic defect, or even from any difficulty in its utterance as is sometimes the case with the letter *r*, for the very persons who most frequently omit the *h* where it should be sounded, often prefix it with great force to words beginning with vowels.

Faults in aspiration may be divided into five classes.

1st. Omitting the aspirate in all places where it should be given, not only at the beginning of words, but also after the *w*, and in the middle of words. This general omission is the grossest form of the fault except the

2nd., which consists in prefixing an aspiration, more or less strong, to words beginning with vowels, and sounding *h* in the few words in which it should be silent. Although those who commit the first fault *may not* commit the second, those who commit the second generally, I think I may say always, commit the first. The second fault I consider to be the extreme of *vulgarity* in pronunciation; while the first, bad as it is, is more a sign of neglected education or great carelessness in speech.

3rd. Omitting the aspirate after *w*. This is a fault much less in degree, but still highly detrimental to correct pronunciation, and is committed, by the majority of educated people, through pure negligence. See p. 23.

4th. Omitting the aspirate when it should be given in the *middle* of a word. The preceding remarks equally apply to this fault. See p. 20.

5th. Omitting the aspirate in combinations of small words. See p. 19.

These defects sometimes occasion ludicrous and even serious mistakes, of which numerous anecdotes are told at the expense of the Londoner, although they are equally characteristic of the vulgar and the uneducated in all parts of England. But it is not my design to manufacture a book out of such stories, which, however amusing to those who fondly imagine themselves to be free from faults in pronunciation, are of no use towards correcting such faults. He must, indeed, be uncommonly stupid or grossly ignorant who cannot at once see the great importance of the proper use of the aspirate, upon his defect being pointed out to him by a friend who will take the trouble to repeat a few sentences, each at first improperly, and then correctly.



When the aspirate is omitted, it materially affects the energy of the speaker, the expression of emotions and passions often depending, in a great measure, upon the degree of power with which the aspirate is uttered. This is very apparent in such words as hark, hush, heave, hope, howl, havoc, &c., and becomes strikingly so when Italian words derived from Latin words beginning with *h* are compared with English words derived from the same source, as *orrore*, *horror*, from the Latin *horreo* I dread, *umano*, *human*, Latin *humanus*—the Italian language being without the aspirate. Through this deficiency the language already soft in the extreme would become absolutely effeminate, but for the prevalence and power of the *r*, which the Italians give with a strength and vibration that cause it to form, as it were, a backbone to the language. Consonants may be styled the bones of a language, and vowels its flesh. As for perfect beauty of form in the human figure, both are required in due proportion, so are they to beauty of sound in a language. The English language, independently of its copiousness, &c., is in this respect nearer to perfection than any other modern tongue, and next after the Greek; I mean in sound, for our language is not the same in sound, when well spoken, as it appears upon paper. The English language is most expressive if properly spoken. It abounds in words which seem to paint the thing for which they stand. Of its many elements of strength the aspirate and the *r* are the most important, but unfortunately they are most villainously abused by the vulgar, the uneducated, and the refined. The two former either leave out the aspirate where it should be given, or prefix it where it should not be given—many committing both faults, while the last drop the *r*, or convert it into *w*. One robs his “am” to enrich his “hegg,” while the other “wenders himself wemarkably widiculous” by his senseless

affectation. I know not which is the worse, the Wellerism of the East or the Dundrearyism of the West. "O reform it altogether." I wish I could, but as I cannot, I address myself to those who, conscious of this imperfection, wish to correct their faults, and to the rising generation, for there are immense numbers of educated persons who, from bad habit and carelessness, abuse the aspirate more or less.

By the way, I may as well caution my readers against the theatrical mode of pronouncing the letter *r*, for on the stage its sound is often exaggerated, not only by inferior actors, but also by many of superior talent.

I have never heard but of one direction given for the correction of this bugbear of English pronunciation—namely, "mind your *h*'s." This is very easily said, but very difficult to follow by those in whom the fault—originating, probably, in a careless nurse, or ill-speaking companions—has, from neglect, become a habit. They will most likely mistake loudness for aspiration, as, on the other hand, many clergymen in church, and others speaking for the first time in a large building, and having rather weak or unpractised voices, have astonished their hearers by unnecessarily aspirating words in public which they would not so mispronounce in private society. This arises from an instinctive effort to be better heard. Not having sufficient power of voice, or not knowing how to use the power they possess, these gentlemen mistake aspiration for loudness as others mistake loudness for aspiration.

It is much easier for those who have fallen into bad habits to aspirate when speaking loud and high, than when soft and low, and less difficult to avoid prefixing the aspirate before vowels when speaking soft and low than when loud and high. I have, therefore, directed the respective exercises to be practised in different

degrees of power and pitch, the aspirated words being commenced loud and high and decreased in loudness and lowered in pitch on subsequent utterances; while words beginning with a vowel or a silent *h* are to be commenced soft and low, and the power increased and the pitch raised upon the following utterances.

I must remark that it is a common mistake to confound *pitch* with *power*. *High* and *low* refer to the degrees of pitch, or the acuteness and gravity of sounds, and *loud* and *soft* to the degrees of power. You may speak in a large room upon the *lowest* pitch of your voice, and be heard if you use sufficient power, and upon your *highest* pitch in a small room without annoying your hearers, if you use power only sufficient to fill the place. The power or *loudness* should be proportioned to the size of the place in which you speak, and the number of the audience—much clothing, especially woollen, absorbing sound—and the *pitch* according to the expression of the language.

I must also observe that although in practising the exercises the aspirate is to be given strongly, in ordinary speaking all effort should be avoided. He who labours at his *h*'s betrays the consciousness of defect.

Smart says:—"It is sometimes denied that *h* is properly called a consonant;—*h* is a strong propulsion of breath unvocalized, which becomes vocal in the vowel element that follows;—whether this is a consonant, depends on what we choose shall be the definition of a consonant; a point of no moment, if the nature and effect of *h* is practically understood."

Professor Day, of Yale College, Connecticut, speaking of the orotund, guttural, and aspirated *qualities* of voice, says:—"The aspirated voice is simply the emission of vocalized with unvocalized breath. The function of the