

**A PRACTICAL AND
THEORETICAL
ANALYSIS OF MODERN
FRENCH PRONUNCIATION**

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A practical and theoretical analysis of modern French pronunciation by Charles Heron-Wall

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CHARLES HERON-WALL

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A
PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL ANALYSIS
OF
MODERN
FRENCH PRONUNCIATION:

PRINCIPALLY INTENDED FOR THE USE OF
PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

BY
CHARLES HÉRON-WALL (*of Paris*),
BRIGHTON COLLEGE.

"Qu'il sache qu'il sait au moins.—Savoir par cœur n'est pas
savoir; ce qu'on sait droitement, on en dispose."—MONTAIGNE.



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P R E F A C E.

THE following treatise is especially intended for classes in public schools. It is hoped that with it a master may not only economise the small amount of time, which can generally be devoted to the subject of French pronunciation, but that he may render it a more intellectual and interesting study.

I have not attempted the impossible task of trying to arrive at the pronunciation of French by comparison with English words. Almost all the French vowel-sounds, and some of the consonant sounds, differ essentially from the English, and can be learnt by the ear ONLY. The difference of accent would also be an insurmountable obstacle.

There is no doubt that the chief cause of failure in the teaching of French pronunciation is the absence of system. When plenty of time and attention can be given, this want will not be so apparent, because the pupil may, by constantly hearing and repeating the same sounds, become familiar with the pronunciation of the French language in the same way that he has learned that of his native tongue; but when only an hour or two can be given every week to the subject, I think that much will be gained by careful attention to a well-considered plan; for information which is methodically given, and the reason of which is pointed out, will not only be easily acquired, but

more surely retained and more readily turned to account.*

The plan which experience has shown me to be best is this:—

First. To settle the division of syllables.

Secondly. To master the elements of these syllables.

Thirdly. To determine the pronunciation of any word that may arise by a series of rules, not too elaborate or artificial, and yet sufficiently long and systematic to ensure perfect accuracy.

If it be objected that such a method is not practicable, I can only say that I have employed it for a long time, and with uniform success. It need scarcely be said that any attempt at teaching pronunciation by rule merely would be absurd—abundant illustration must, of course, be employed. Any reading-book that may be in use will answer the purpose.

The acknowledged irregularity of the English pronunciation would, I think, render such a scheme impossible in that language.

In using the book with beginners, the mode which I have found most effective is as follows:—

After going through the rules for the Division of

* If we observe how little *individual practice* each pupil of a class can get, we may more strongly feel the importance of utilising to the utmost the time supposed to be employed in listening. Imagine a class of twenty boys—a very low average in public schools—with two hours a week for forty weeks. Without allowing anything for the time required in explanation, for unavoidable loss of time, &c., this would give four hours only to each pupil in the course of a year.

Syllables (§ 1, § 2) the pupils should be practised in the section marked ** (§ 5), until they are able not only to give perfectly the pronunciation of each model-word with its corresponding vowel-sounds, but are also able to write them down with facility, from the master's dictation. Both these ends will be easily attained by short lessons of ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, continued at intervals during a month or two.

In the mean time the rules marked * ought to be studied. The remainder may be simply referred to when a difficulty arises. A few of the rules, although essential to make the work complete, will be rarely wanted, as they relate to cases in which mistakes are seldom made.

Pupils who have already attained, by other means, to some proficiency in French pronunciation, may find it sufficient to use the book for the purpose of reference. I have found, however, the special study of some portion to be of great service.

The matter in the Appendix, to which the small numbers refer, is quite independent of the rest, and consists of information not generally wanted for ordinary teaching; much of it, however, will be found useful, even to young boys, for the purpose of illustration.

The lists of exceptions have been generally arranged in such a way as to render them easy to be committed to memory; *e. g.* in (§ 16 *b*) the words are so placed that their initials will form a memorial word, and in

(§ 37 n 2) one word will by its meaning, more or less, suggest the next. Other instances will be observed.

The letters,—both vowels and consonants,—are classified according to their sound, and not according to their position in the alphabet.

As much confusion and contradiction exist upon the meaning of the words vowel and diphthong, it was impossible to avoid the somewhat difficult definitions given in § 3 and § 4.

None but modern authors of acknowledged merit have been given as authorities. Nodier, Poitevin, Bescherelle, and Littré, are names well known even in England. Guérard, whom I have quoted several times, is spoken of, in the highest terms of praise, by Littré in the Preface to his large Dictionary, now in the course of publication by Hachette. Other authors of equal standing have been mentioned once or twice.

C. H-W.

*The College, Brighton,
November, 1867.*

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