

**LATIN PRONUNCIATION:
A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE
ROMAN, CONTINENTAL
AND ENGLISH METHODS**

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Latin Pronunciation: A Brief Outline of the Roman, Continental and English Methods by D. B. King

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A BRIEF OUTLINE

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ROMAN, CONTINENTAL, AND ENGLISH METHODS,

BY

David Bennett
D. B. KING,

ADJUNCT PROFESSOR OF LATIN IN LAFAYETTE COLLEGE.

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PREFACE.

THE following pages contain a few explanatory and historical paragraphs on the Roman, Continental, and English methods of pronouncing Latin, and a brief presentation of the main features of each.

The character and arrangement of the studies in English and Comparative Philology at Lafayette College make it desirable that students should have a knowledge of both the Roman and the English methods. The students are carefully taught in practice to use the English method, and to give the rules for the sound of the letters, this having been found a valuable aid in teaching English Pronunciation and the Philology of the English language. A knowledge of the Roman method, giving the sounds, in the main, as we believe Cicero and Virgil gave them, is required, as a matter of historical information and culture, and as an important aid in determining the derivations of words and the laws of phonetic change, and in illustrating the principles of Comparative Philology.

We have therefore needed for the use of our students a somewhat fuller presentation of both methods than is

found in the grammars in common use. I have thought that a brief outline of the *three* methods used in this country might be of some interest and value to those who are learning to pronounce Latin,—supplementing the facts given in the ordinary grammars,—and to those who desire some general information on the subject.

D. B. K.

LAFAYETTE COLLEGE,
Easton, Pa., *January 27, 1880.*

THE ROMAN METHOD.

THE Roman method aims to give the letters the same sounds as were heard from educated speakers in the Augustan period. The chief means of ascertaining these sounds are: (1) The statements of ancient writers, — particularly the grammarians; (2) The traditions of scholars, — particularly the monks; (3) The Greek representations of the Latin sounds; (4) The orthography of the language itself; (5) The pronunciation of the Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and French, — the descendants of the Latin; and, (6) The general principles of Phonology.

(1) Varro, Cicero, Quintilian, Velius Longus, and many other writers have undertaken to describe or have made incidental allusions to the sounds of the letters. These writers, it seems, knew comparatively little about the physiology of the organs of speech and the laws of Phonology. This lack of knowledge, added to the difficulty always found of intelligibly describing vocal sounds, and the obscure and sometimes apparently contradictory statements of the writers, some of whom lived centuries apart, makes corroborative testimony from other sources quite necessary.

(2) The natural tendency to conform the sounds of the letters of another language to the sounds of the same letters similarly situated in one's own speech, makes the traditional pronunciation rather unreliable. The constant and unbroken use of the Latin, in the services of the Roman church, makes a tradition of some value, though the priests no doubt very often conformed the pronunciation of the Latin to their own

vernaculars, as we find them doing now. The rhymes of the Latin hymns belong to so recent a period as to be of scarcely any value in determining the pronunciation of the Augustan Latin.

(3) The Greek representations of the Latin sounds are a great aid in determining the character of the latter, and would be still more valuable if we knew just how the Greeks pronounced all the letters.

(4) It is generally conceded that the orthography of the Latin was for the most part phonetic. No doubt there were many exceptions, and, we know, there were not a few variations and changes from time to time. Julius Cæsar, Augustus, and Claudius revised the orthography in the direction of the phonetic method. And yet we find inscriptions and misspellings—apparently phonetic—differing from the established orthography (“Cacography is always a surer guide to pronunciation than orthography.”—ELLIS). It may be that these variations in spelling sometimes indicate different pronunciations, rather than differences between the accepted orthography and the phonetic representation of the common pronunciation. What we know of Latin orthography applies mainly to the first century of the Christian Era. We do not have full and accurate information in regard to the orthography of Cicero and Virgil.

(5) Some consideration must be given to the sounds of the letters as heard in the words—mostly proper names—preserved entire in the lineal descendents of the Latin, particularly in the Italian. It cannot, of course, be assumed that the exact sounds have been preserved unchanged, even where the orthography is precisely the same in the Latin and in one or more of the Romance languages, any more than it follows that words spelled alike by Chaucer and Shakespeare were pronounced exactly alike by both.

(6) The general principles of Phonology, and the laws of change derived from the study and comparison of the languages of the Indo-European family, are a very valuable aid in deciding doubtful points and correcting errors into which other clews might lead.

During the past thirty years, there has been much careful and profound investigation into these sources of information, and very diligent comparison of the knowledge obtained. Corssen in Germany, Roby, Ellis, Munro, and Palmer in England, and Haldeman, Blair, Richardson, and others in this country have wrought wonders in elucidating obscure points, and have, without doubt, succeeded in bringing to light the main features of the Augustan pronunciation. The ordinary sounds of most of the letters have been ascertained. A few points, however, are still in doubt. There were probably many exceptions and variations and changes from time to time, as there are in all languages. Scientific phonologists, who are accustomed to note and measure with great nicety very slight differences of sound, will probably never be fully able to agree in regard to the precise sounds of some of the letters, though additional facts may be brought out by their discussions. The knowledge already obtained enables us to form a much better idea of the rhythm and harmony of the grand old Latin, and is of great interest and value to archaeologists and philologists. Many still prefer the English method for practical purposes. No one, however, who lays claim to Latin scholarship, should be ignorant of the leading features of the Roman.

A few years ago considerable interest in the adoption of a reformed method of pronunciation sprung up in England. The syllabus of Professors Munro and Palmer was issued at the request of the head masters of the grammar schools, and some effort was made to introduce the new system. The