

**A PRIMER OF
FRENCH
PRONUNCIATION**

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A Primer of French Pronunciation by John E. Matzke

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PREFACE.

WITH this new edition the Primer of French Pronunciation appears in an entirely new form. Eight years ago, when I prepared the first edition, no phonetic alphabet presented especial claims for adoption, and believing that no distinction ought to be made between the practical and the scientific study of the language in this regard, I selected the alphabet with which students of the history of French are familiar the world over. Since then, however, the Michaelis-Passy Dictionary has been published and the alphabet of the Association Phonétique has been used in such practical books as the Fraser and Squair French Grammar and the recent International French-English Dictionary, so that the choice is really no longer an open one. If we are to succeed in the difficult task of teaching an intelligent pronunciation of the language, we must work in unison. The alphabet of the Association Phonétique is open to criticism, but so are other alphabets as well, and, whatever their final value may be, it certainly is poor method to introduce the discussion into the Freshman class or the High School. Here the form of the phonetic symbols may be conceded as immaterial, provided they permit a fairly accurate picture

of French pronunciation. And it is with this practical end in view, and for the purpose of making this little Primer work in harmony with other recent helps for the study of French, that I have prepared the present edition.

That French pronunciation presents serious difficulties to English-speaking students is an apparent fact, while it is also a truism now to say that the only way to teach the subject is on the basis of phonetics. However, the difficulties are of various kinds and not all are equally great.

There is in the first place the physical difficulty. The ear fails to catch unfamiliar shades of sounds and the muscles of the mouth are not able to reproduce them. Here, it goes without saying, the phonetic alphabet can be of little help. There are various devices that may be employed, but on the whole the difficulty remains the same. The student's ear and muscles must be trained, and only constant and faithful practice under experienced guidance can give results.

The phonetic alphabet is, however, especially adapted to meet another class of difficulties, which is not of the muscles of the mouth or of the ear, but of the understanding. I mean the ability to differentiate an open from a closed vowel, to know which letters to pronounce and which to leave silent, to treat the mute *e* correctly, and to make the proper liaisons, in other words to show a general intelligent handling of the French alphabet and the printed page, to give evidence of a proper appreciation of

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the difficulties to be overcome and to understand the aid to be sought in the dictionaries. Here a phonetic transcription presents the surest and the quickest road, and here lies the claim of books such as the present for introduction into all French courses.

I take this opportunity to appeal to teachers of French to give this method a trial. It does not apply to young children, but it can and should be used with all students mature enough to separate the sound of the letter from its written form, and these are found in all High Schools, Colleges, and Universities. If the teachers of such students will give the book a sympathetic trial, they may wish to change its method, but they will not wish to give up the system.

Naturally the book will need a thoughtful application. The object has been to teach the student how to turn a printed page into a phonetic transcription. If this can be done accurately, the battle is won and constant oral practice will do the rest. Usually in similar books the phonetic alphabet is explained and connected passages are at once practised. Experience has shown that this method attacks merely the first of the difficulties mentioned above, but affords practically no relief for the second. In the present book, therefore, the subject is presented in chapters graded as much as possible, the object always being to show the application of the phonetic to the ordinary alphabet. To take the whole book in course, before the study of Grammar is begun, will entail a waste of effort. The essentials should be studied first, and details filled in later.

Beginning with the consonants the study should be concentrated first upon the phonetic alphabet as such, without reference to the usual orthographic representation of these sounds. When, through the study of the examples and the Illustrative Sentences, the student has learned to read phonetic script, which can be accomplished during the first week, the study of syllabication, of the orthoepic rules and quantity should be taken up and continued in small but constant amounts as an accompaniment to the study of the Grammar. At the proper time a portion of the Prose Composition or the Reading Lesson can be written out in script. Errors of pronunciation should always be corrected for both the ear and the eye by pronouncing the word and writing it in script on the blackboard, and above all the subject should not be allowed to drop when the Primer has been gone over in main outline.

The vocabulary of this book has not been selected with any particular point in view beyond that of illustrating the rules in question. Some rare words have necessarily been included, and other very familiar words are absent. On the whole, however, the list is fairly representative and together with the orthoepic rules will serve its purpose of making the student independent.

As in the first edition, I have dismissed all phonetic minutiae in the practical interests of simplicity. Much that a more minute marking can indicate will take care of itself, if the essentials of pronunciation are properly handled, as for instance the value of half-

long and intermediate vowels. A few indications have, however, been given at the proper places, which it is hoped will call sufficient attention to the matter without adding details excluded by the alphabet of the Association Phonétique.

I add the titles of a few books on French pronunciation which will be found helpful to teachers and students. Of this list the work of the Abbé Rousselot and particularly the Michaelis-Passy Dictionary will be found to be almost indispensable books of reference for the successful study of this subject.

Passy—*Les Sons du Français*, Paris, Firmin-Didot.
Koschwitz—*Les Parlers Parisiens*, Paris, Welter, 1896.

Rambeau-Passy—*Chrestomathie Française*, New York, Holt, 1897.

Lesaint—*Traité complet de la Prononciation Française*, Halle, Gesenius, 1890.

Rousselot et Laclotte—*Précis de la Prononciation Française*, Paris, Welter, 1903.

Hatzfeld-Darmesteter-Thomas — *Dictionnaire Général de la Langue Française*, Paris, Delagrave.

Michaelis-Passy—*Dictionnaire Phonétique*, Hanovre, Meyer, 1897.

The International French-English Dictionary, New York, Hinds, Noble & Eldredge, 1904.

J. E. M.

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