

**AN ENDEAVOR  
TOWARDS A  
UNIVERSAL ALPHABET**

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An Endeavor Towards a Universal Alphabet by A. D. Sproat

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**A. D. SPROAT**

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No. 5  
AN ENDEAVOR

TOWARDS A

UNIVERSAL ALPHABET,

WHICH SHALL HAVE A LETTER FOR EVERY DISTINCT SOUND AND ARTICULATION  
UTTERABLE BY THE HUMAN VOICE;

WHICH SHALL HAVE A DISTINCTIVE FORM FOR EACH LETTER, THAT SHALL RE-  
SEMBLE NO OTHER, UNLESS IT IS SIMILAR IN POWER;

WHICH SHALL RETAIN THAT DISTINCTIVE AND ESSENTIAL FORM OF EACH LETTER,  
THROUGHOUT THE RANGE OF AND CHANGES FOR CAPITAL AND BODY,  
OR LOWER CASE PRINTING LETTERS, CAPITAL AND BODY  
ROUND WRITING LETTERS, AND SHORT  
WRITING LETTERS;

AND WHICH SHALL FORM THE BASIS OF AN EASY, PRACTICAL SYSTEM, ADAPTED  
TO ALL KINDS OF PRINTING AND WRITING.

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BY A. D. SPROAT,  
CHILLICOTHE, OHIO.

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CHILLICOTHE:  
PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHOR.  
1857.



## ADVERTISEMENT.

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*To Publishers, and friends of the Spelling Reform :*

THE change from the present heterogeneous ways of spelling to the phonetic mode, necessarily produces a very considerable change in the Alphabet. Phoneticians endeavor to make this change as little as possible, by using nearly all the Roman letters, and adding enough new ones, or making slight changes in the old ones, so as to fill out the complement of a list of all the sounds. But even this involves a great change.

It is certain that a person having an English education can learn to read Phonotypy, as it has heretofore been proposed, sooner than he can learn an entirely new alphabet, and read by it. Now, is this advantage (a superficial and temporary one), and any other advantages that can be named, which an emended Roman alphabet may have over a new one (an AMERICAN ALPHABET), of sufficient importance to countervail the serious disadvantages connected with it? This is the question which I wish to bring emphatically before you. Please turn to numbers 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, in the body of this work, for the reasons why we should have *but one alphabet*; and suffer me to say here, that any enterprise of this kind which employs more than one alphabet, however successful it may be in its inception, *will not stand the test of time*. Why, then, put up with amendments? Why not make the reform a thorough and permanent one, at once?

While this work was being put in type, I have become aware that a variation of Pitman's Phonography is taught in England, called Phonical Stenography. The Printing Schemes, as now proposed in England and America, are variant, and have been changing ever since Phonotypy became agitated. The language of the two countries not only should, but *must* be the same; and not in its spoken form alone, or written form alone, but in both. Nothing, therefore, in this printing and writing reform is yet fixed; and although considerable outlays in types and books have been made, no one can reasonably hope or even wish for the success of his scheme, when satisfied it is far behind what is easily attainable.

It is said that there must be a time when changes shall cease: when we must settle down on some plan, and keep to it. True; but we must first *have a plan*, and one on which the great body of those who speak our language can be made to settle.

I claim superiority for my system, on the following points:

1st. I claim that my tables of vocal and consonant elements are

either perfect, or, if they should not be deemed so, that they are nearer the truth than any heretofore proposed.

2d. I claim that my Alphabet (the table of forms appropriated to the elements) is by far the best and most practical one yet devised for all purposes of printing, and round or long hand writing; and this without reference to its connection with brief writing. For reasons for this superiority, see Nos. 8 and 9.

3d. I claim that my Brief Writing, in its recording stage, is superior to Pitman's, or any other, in its adaptation to all purposes of short hand, save that of reporting, by showing the exact sounds of words, in a plain, lineal, and easy manner, not depending on thickening the letters, or on minute turns, which cannot be shown with a pencil, or dull pen. See No. 150, and plate No. 3.

4th. I believe that my system of writing, in its reporting stage, is, or can very easily be made, equal, if not superior, to Pitman's, even as to brevity. By brevity I mean the quickness with which a word can be written, and not the shortness of the strokes. As Mr. Pitman's Phonography is considered to be the shortest and best now known, I have made a comparison between his and mine, in plate No. 4. Many words can be written shorter by his system than by mine, and *vice versa*. I think that any regular piece of composition, containing a dozen lines or more, where all the words are to be written out, or plainly and separately designated, can be done by my system shorter than by his. See No. 151.

5th. I claim that my system, as a whole, although it may be imperfect, is still integral, and far in advance of any yet proposed. I solicit investigation of the above claims, by those who are competent to judge.

This little work has cost me much labor. I offer it to the public free of copy-right, feeling that I have but little pecuniary interest in its success. But I do feel a very considerable interest as an author and philanthropist, in having its merits and demerits fully canvassed. If any one shall put forward a better system, or shall make improvements in mine, I shall wish him God speed.

The recital of the foregoing claims may appear arrogant and egotistical. I have made them with the view of eliciting investigation, and thereby inducing some publisher, or some society, after examining my system, to undertake its advocacy, in a monthly paper. To do this properly, will involve a considerable outlay for matrices for the new type, &c. The journal should receive and publish suggestions and corrections from all who felt interested; so that, before the final adoption of any system or plan, the relative merits of all should be thoroughly discussed, and the best one rendered as perfect as man can make it. I can spare neither time nor money to conduct these matters, and must leave them to others.

AMASA D. SPROAT.

Chillicothe, Ohio, January, 1857.



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TOWARDS  
A UNIVERSAL ALPHABET.

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INTRODUCTION.

PROMINENT among the improvements soon to come into use, will be the substitution of a new, or at least of a corrected and extended alphabet, for our present one; and the consequent abrogation of our abnormal ways of spelling. Subsequent to this, (it may be long in the future,) will be the regulation to some extent, of our language. That art by which all other arts are made known and their knowledge perpetuated, and by which, next to reason, we are distinguished from brutes; the medium of our social intercourse, and thereby, in a great measure, of our civilization and happiness; and above all, the medium through which the Word of the Lord is communicated to us, has been, as respects any sophical amendments in its construction, or attempt at any, almost entirely neglected. It has been left to tumble into shape, to drift, to stretch, as ignorance, chance, or caprice, might sway it.

2. Our own loved English, rough, irregular, redundant, and defective as it is, we would not exchange for any other tongue on earth, either ancient or modern. But it has faults which need correcting, such as pronouncing different words alike, and irregularities in tenses; and probably it has a few deficiencies which should be supplied. We do not want the machinery of Greek or Latin conjugations and declensions, but we think that short terminals to verbs to note their moods and tenses, and to substantives for their numbers and genders, might be employed

with considerable advantage. Endings might be arranged so as to show the parts of speech, and give definiteness to the meaning, as -ing, -ed, -ly, -tion, -ness, &c. do now; and so as frequently to enable one word to express what is now done by several. Such innovations being based on a few simple rules, might be learned by any person in a few hours.

3. The regularity, beauty, and power of the Greek and Latin languages, their grammatical construction, particularly in their declensions and conjugations, prove that they were set in order by men of science. Many of their radical words were drawn from other tongues; some might have sprung up fortuitously; yet no chance convention of children, or ignorant barbarians, could have produced the harmony and order we see reigning there. Their writing too, we have every reason to believe, was strictly phonetic, except that they had two or three double letters.\* How sadly have we departed from this plain and simple way of expressing speech on paper! What years of toil does this departure cause our youth to endure!

4. No living language is stationary. Ours is not, and can not be made so; therefore improvements ought not to be so much regretted, or opposed simply on account of the change. I deem it impracticable in the present state of religion and science, for men to form a good philosophical language; a perfect one would be out of the question; and therefore I would correct our own as a man amends his life, which is not by jumping at once into a new one, but by gradually reforming the present.

5. But not so with improvements in the Alphabet and mode of spelling. Here the change, when made at all, should be a thorough one. It should leap at once from the present deficient alphabet and heterogeneous modes of spelling, to the most perfect means of recording words that can be devised.

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\* The rule adopted by our Latin grammars, of pronouncing *c* and *g* *soft*, as it is called, before *e*, *i* and *y*, and pronouncing *æ*, *œ* and *e* alike, has always seemed to me absurd. We have no evidence that the Romans ever perpetrated any such jumble; but have every reason to suppose that with them *c* and *g* were always hard, and that their single vowels indicated simple sounds, and when two vowels came together, that both were sounded and formed a diphthong.

6. To write speech by having and using a separate letter for each and every distinct articulate sound, or element spoken; to always express each element in writing or printing by its own proper letter, and by that alone; and to set down the letters in the same order in which the elements are uttered, are principles so plain, so natural, so easy to be learned, and which dispense at once with such an immense amount of disadvantage pertaining to the present system of spelling, that they must ultimately prevail.\*

7. Writers on Phonetics, as far as I have noticed, have taken great pains to depict the advantages of Phonetic spelling over the common orthography. They, however, adopt the present letters as far as they go, adding a few new ones, or new parts to old ones, to complete the list. Two reasons are assigned for this course: The first is they wish to retain the old letters, so that the present generation may be able to read the new way with little trouble. Grave as this consideration may look, it is really but a slight one. A man can learn a phonetic alphabet which is altogether new to him, and learn how to read with it in a few hours; a labor insignificant in comparison with even the slightest advantage in an alphabet intended to spread over the world, and endure for ages. There is no advantage to the learner, in retaining a letter as to its shape, and changing its character. We may retain the letter e, but when we restrict it to one of the many sounds it now stands for, we in fact make a new letter of it. I have found it occasioned me more trouble and more labor to learn and remember that a particular sound belongs to the printing a, and another particular sound to the written form, *α*, than to attach those particular sounds to new characters, because in this latter case the other sounds of the letter a are not constantly occurring to my mind to bother me. The other reason for retaining the old letters is that the old

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\*Although our table of elements and the characters representing them, are to be in strict conformity with these precepts, yet a departure from them is convenient in common printing and writing, and even necessary in brief writing, so far as to combine two or more elements which are frequently associated in words, in one letter. Such letters will be called double, or composite letters.