

**A BIOGRAPHICAL
SKETCH OF SIR ISAAC
PITMAN: ILLUSTRATED**

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A Biographical Sketch of Sir Isaac Pitman: Illustrated by Various

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PITMAN: ILLUSTRATED**



SIR ISAAC PITMAN
(1812-1897).

A
Biographical Sketch
OF
Sir Isaac Pitman

ILLUSTRATED



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A
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
OF
SIR ISAAC PITMAN.



ISAAC PITMAN was born at Trowbridge, a Wiltshire town ten miles east of Bath, on 4th January, 1813, and the first eighteen years of his life were spent at his birthplace. The town is largely occupied in the manufacture of cloth, and his father, Samuel Pitman (b. 1787. d. 1863), was an overseer in a cloth factory. He received his early education in the Trowbridge Grammar School. Owing, however, to the fact that the ill-ventilated schoolroom proved prejudicial to his health, he left the school in his thirteenth year. Educational facilities were far less common then than in the present day, but his father provided those opportunities for further study which are now so easily accessible to every class. The services of a teacher were secured, and a home evening school carried on; in addition, standard works were obtained from London for the use of the family. Isaac Pitman was an earnest student, and not only made himself acquainted with the writings of our great authors, but mastered several branches of knowledge, including Greek. The book, however, which more than any other was destined to have an influence on his life's work, was "Walker's

Dictionary." He made a close study of this volume, and especially of the "Principles of English Pronunciation," formulated by the author.

After leaving school he occupied a stool in the counting-house of the factory in which his father was manager, and subsequently filled a similar position in his father's counting-house, when the latter became a manufacturer. In August, 1831, it was decided that he should become a school teacher, and he left his home for a course of training at the British and Foreign School Society's College, Borough Road, London. Of his nine brothers and sisters, five became teachers in addition to himself. In January, 1832, at the age of nineteen, he was sent to take charge of an endowed school at Barton-on-Humber, a market town in North Lincolnshire, six miles southwest of Hull. Four years later he removed, in January, 1836, to the Gloucestershire town of Wotton-under-Edge. Here, under a Nonconformist School Committee, he established and conducted with success a school on the British and Foreign School system.

The circumstances which led Isaac Pitman to direct his attention to the invention of a new system of shorthand were thus related by himself. In speaking on the subject to an assembly of phonographers eight years later, at a time when the writers of the new system formed already a large and powerful body, he explained that he wrote Taylor's system of shorthand for about seven years, and desired that an art that had proved so useful to himself in the saving of time, should be generally taught in British, National, and all other schools. There was, however, no cheap manual in existence. He had become acquainted with Mr. Samuel Bagster, the eminent Bible publisher, from the fact that two years before he had voluntarily undertaken and completed the revision of the references in the "Comprehensive" Bible published by the latter, and

to Mr. Bagster, in the spring of 1837, he forwarded the MS. for a cheap manual of Taylor's system. The manuscript was submitted to the judgment of a skilful reporter, who pronounced against the republication of a system already on the market, and, in sending this opinion, Mr. Bagster intimated that if an original system were prepared by his correspondent, he would readily take charge of it.

Isaac Pitman at once set about the work, and throughout the summer all his leisure hours were devoted to experiments in the construction of shorthand alphabets. The whole of his summer holiday of three weeks was given up to the undertaking. It was some time before the young inventor decided to abandon the conventional but unnatural pairing of the vowels exhibited in most grammars and dictionaries of the period. At last he tried the experiment of writing the vowel in *pin* with the same sign as the vowel in *pen*; *met* with the same sign as *may*, etc., except that the dots were lighter in the first word of each pair. He had little confidence in any good results from this classification, but he had, in fact, discovered the true phonetic arrangement. "I saw the truth," he exclaims, "practised it, and it became delightful. In a few months I got clear of the shallow waters and breakers of our present orthography, and committed myself to the boundless deep of phonographic writing." The classification of the consonants was next taken in hand, and the marking of *p*, *t*, etc., by light strokes, and *b*, *d*, etc., by heavy ones, was fully carried out. He had noticed the frequent recurrence of *l* and *r* in immediate or near communication with other consonants, as in *please*, *bread*, etc., and, after many experiments, found that the best way of expressing the two letters by one stroke, was by hooking the letter with which *l* or *r* comes in contact. Hooks were accordingly provided for the straight letters. The