

# THE PRONUNCIATION OF GREEK AND LATIN.

It is proposed in the following pages that the method of pronunciation which is almost universal in England in the case of Greek, and still widely prevalent in the case of Latin, should be abandoned. This method, like others which prevail locally in various parts of Europe and America, chiefly finds acceptance from the immediate convenience of giving to the symbols of the Roman alphabet when used to write Latin, and the corresponding symbols in Greek, the sound which is most commonly denoted by the former in the particular locality. In Wales, the same series of symbols is used to write two languages which exist side by side, but at least half the symbols have different values in the two languages, so that even this immediate convenience is here wanting. Any method of this kind altogether disregards historical accuracy, and accustoms the learner to fancy that languages exist as written rather than as spoken: for he is put to no trouble to discover the true sounds of the language he is studying. It is to him in a very real sense a 'dead' language: he ceases or never begins to

realise that by its help men and women lived, felt, and thought: and is directly encouraged in a mistake which defeats the very purpose of his education, the mistake of regarding books as something remote from life rather than as an integral part of the life of mankind and therefore of that for which he himself is preparing.

But the local 'English' method of pronouncing Latin and Greek must be condemned also on the following more definite grounds, which involve consequences smaller in themselves but obviously and immediately mischievous:

(1) It confuses distinct sounds, and hence distinct words: e.g., *ceu* and *seu*, *cedit* and *sedit*, *luceo*, *lusio* and *Lucio* (to say nothing of *so-lutio*), *κείται* and *χαίται*, *καινώ*, *κείνω* and *κινώ* are pronounced alike.

(2) It obscures quantity: *mensis* (abl. plur.) is pronounced as *mensis* (gen. sing.), and very often *mensa* (nom. sing.) just as *mensa* (abl. sing.): *malum* (evil) and *malum* (apple) are made alike, and so *venit* (present tense) and *venit* (perfect). The same confusion occurs in the case of Greek, though not to the same extent.

These two defects largely conceal from the student the musical and rhythmical beauties of the two languages.

(3) The learner acquires by ear at the very beginning false views as to the relations of languages, and, in particular, fails to recognise the intimate natural tie between Latin and the Romance languages. Thus Latin *a* instead of being pronounced as French *a* is made to sound like French *ei*, that happening to be the common value of English *a*.

In this way the historical study of language meets with a needless obstacle even in tracing in a Romance language, such as French, those words which are most immediately derived from Latin.

(4) A somewhat similar objection has especial importance

in Wales. The sounds used in the Welsh language are on the whole, and particularly as regards the vowels, of a simpler and more primitive character than those of English: and their expression in the written form is a permanent record of the direct influence of Latin civilisation upon the Welsh people. The 'English' method of pronouncing Latin tends to push out of sight this important historical relationship, and to obscure the comparative antiquity of the Welsh language itself.

In any attempt to frame a better system, two conditions should be fulfilled. On the one hand, the scheme proposed should present, if our knowledge can secure it, at least a reasonable approximation to the sounds which actually existed in ancient times: and on the other, it should avoid placing any really serious difficulty in the way of beginners in Latin or Greek. For it must always be the principle of the study of these languages that the learner shall, as soon as possible, begin to read for himself the works of the great classical authors.

The progress of philological research has made it possible to meet the first requirement. We can in the main reproduce with certainty the sounds actually heard at Athens in the fifth century B.C. and at Rome in the first. The margin of doubt that remains, though from the scientific point of view it is considerable, is nevertheless, when seen from the standpoint of the practical teacher, confined within very narrow limits.

For example; some scholars may feel a doubt whether Latin  $\bar{i}$  more nearly resembled French (close)  $i$  in *livre* (= Eng. *ee* in *queen*) or Italian (open)  $i$  in *civiti* (= Scotch  $i$  in *pity*, sometimes represented by English writers as *ee*, 'peety'); but that it was immeasurably nearer to Eng. *ee* than to the English (really diphthongal)  $\bar{i}$  in *line*, *tide*, etc. is clearly demonstrable and universally admitted.

Accordingly in drawing up the Tables, we have kept in view the distinction between variations of greater and less importance, and have inserted approximate illustrations of some of the sounds from languages where precise equivalents were not easily found: whilst we have tried to guard against any misunderstanding by pointing to more exact equivalents in other columns. We venture to hope that the use of a fairly complete series of English, French and Welsh illustrations side by side may enable even beginners to attain to an approximately correct pronunciation of Greek and Latin, while incidentally rendering some slight service to the teaching of modern languages also.

In the second place, after careful discussion, and (in the case of Latin) some years' experience, we feel that the scheme proposed offers no difficulty that can reasonably be called serious even to the English-speaking student: while those who are familiar with spoken Welsh (or French) should find it far easier than the local English method. In one or two cases some difficulty may be felt, especially while the system is somewhat new to the teacher: and slight deviations from the best standard will be better left uncorrected when the effort to correct them would produce either an error in the opposite direction, or real danger of misunderstanding in the oral work of a class. Such difficulties occur from time to time in any system, and are especially numerous and embarrassing in that which has been so far usual in England. How far we and our colleagues are right in thinking that the scheme here proposed is free from objections of a practical nature, experience alone can decide.

It may indeed be felt that the difference between the pronunciation of Latin and Greek here advocated and that which is actually adopted in most parts of England is in

itself a serious embarrassment. But this difficulty is likely to diminish in extent before long. The Cambridge Philological Society in the pamphlet they have issued on the Pronunciation of Latin advocate the reformed system: the Head Masters' Conference has adopted it as an alternative: and it is already familiar in many schools and lecture-rooms. Most of the reforms that we advocate in Greek, especially in the pronunciation of the vowels and diphthongs, have been long in use in more than one Scotch University, and, as we learn from Professor Goodwin<sup>1</sup>, are adopted with something like uniformity in America.

For these reasons we consider that the difficulties involved are of a transient character, and far smaller than those brought about by the present position of uncertainty. But on the other hand, the restored pronunciation has the advantage not only in distinctness and scientific accuracy, but also in simplicity and musical character. Written explanations must always be to some extent tedious and incomplete: but if once an oral tradition is established amongst teachers, it will be maintained with no greater sense of effort than must always be needed by those who, rejecting slipshod and inartistic methods of speech, aim at inspiring the most constant of our occupations with the instincts of force, precision, and beauty.

<sup>1</sup> *Greek Grammar*, New Edition, 1894 (Macmillan), Preface p. vii.

## TABLE OF GREEK SOUNDS.

THE letters which give the equivalents in English, French and Welsh are printed in **heavy** type. Examples enclosed in square brackets contain only rough equivalents.

Greek	English	French	Welsh
$\alpha$	{ <i>foot<b>path</b>,</i> <i>grand<b>father</b></i>	<i>chasse</i>	<b>aber</b> , <i>llan</i>
$\bar{\alpha}$	<i><b>f</b>ather</i>	<b>â</b> me	<i>tad</i>
$\beta$	<b>b</b> ut	<b>bon</b>	<b>baner</b>
$\gamma$ always as except <sup>1</sup> that	<b>g</b> et, <b>g</b> one	<b>g</b> âteau	<b>g</b> ardd, <b>g</b> ynt
$\gamma\gamma$ ) $\gamma\kappa$ ) $\gamma\chi$ )	are as { <i><b>a</b>nger</i> <i><b>a</b>nkle</i> <i><b>i</b>nkhorn</i>		<i>B<b>a</b>ngor</i> (not as in <i>angor, tyngu</i> ) <b>llangc</b>
$\delta$	[ <b>d</b> en] <sup>2</sup>	<b>d</b> ette	[ <b>d</b> u] <sup>2</sup>
$\epsilon$ (close $\bar{e}$ )	[ <b>g</b> et] <sup>3</sup>	<b>e</b> t, <b>é</b> té	[ <b>ce</b> gîn] <sup>4</sup>
$\zeta$	<b>'s</b> death, <i>wisdom</i> , <b>glazed</b>		
$\eta$ (open $\bar{e}$ )	<b>b</b> ear	<i>père, il mène</i>	<b>hen</b> <sup>4</sup>
$\acute{\prime}$ (spiritus asper)	<b>h</b> oard		<b>hardd</b>
$\grave{\prime}$ (spiritus lenis)	denotes merely the absence of the spiritus asper in initial vowels.		
$\theta$	<i>an<b>th</b>ill</i>		<i>Nant-<b>h</b>ir</i> (not as in <i>peth</i> )
$\bar{i}$ (close $\bar{i}$ )	[ <b>h</b> it]	<i>vér<b>i</b>té</i>	<b>dim</b>
$\bar{\iota}$ (close $\bar{\iota}$ )	<i>que<b>n</b></i>	<i>liv<b>r</b>e, ég<b>l</b>ise</i>	<b>hin</b>

κ	cat, come	éclat, cour	ci, coed
λ	let	lit	gweled
μ	man	mère	mam
ν	name	nom	nid
ξ	text	fixer	bocs
ο (close <i>o</i> )	cannot, consist	monologue	[colyn, pont] <sup>4</sup>
π	pit	parler	pen
ρ	[herring	chéri	carreg
ρ̄		théâtre	rhwng
σ, ς always as except that	salt, mouse	savant, russe	nos
σβ } σμ } are as	{rosebush {rosemary		
τ	[ten, tin] <sup>2</sup>	tête	[tan] <sup>2</sup>
ϑ		du pain, lutte	[North Welsh pump]
υ		dû, lune	[North Welsh [German grün] cun]
φ	uphill		Ap-Henry (not as in gorphen)
χ	{bakehouse {backhanded		ac hefyd (not as in drachefn)
ω (open <i>o</i> )	ore, oar	encore	po <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A further probable exception, of no great importance, is mentioned on p. 13 below.

<sup>2</sup> For the slight variation in English and Welsh *t d* from the continental dentals see p. 12 below.

<sup>3</sup> Greek *ε* was a 'close' *e* (see p. 16 below), and may be more nearly heard in the usual pronunciation of *college*, or in the old-fashioned pronunciation of *engine*, *engineer*, *entire*, than in the approximate examples given in the table, which contain a more 'open' sound. It was the short sound corresponding in quality to the *ei* of *eis*, see below.

<sup>4</sup> Welsh *e* and *o* are open or 'half-open' sounds, both when short and long: but the degree of openness appears to vary slightly in different districts.

DIPHTHONGS ENDING IN  $\iota$ .

These should be pronounced simply by combining the sounds of their component vowels.

Thus

$a\iota = a + \iota$ . Roughly as Eng.  $\bar{i}$  in *ride*, more exactly Fr. *ail* in *émail*, Welsh *ai* in *taid*.

$o\iota = o + \iota$ . Eng. *oi* in *oil*, Welsh *oi* in *troi*.

$v\iota = v + \iota$ . Roughly as Fr. *ui* in *lui*. It rarely occurs save before vowels and then  $v$  has its regular sound and the  $\iota$  is simply equivalent to the Eng. consonant *y*.

$\bar{a}, \eta, \omega = \bar{a} + \iota$  (Welsh *ae* in *caer*),  $\eta + \iota, \omega + \iota$  (Welsh *oe* in *coed*) respectively.

The  $\iota$  was probably not pronounced at all after about 250 B.C., just as in modern spoken S. Welsh *ae* and *oe* are pronounced (in Glamorganshire) simply as Welsh  $\bar{a}$  and  $\bar{o}$ .

The sound of  $e\iota$  was originally diphthongal (Welsh *ei*, half-way between Eng. *lay* and *lie*), but by about 450 B.C. it had become simply equivalent to a long  $\epsilon$  ('long close *e*') = French *-ée* in *passée*, Eng. *u* in *duy*, pronounced without the final *y*-sound.

DIPHTHONGS ENDING IN  $u$ .

These should be pronounced by combining the sound of their first vowel with that of Latin *u* (= Eng. *u* in *full*, Welsh *w* in *cwm*), not with that of the Attic  $u$ , which when it stood alone had undergone a change that it had resisted when preceded by another vowel.





