

**Phonetic syllabication : the cure for oratorical and other defects of speech
/ by Alexander Melville Bell.**

Contributors

Bell, Alexander Melville, 1819-1905.

Publication/Creation

Washington, D.C. : Volta Bureau, [1896]

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PHONETIC SYLLABICATION

THE CURE FOR.

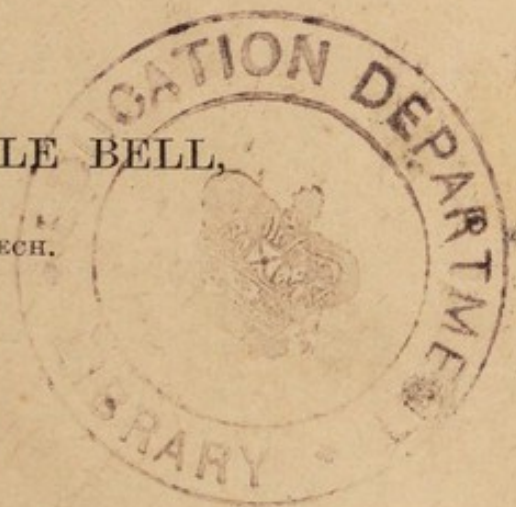
ORATORICAL AND OTHER

DEFECTS OF SPEECH.

BY

ALEXANDER MELVILLE BELL,

AUTHOR OF VISIBLE SPEECH.



Dedicated to the National Association of Elocutionists.

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WASHINGTON, D. C.

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PHONETIC SYLLABICATION.

THIS SIXTH in a series of Occasional Papers* on Phonetic topics calls attention to some principles in connection with Speech, which are either little known or much neglected

The effect of this ignorance or neglect is widely manifest; not only in school exercises, but in the public utterances of those who have passed through school and college, and occupy the lecture-desk or the platform. The rarest quality among all classes of speakers is the clear, intelligible delivery of words.

That which ought to be characteristic of every educated person we look for almost in vain among the majority of the most highly

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educated. Instead of sonorously vocalising, crisply articulating, and speaking OUT, to their hearers, they mutter and mumble, and speak IN, to themselves.

The fundamental fault is the absence of PHONETIC SYLLABICATION. Syllables and words run together, so that the closest attention is required to enable the hearer to gather the sense. Instead of this, we ought to be able to catch the speaker's every syllable. The difficulty is, that a speaker must UTTER syllables before an auditor can catch them. This art our lecturers and other orators have need to set themselves to study. They deliver words and phrases, but not syllables. Sentences are made up of phrases, phrases of words, and words of syllables. In public delivery the last is the most important, for if syllables are heard, words and phrases will not fail of apprehension; but if syllables are lost, ambiguity and unintelligibility result. The hearer's attention flags, and the best oratorical efforts may in

this way be rendered nugatory. Sound travels only at a definite rate; and, before the voice can reach a distant hearer, the speaker's ill-articulated syllables become commingled to the ear, and, of course, confused to the mind.

Spoken syllables are not the same as written syllables. The latter are divisions to the eye, to show the etymology of words; the former are divisions to the ear, and are governed solely by the sound. Every syllable—even in the quickest utterance—should have a **SEPARATE IMPULSE OF VOICE**. But practically a large proportion of impulses are lost through vocal mismanagement.

The elements which make up syllables are vowels and consonants. Vowels require an **OPEN CHANNEL** in the mouth; and consonants require a more or less complete **CLOSURE** of some parts of the mouth. Now, herein lies the grand principle of syllabic articulation. The direction of organic action ought in all cases to be **FROM CLOSE TO OPEN**; that is, from consonant to vowel;

whereas the prevailing habit among faulty speakers is to make the action from open to close ; that is, from vowel to consonant. The effect is, that vowels, instead of having a free channel through the mouth, directly from the throat, are, as it were, squeezed between consonants, cut short, and often altogether lost.

The principle of oral action—from close to open—cannot be too clearly apprehended. Its practical application dictates that any vowel between consonants should be collocated phonetically with the consonant which precedes, and not with that which follows it; and conversely, that any consonant between vowels should be collocated with the vowel which follows, and not with that which precedes it. Thus :

he-te-ro-ge-ne-ous

o-ra-to-ri-o

e-ter-ni-ty

e-ve-ry

a-ny

When double consonants are written the same principle applies: only one of the consonants is sounded, and therefore only one is recognised in phonetic syllabication. Thus:

ha-(p)py	i-(r)ri-tate
fe-(l)low	a-(t)ten-dance
si-(l)ly	di-(f)fi-cul-ty
ho-(r)ror	e-(r)ro-ne-ous
cu-(n)ning	a-(l)le-go-ri-cal

The reader is presumed to give the customary pronunciation to these words. Thus:

hě tə rō gē nē oŭs, ă llē gō rī cāl, hōrrōr, &c.

The phonetic divisions in

ha-(p)py, fe-(l)low, &c.

will, no doubt, at first sight, seem unnatural to many persons; nevertheless, this syllabication represents the **ACTUAL PROCESS OF UTTERANCE**. The latter is only concealed from recognition by our orthography, which, for want of distinctive characters,

compels us to write very different varieties of sound by the same letters; as in:

ab	eb	ib	ob	ub
ba	be	bi	bo	bu

Thus we have become accustomed to distinguish "long" and "short" sounds of the vowel-letters by their position; short sounds preceding, and long sounds following, a consonant. From this habit short vowels are thought to be inseparable from the succeeding consonant; they are, in fact, said to be "stopped" by the consonant. But this is a mistake. The stoppage of vowel sound is not due to consonant action, but to the organ of voice itself. Vowels are stopped only where they are formed—in the throat. There is, therefore, no more difficulty in pronouncing the vowels separately in the syllables

ă-b, ě-b, ĭ-b, ō-b, ů-b

than in

b-ā, b-ē, b-ī, b-ō, b-ū

The idea of any such difficulty would never have entered the mind, if we had had separate letters for the sounds

ǎ, ě, ĭ, ǒ, ů.

Vowels are utterances of voice, issuing from the throat, and merely moulded in passing through the mouth. Consonants are constrictions or obstructions of the mouth-channel, producing a hissing, puffing, or buzzing effect. The sounds of vowels thus originate in the throat, and the sounds of consonants originate in the mouth. In WHISPERING, the breath is simply unvocalised; and for vowels it flows through a free channel, from the throat, while for consonants it is compressed, with more or less fricativeness, in some part of the mouth.

Consonants are sometimes accompanied by voice, but, as often, they are mere breathings, without a trace of vocality. One half

of all consonants are thus entirely voiceless, as heard in the words

SH-e, S-ee, F-ee, TH-igh, P-ie, T-ie, K-ey
a-SH, u-S, iF, oa-TH, u-P, ou-T, oa-K.

In all of these words the sound of the consonant cannot possibly flow into or mingle with that of the vowel. Even in the most rapid utterance the two elements really remain apart, as distinctly as if one were pronounced to-day and the other to-morrow.

The mouth can do only one thing at a time, and thus the relation between elements in syllables, syllables in words, and words in sentences, is merely that of SEQUENCE—not combination. The sequence is so close and rapid that no break is noticeable; but between voiceless and vocal elements—as in all of the above instances—a break there must be. The organ of voice is entirely unused for each of the consonants, and brought into separate action for each of the vowels.

This fact—of sequence, and NOT COM-

BINATION, among syllables and elementary sounds,—is so fundamentally important that it should be, once for all, settled in the reader's mind by experiment. Pronounce the syllables

see, she, fee, &c.,

at first with a prolongation of the consonant sound and with an interval between it and the vowel; then with ordinary compactness of verbal utterance; and afterwards as fast as possible; and it will be found that the vowel and consonant elements do not tend to coalesce under any degree of rapidity.

In the syllabication of words the division may sometimes be, indifferently, either etymologic or phonetic, as in the words

baker, eating, striking, owner, ruler.

These words, divided etymologically, yield the syllables

bak-er, eat-ing, strik-ing, own-er, rul-er;

but, divided phonetically, they yield the syllables

ba-ker, ea-ting, stri-king, ow-ner, ru-ler.

So, when two or more consonants meet in proximate syllables, the consonants may either be divided between the syllables, or else all the consonants that can be uttered without an intervening vowel may be united in one syllabic impulse. Thus the word

exert

may be phonetically syllabled either into

eg-zert or egz-ert.

The form

e-gzert

might be added; but that the compound at the beginning of the second syllable would be one which is unknown in our language.

The word

exercise

may be phonetically syllabled into

ek-cer-cise, ex-er-cise, or eks-ers-ise.

However words may be divided, a SEPARATE VOCAL IMPULSE must be heard for EVERY SYLLABLE. Thus there must be two vocal impulses in the word

exert;

three in the word

exercise;

four in the word

difficulty;

five in the word

arbitrariness;

six in the word

transubstantiation, &c.

Careless speakers lose the syllabic impulse, by elision of unaccented vowels, in one syllable out of every cluster of three or four syllables, as in

gen'ral	lit'ral	poss'ble
nec'sary	exper'ment	univers'ty
acc'racy	prob'ble	philos'phy
'ksplore	incomprehens'ble	partic'lar

The true principle of oro-vocal action is exemplified, in SINGING. The voice in song is distinctly poised on every vowel; and consonants are only instantaneously heard in the transition from vowel to vowel. To the eye of a singer the divisions

ha-(p)py, fe-(l)low

will not seem unnatural, because they are precisely such as he habitually makes in singing. The faulty speaker anticipates the consonant that follows a vowel, and shortens the vowel to reach it. The singer never does. The march of articulation in the one case is from consonant to consonant in successive syllables; in the other case it is from vowel to vowel. What is done in singing should be done in speaking:—**POISE THE VOICE ON EVERY VOWEL!**

The chief difference between the two modes of utterance—speech and song—is that the tones in singing are level, while those in speaking are inflected. Inflected

sounds are less easily projected to a distance than level sounds: but voice is equally the material of speech and song; and voice must be ever present, and paramount, in the one form of utterance as in the other.

In singing, the voice is sustained for a definite time on every note, and one note may be many times as long as another; in speaking, only two quantitative classes of vowels are discriminated;—single-impulse sounds, which consist of instantaneous emissions of voice, as heard in the words

odd, doll, pull;

and double-impulse sounds, where the voice is sustained through the time of two impulses:—as heard in the words

awed (= aw-awed,); call, (= ca-all,);
pool (= poo-ool).

The terms “long” and “short” might be used to designate these classes but for the ambiguity associated with that nomencla-

ture:—"long" and "short" having reference, commonly, to unlike sounds of the vowel LETTERS; whereas quantitative names should refer only to longer or shorter sounds of identical quality, as in

il (French) = $\text{ē}l$; and eel (English) = $\bar{e}e\text{-}\bar{e}l$.

A Table of English vowels is furnished at p. 23. Let the reader, for his own improvement, pronounce each of these sounds in the two modes of single-impulse and double-impulse sounds—as explained above,—and he will, in this exercise, gain a command over the organs of speech, such as is not otherwise to be so readily acquired.

Pure single-impulse vowels are rarely heard colloquially in America; the ordinary "short" sounds being made double, both in quantity and quality, by a gliding addition to the original sound. Thus for "man" we hear ma-an, for "then" the-en, for "ill" i-ill, for "off" o-of, for "up" u-up, &c. The effect is unpleasantly suggestive of

drawling. This habit is, however, happily, less common in public delivery than in conversational speech.

The faulty action of the mouth—in moving from open to close positions—is strikingly illustrated in Stuttering and Stammering. The voice, in these cases, is choked in the throat, or emitted in discontinuous jerks, and the mouth is **CONSONANT-CLOGGED**. In my long experience with defects of this kind, the true principle of oral action has invariably worked like a charm. In many instances the impediment has wholly disappeared after the first lesson. Only the nervous dread of habitual difficulty can prevent immediate relief, when once the stutterer has practically learned the simple law of phonetic syllabication:—to articulate from close to open positions.

In communicating this key to the art of removing impediments of speech, I am giving my American brethren a valuable professional hint. During more than fifty years I have

proved the efficacy of the method; and the principle will now, no doubt, be much more widely tested in this far greater field of work.

But I am showing the applicability of the same principle to the improvement of public delivery, in cases where nothing in the nature of impediment exists. The common oratorical defect of **INDISTINCTNESS** we meet on every platform. Let speakers give the subject a little thought, observation, and experiment. Let them ponder on the precept—**GIVE EVERY SYLLABLE ITS OWN IMPULSE OF VOICE.** Then let them listen to themselves, and be conscious that they violate this precept. The cure is in their own hands:—**APPLY THE PRECEPT!** This work each man can best accomplish for himself.

But while self-surveillance may suffice for the correction of individual speakers, the pupils in schools should be regularly trained in the right method. The most improving

exercise in reading is, undoubtedly, to pronounce words phonetically, SYLLABLE BY SYLLABLE. When this analytic power is attained, fluent reading will then be merely a more rapid sequence of the same sounds. In carrying out the exercise of phonetic syllable-reading, the voice must not be drawled from one syllable to another, but stopped at the end of each, whether long or short. The following is an illustration :

ILLUSTRATION OF PHONETIC SYLLABICATION.

(On the influence of great actions.—Webster.)

“Great ac-tions and stri-king o-(c)cu-(r)ren-ces, ha-ving ek-(x)ci-ted a tem-po-ra-ry ad-mi-ra-tion, o-f(te)n pass a-way and are for-go-(t)t(e)n, be-cause they leave no las-ting re-sults, a-(f)fec-ting the wel-fare of co-(m)mu-ni-ties. Such is fre-quent-ly the for-tune of the most bril-(l)iant mi-li-ta-ry a-chieve-ments. Of the ten thou-sand ba-(t)tl(e)s which have been fought; of all the fields fer-ti-lised with car-nage; of the ba-(n)ners which have been

bathed in blood ; of the wa-(r)ri-ors who have hoped that they had ri-s(e)n from the field of con-quest to a glo-ry as bright, and as du-ra-ble as the stars, how few con-tin-ue long to in-te-rest man-kind ! The vic-to-ry of yes-ter-day is re-versed by the de-feat of to-day ; the star of mi-li-ta-ry glo-ry, ri-sing like a me-te-or, like a me-te-or has fa-(l)len ; dis-grace and di-sas-ter hang on the heels of con-quest and re-nown ; vic-tor and van-quished pre-sent-ly pass a-way to o-bli-vi-on, and the world holds on its course, with the loss on-ly of so ma-ny lives and so much trea-sure.

But there are en-ter-pri ses, mi-li-ta-ry as well as ci-vil, that some-times check the cu-(r)rent of events ; that give a new turn to hu-man a-(f)airs, and trans-mit their con-se-quen-ces through a-ges. We see their im-por-tance in their re-sults, and call them great, be-cause great things fo-(l)low. There have been ba-(t)ties which have fixed the fate of na-tions. These come down to us in his-to-ry with a so-lid and per-ma-nent in-flu-ence,

not cre-a-ted by a dis-play of gli-(t)te-ring ar-mour, the rush of ad-verse ba-(t)tal-ions, the sin-king and ri-sing of pe-(n)nons, the flight, the pur-suit, and the vic-to-ry; but by their e-(f)fect in ad-van-cing or re-tar-ding human know-ledge, in o-ver-throw-ing or e-stab-li-shing des-po-tism, in ex-ten-ding or de-stry-ing human ha-(p)pi-ness. When the tra-ve(l)ler pau-ses on the plains of Ma-ra-thon, what are the e-mo-tions which strong-ly a-gi-tate his breast? What is that glo-ri-ous re-co-(l)lec-tion that thrills through his frame and su-(f)fu-ses his eyes? Not, I i-ma-gine, that Gre-cian skill and Gre-cian va-lour were here most sig-na-(l)ly dis-played; but that Greece her-self was saved. It is be-cause to this spot and to the e-vent which has ren-dered it i-(m)mor-tal, he re-fers all the suc-ceed-ing glo-ries of the re-pub-lic. It is be-cause if that day had gone o-ther-wise Greece her-self had pe-rished. It is be-cause he per-ceives that her phi-lo-so-phers and o-ra-tors, her po-ets and pain-ters, her sculp-tors

and ar-chi-tects, her go-vern-ment and free in-sti-tu-tions, point back-ward to Ma-ra-thon, and that their fu-ture (ex)eg-zis-tence seems to have been su-spen-ded on the con-tin-gen-cy, whe-ther the Per-sian or the Gre-cian ba-(n)ner should wave vic-to-ri-ous in the beams of that day's se-(t)ting sun. And as his i-ma-gi-na-tion kin-dles at the ret-ro-spect, he is trans-por-ted back to the in-te-res-ting mo-ment; he counts the fear-ful odds of the con-ten-ding hosts; his in-te-rest for the re-sult o-ver-whelms him; he trem-bles as if it were still un-cer-tain, and seems to doubt whe-ther he may con-si-der So-cra-tes and Pla-to, De-mos-the-nes, So-pho-cles and Phi-di-as, as se-cure yet to him-self and to the world."

The reader will observe that these pho-netic syllables, wherever possible, end with a vowel, in accordance with the governing principle of oral action—"from close to open." This must, manifestly, relieve the consonant blockades to which the stutterer is subject; as it will, also, prevent the possi-

bility of such elisions of unaccented vowels, as now so frequently disfigure the utterance of thinkers and men of science.

English Vowels.

The following Table comprises all the varieties of English vowel sound. Pronounce each vowel (without consonant) in the two quantitative modes, with exactly the same quality of vowel.

17	pool	1	eel
16	pull	2	ill
15	old	3	ale
14	ore	4	air
13	all	5	ell
12	doll	6	an
11	up	7	a (article)
10	err	8	ask
		9	
		ah	

Combinations.

8-2 isle; 8-16 owl; 12-2 oil; y-16 cure;
y-17 cue.

The NUMBERS in this table should be associated with the vowel sounds; otherwise the learner will be confused by LETTERS. Thus:

¹⁵ ⁵ ² ² ⁶ ² ³ ¹¹ ² ² ^{y-16} ¹²
 Pho-ne-tic sy(l)la-bi-ca-tion is the cure for
¹² ⁷ ¹² ² ⁶ ⁶ ¹¹ ¹⁰ ¹ ⁵ ¹² ¹
 o-ra-to-ri-cal and o-ther de-fects of speech.

Exercise on the preceding Table involves the recognition of thirty-four vowels (seventeen long and seventeen short) in addition to five diphthongal combinations. To pronounce all of these with definiteness, will give the best possible training to the organs of speech, and to the ear. Some of the sounds will be found to be unfamiliar, in one or the other of the quantitative forms; their utterance will, therefore, be of great assistance in enabling the speaker to acquire the knack of pronouncing foreign sounds. Some of the sounds, also, differ in quality so little, that an untrained ear can hardly distinguish them. Thus:

- Nos. 4 and 5, (air and ell)
“ 10 “ 11, (err and up)
“ 14 “ 15, (ore and old)

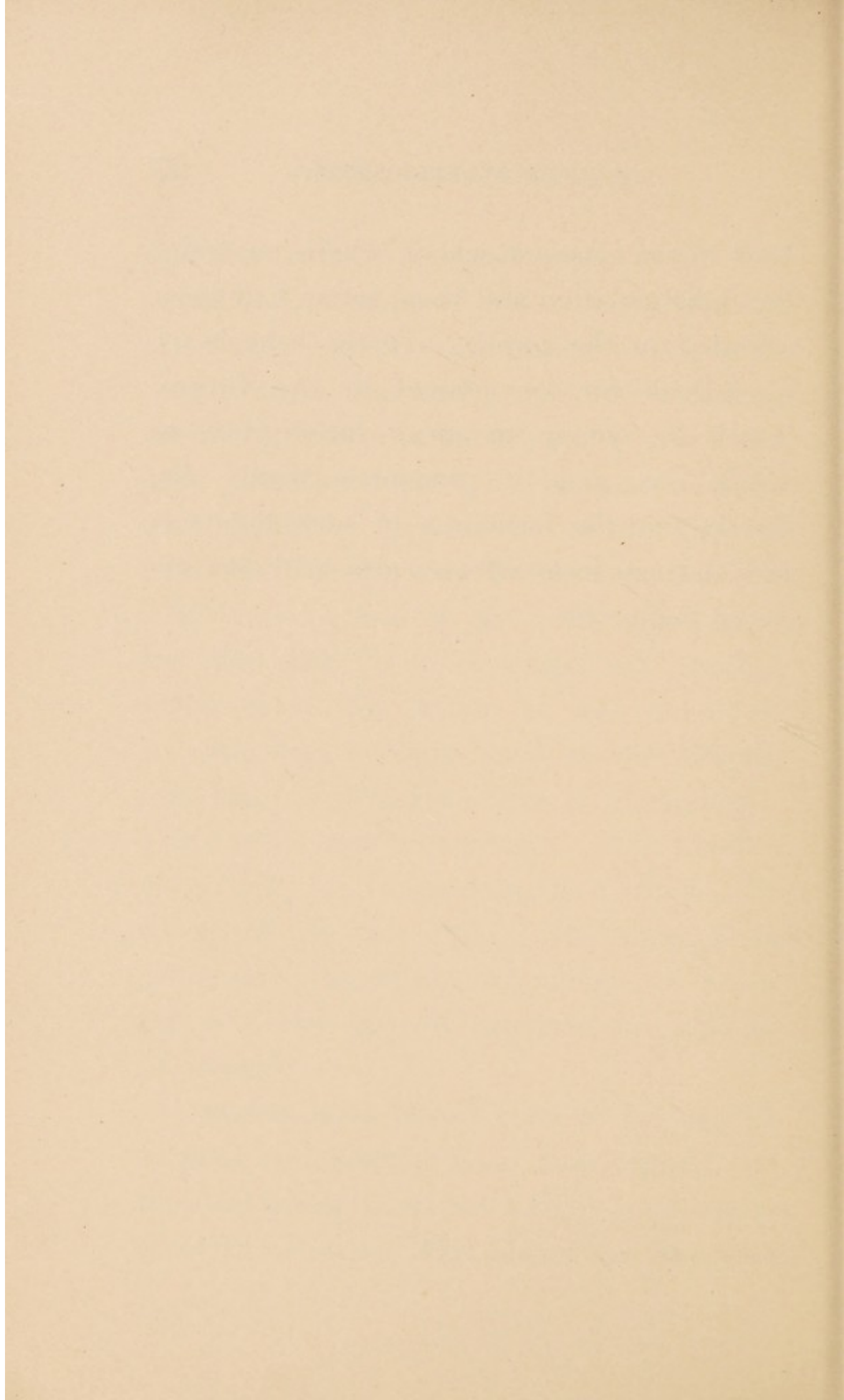
present only *shades* of difference. But the discrimination of just such nice varieties is the test of a cultivated pronunciation.

The faults referred to in this Paper are, unfortunately, most felt where the speaker's subject is the most intellectual. Boanerges may rouse the echoes at some camp-meeting, or political caucus; but the man of Science, expounding and demonstrating, does not need to employ impassioned oratory. He must, however, “be not too tame neither.” He must speak so as to be heard by all his auditors, and above all, remember that he is speaking **TO THEM**, and for **THEIR INFORMATION**. All this is so self-evident, that it seems idle to set it forth. But observation will discover illustrations, only too common, of the need for doing so. For example: a lecturer was recently explaining a

diagram on the screen and using a soft conversational voice, as if making a confidential statement to another gentleman on the platform, while a thousand people were straining their ears in vain to participate in what was said. Another turned his back to the audience, while he pointed out some object of which he was speaking, and he continued for some time to talk to the wall, oblivious of the fact that his voice could not possibly reach those for whom it was intended. Another kept his eyes fixed on the MS. before him, while he read from it mutteringly, as if for his own information. And another closed his eyes, in speaking, as if blinded by excess of his own light. The speakers in these cases were not schoolboys, or tyros, but men, and men of eminence in their departments.

Common sense would seem to be enough to preserve speakers from such errors; but the subjects of them are simply unconscious of their failings. The blame for this goes

back to the common school, where no training in articulation and vocalisation had been afforded to the pupils. To the schools we must look for amendment in the future. Teach the young to speak intelligibly, to speak out, and to pronounce words distinctly, and the formation of such habits as now detract from effectiveness will be rendered impossible.



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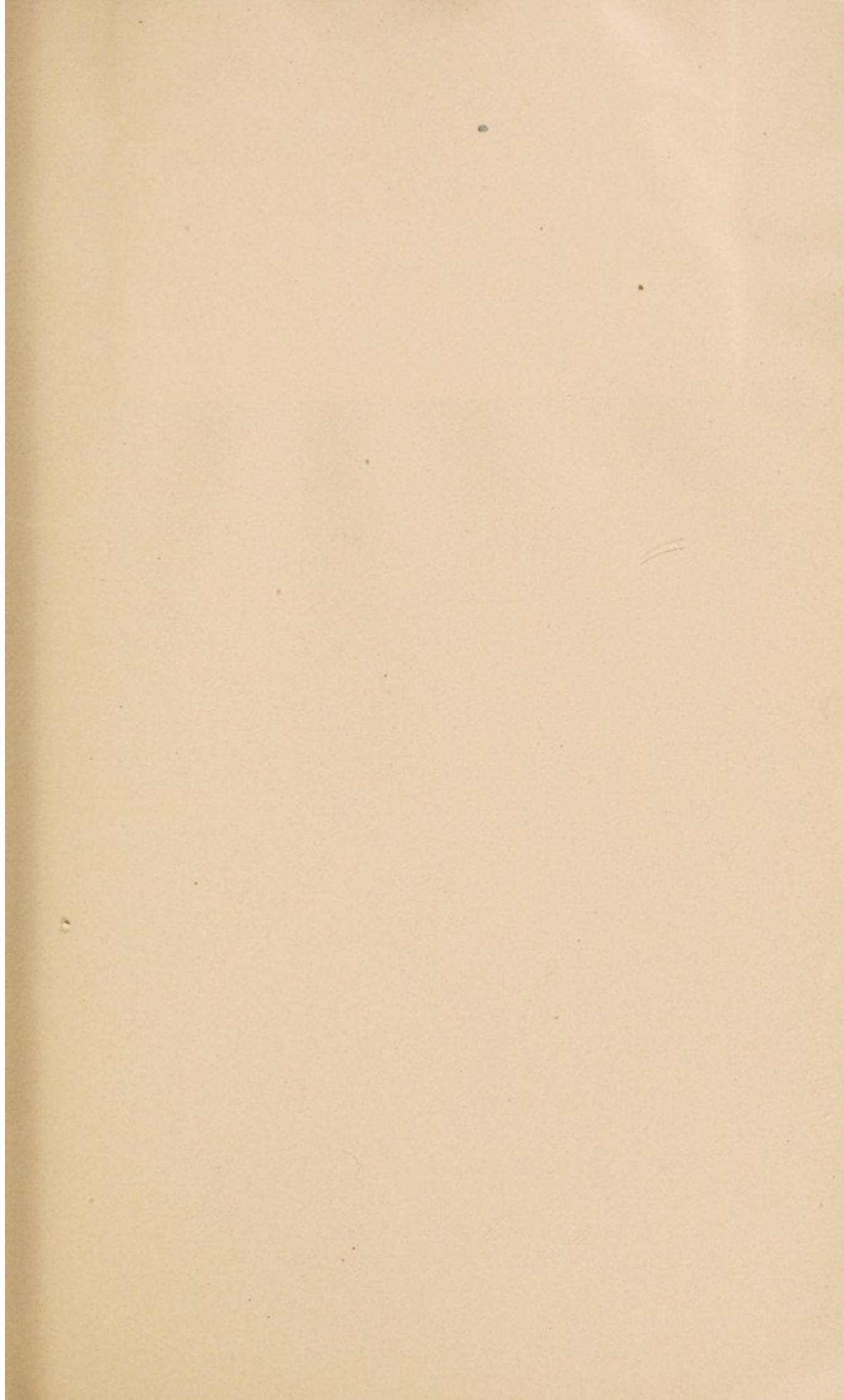
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