

V. *A Letter from John Byrom M. A. and F. R. S. to the President, containing some Remarks on Mr. Lodwick's Alphabet.*

*Honoured Sir,*

Read June 30. 1748. **H**AVING, by your Permission, bor-

row'd N<sup>o</sup>. 182. of the *Transactions*, wherein is contained *An Essay towards an Universal Alphabet, by Mr. Francis Lodwick F.R.S.* I shall give a brief Account of it; and, in Obedience to your Commands at the last Meeting, endeavour to shew how it may be reduced into less Compass, and set in a plainer Light.

Mr. *Lodwick* premises first the Advantages of such an Alphabet; which I may as well refer to as repeat; they all center in acquiring, describing, or perpetuating the true Sounds of any Language, by a Standard Character for all.

He then defines what a single Sound, what a compounded one, a Vowel, Consonant, Diphthong, and Triphthong is; all which is likewise sufficiently obvious, and needs no Repetition.

To proceed directly, therefore, to his Alphabet, or Collection of all the single Vowels or Consonants which are used in any Language, the Number of Vowels is, according to him, 14, which are, all but 3, expressed in *English* Words in the following Table.

G g 2

1.

- |                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>a</i> — <i>tall</i>          | 8. <i>ui</i> — <i>muīs</i> . Low Dutch |
| 2. <i>a</i> — <i>tallow</i>        | 9. <i>y</i> — <i>tile</i>              |
| 3. <i>a</i> — <i>tale</i>          | 10. <i>o</i> — <i>tone</i>             |
| 4. <i>e</i> — <i>tell</i>          | 11. <i>u</i> — <i>tunne</i>            |
| 5. <i>ea</i> — <i>teal</i>         | 12. <i>u</i> — <i>une</i> . French     |
| 6. <i>i</i> — <i>till</i>          | 13. <i>oo</i> — <i>tool</i>            |
| 7. <i>u</i> — <i>dure</i> . French | 14. <i>ou</i> — <i>tould</i> .         |

These, he says, are the Vowels, *each of which is long, and short; short, as in the Words God, Man, Sin; long, as in Ball, Demand, Seen, &c.*

As any Vowel sounded by itself is naturally long, I take it for granted that he intended the 14 in this Table to be all such; and yet, in the Words *Tallow, tell, till, tunne*, the Vowels, as we now pronounce them at least, are all short; and in the Words *tile* and *tould*, a Diphthong (or Composition of 2 Vowels pronounc'd in the Time of one) is sounded: So that there are but 5 long Vowels accounted for in our Language by the Words *tall, tale, teal, tone, tool*. The foreign Words, as it would be nice and endless to dispute about, so it comes not within the Compass of my present Design; which is to give a List of Vowels, whereby to discriminate, as conveniently as may be, all the Instances of Vocality that occur, distinctly, in the *English* Language; for which I apprehend that half the Number in his Catalogue, or 7 Characters, would be, to all attainable Purposes, sufficient.

As we commonly reckon but 5 Vowels in our Alphabet, *a, e, i, o, u*; two of which, *viz. i* and *u*, are really Diphthongs, I must denote the single Vowels

Vowels by 2 apiece, as Custom sometimes does, to shew which I mean; and, beginning from the smallest Aperture of the Organs to the most dilated, they are these.

1.	<i>oo</i>	<i>ooze</i>	<i>stool</i>	<i>too</i>
2.	<i>oa</i>	<i>oat</i>	<i>stole</i>	<i>to</i>
3.	<i>ee</i>	<i>eel</i>	<i>steel</i>	<i>see</i>
4.	<i>ea</i>	<i>eat</i>	<i>steal</i>	<i>sea</i>
5.	<i>ai</i>	<i>aid</i>	<i>stale</i>	<i>say</i>
6.	<i>aa</i>	<i>aaron</i>	<i>stamen</i>	(fol)fa
7.	<i>au</i>	<i>autumn</i>	<i>stall</i>	<i>saw</i>

Though vocal Sounds, like instrumental, may, in Speculation, admit of numberless Distinctions, y. t, as Experience shews that 7 Notes, flatten'd or sharpened, upon Occasion, suffice for a practical Gamut, or Scale of Music, so I incline to think, that 7 vocal Notes or Vowels, varied in some correspondent manner, or struck, as one may say, in diphthongal or triphthongal Chords with each other, may well enough account for the Sounds of our Language; or possibly of any other, if it be consider'd, that different Voices, as well as Instruments, have somewhat so peculiar in them, that nothing but the Ear itself is able to distinguish.

However, as far as these 7 Vowels extend, if they were denoted by any common Characters, as, suppose at present, by the 7 first numeral Figures, the absurd Variety which Custom has introduc'd of expressing the same vocal Sounds, amongst different Nations, even using the same alphabetical Characters,

ters, would, in a great measure, be immediately corrected.

One Instance may serve for many; the Word *we* in *English*, and the Word *oui* in *French*, however differently written, have the same Sound, or Composition of Sound, from our Vowels *oo*, and *ee*, or their *ou* and *i*; if then the Figure 1 was always to denote the Sound that we express by *oo*, the *French* by *ou*, the *Italians* by *u*, &c. and the Figure 3 was to denote our *ee*, and their *i*, in like manner, the combin'd Character, or Diphthong 13, would be sounded alike by all Readers of any Nation, who should previously be agreed upon such a common Character.

And allowing Mr. *Lodwick's* Notion, that there are 3 Vowels in other Languages, which ours has not, there will remain the Figures 8, 9, 0, to express them by — or any other Characters may be pitch'd upon. What I aim at is to shew, that, through an over Pursuit of Accuracy, he has multiplied his Vowels, without any apparent Necessity.

And the Case is the same with respect to his Consonants, which he thus ranges into 11 Files, and 6 Ranks.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1 B <i>bond</i>	D <i>dark</i>	J <i>jest</i>	G <i>game</i>	=
2 P <i>pond</i>	T <i>tart</i>	Ch <i>chest</i>	K <i>came</i>	=
3 M <i>mind</i>	N <i>name</i>	gn <i>seign</i>	Fr. ng <i>song</i>	=
4 =	dh <i>this</i>	j <i>jean</i>	Fr. g <i>gaen</i>	} Low V <i>Valley</i> Dutch F <i>Folly</i>
5 =	th <i>thing</i>	sh <i>shell</i>	ch <i>dach</i>	
6	n <i>danse</i>	French.		

6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
=	L lane	H hand	Y yarn	R rand	W wand
=					
=					
Z	zeal	lh	Welsh		
S	seal				

By this Distribution one is led to think, at first, that he would hint that there were in Language 11 times 6, or 66 Consonants; though Experience had taught him to complete the 6 Ranks of his second File only.

But, as the Mark (=) by which he signifies that there are indeed analogous Consonants that might be express'd in those Places, but with a *Difference that would be too nice for common Discernment; and such as he had never heard expressed in any Language*; as this Mark, I say, occurs but 8 times, I will suppose him to take the real Number of Consonants in Nature to be 37, whereof 29 may answer the Purposes of an universal Alphabet.

To reduce both Files and Ranks into less Compass, and plainer Order, I would take the real Consonants of his first and fifth Files into one File or Rank; and place them in this manner

P. B. M. F. V.

dismissing the 5 unexpress'd (and, for any thing that appears, inexpressible ones) as imaginary.

And to this Order of Consonants all such as are used in our Language may be adjusted; for, beginning thus with the labial and labio-dental Consonants, and so proceeding to the Gutturals, they will stand, in Rank and File, after this manner.

P. B. M. F. V.  
 S. Z. R. Sh. Zh.  
 T. D. L. Th. Dh.  
 K. G. N. Ch. J.

wherein their mutual Analogy and Correspondence seems to appear in the plainest Light that one can possibly put them in ; as a little Attention will better discover, than a Prolixity of Particulars explain.

If not, I shall be glad to be set right, if I am mistaken in supposing, 1. That here is no Consonant omitted, which is really used in our common Pronunciation ; or, 2. That here are none superfluous, or compounded ; or, 3. That, in this View of them, their Relation to each other is the most discernible.

I except the Letter *H*, which may have its Place amongst the guttural consonantal Aspirates, which some foreign Nations are accustomed to, but ours, in general, is not : And these, as I conceive, will not be found to be distinctly more than what the Addition of a fifth Rank to the foregoing may exhaust.

The Power or Force of this peculiar Letter *h* is so capable of Intermixture with that of others in this Table, and that of the Naso-guttural *N*, of sliding, without its full Expression, into a following Consonant (as it does particularly in *French* Pronunciation), that they have led the Writers on this Subject to imagine Consonants in Nature, which they endeavour to express by *N French*, *gn*, *ng*, and by divers Changes of the Letters *h*, *n*, *g*, that give an attentive Examiner no clear Idea of any distinct Consonant, but rather  
 perplex

perplex the Matter by unintelligible Niceties, and hinder the Prospect of an universal Alphabet, by seeming Impossibilities of arriving at it.

*Y* and *W*, which constitute Mr. *Lodwick's* 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> File of Consonants, are equal to the Vowels *ee* and *oo*: His two *Dutch* Consonants may have their Place in the 5<sup>th</sup> Rank above-mention'd.

So that omitting such of his 29 as ought, if these Observations are just, to be omitted, there will remain the 20 that are here digested into 5 Files and 4 Ranks, for the real Alphabet of Consonants in the *English* Language; together with the *H*, which whether it may be reckon'd one or not, I shall leave to the Grammarians.

The 5 Files, for an Assistance to the Memory, may by the Help of intermediate Vowels, be compris'd in 5 technical Words of an hexameter Verse, such as,

PaSTiKa, BoZDaGo, MeRLiN, FiShThoChe, VeZhaDhJo.

And the 4 Ranks, as they begin with the Letters *P, S, T, K*, may, for the same Reason, be called *Prima, Secunda, Tertia, Quarta*, (= *Kuarta*) Classis.

These 20 Consonants may appear to be too few; but I much question whether the real Alphabet of any Language has either more in Number, or better fitted for the Purposes of Speech than this of ours: The Difference lies chiefly in the Gutturals, which the *Orientals, Welsh, Germans*, &c. pronounce differently from us.

Our Neighbours the *French* (which is very remarkable) few as these 20 are, have but 16 of

H h h

them;

them ; and yet they are able to express themselves with greater Fluency and Precision than we can well be Masters of, till we shall imitate their Care to polish and to propagate their Language, by some Attention to the Improvement of our own.

They have none of our *th*, *dh*, *ch*, or *j* ; and if a Man's Name, suppose, were *Thatch th' edge*, they would not be able, without previous Practice, to pronounce any one of these 4 Consonants, which help to compose it, and which Custom obliges us to denote, so absurdly, by 9 Letters that have not the alphabetical Force of any one of these 4 amongst them.

The most important Reflection upon the Subject is this, that whereas we have in our Language but 7 distinct Sounds or Vowels, and thrice the Number of Stops or Modifications of them ; if we had accordingly 28 Letters or Types appropriated to them, and always wrote or printed what we spoke, the Theory of Reading might be acquired in as few Hours, as it costs at present Months or Years to acquire it in.

But I forbear the Pursuit of this Topic any farther ; understanding, from Gentlemen who were desirous that I should examine Mr. *Lodwick's* Scheme immediately, that the *Society* would break up for the Summer, at the next Meeting : Attendance upon my Short-hand Scholars has obliged me to urge what occur'd upon the Perusal of it as briefly as I could, and so I submit it to Consideration, and am, &c.