

Critical Pronouncing Dictionary (Walker, 4th edition, London, 1806).pdf/38



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34 DIFFERENT SOUNDS OF THE LETTER I.

equivalent to short *e*, as heard in *virgin*, *virtue*, etc. So *fir*, a tree, is perfectly similar to the first syllable of *ferment*, though often corruptly pronounced like *fur*, a skin. *Sir* and *stir* are exactly pronounced as if written *Sur* and *stur*. It seems, says [Mr. Nares](#), that our ancestors distinguished these sounds more correctly. [Bishop Gardiner](#), in his first letter to [Cheke](#), mentions a witticism of Nicholas Rowley, a fellow Cantab with him, to this effect: "Let handsome girls be called *virgins*; plain ones *vurgins*."

"Si pulchra est, *virgo*, sin turpis, *vurgo* vocetur."

Which, says [Mr. Elphinston](#), may be modernised by the aid of a far more celebrated line:

"Sweet *virgin* can alone the fair express,
Fine try degrees, and beautifully less:
But let the hoyden, homely, rough-hewn *vurgin*,
Engross the homage of a *Major Sturgeon*."

110. The sound of *i*, in this situation, ought to be the more carefully attended to, as letting it fall into the sound of *u*, where it should have the sound of *e*, has a grossness in it approaching to vulgarity. Perhaps the only exception to this rule is, when the succeeding vowel is *u*; for this letter being a semi-consonant, has some influence on the preceding *i*,

though not so much as a perfect consonant would have. This makes [Mr. Sheridan's](#) pronunciation of the *i* in *virulent*, and its compounds, like that in *virgin*, less exceptionable than I at first thought it; but since we cannot give a semi-sound of short *i* to correspond to the semi-consonant sound of *u*, I have preferred the pure sound, which I think the most agreeable to polite usage. See [Mr. Garrick's](#) Epigram upon the sound of this letter, under the word VIRTUE.

Irregular and unaccented Sounds.

111. There is an irregular pronunciation of this letter, which has greatly multiplied within these few years, and that is, the slender sound heard in *ee*. This sound is chiefly found in words derived from the French and Italian languages; and we think we show our breeding by a knowledge of those tongues, and an ignorance of our own:

"Report of fashions in proud Italy,
Whose manners still our tardy apish nation
Limps after, in base awkward imitation."

[Shakespeare, Richard II.](#)

When [Lord Chesterfield](#) wrote his letters to his son, the word *oblige* was, by many polite speakers, pronounced as if

written *obleege*, to give a hint of their knowledge of the French language; nay, [Pope](#) has rhymed it to this sound:

"Dreading ev'n fools, by flatterers *besieg'd*,
And so *obliging*, that he near *oblig'd*."

But it was so far from having generally obtained, that [Lord Chesterfield](#) strictly enjoins his son to avoid this pronunciation as affected. In a few years, however, it became so general, that none but the lowest vulgar ever pronounced it in the English manner; but upon the publication of this nobleman's letters, which was about twenty years after he wrote them, his authority has had so much influence with the polite world as to bid fair for restoring the *i*, in this word, to its original rights; and we not unfrequently hear it now pronounced with the broad English *i*, in those circles where, a few years ago, it would have been an infallible mark of vulgarity. [Mr. Sheridan](#), [W. Johnston](#), and [Mr. Barclay](#), give both sounds, but place the sound of *oblige* first. [Mr. Scott](#) gives both, but places *obleege* first. [Dr. Kenrick](#) and [Buchanan](#) give only *oblige*; and [Mr. Elphinston](#), [Mr. Perry](#), and [Fenning](#), give only *obleege*; but though this sound has lost ground so much, yet [Mr. Nares](#), who wrote about eighteen years ago, says, "*oblige* still, I think, retains the sound of long *e*, notwithstanding the proscription of that pronunciation by the late [Lord Chesterfield](#)."

112. The words that have preserved the foreign sound of *i* like *ee*, are the following: *Ambergris*, *verdegris*, *antique*, *becafico*, *bombasin*, *brasil*, *capivi*, *capuchin*, *colbertine*, *chioppine*, or *chopin*, *caprice*, *chagrin*, *chevaux-de-frise*, *critique*, (for criticism) *festucine*, *frize*, *gabardine*, *haberdine*, *sordine*, *rugine*, *trephine*, *quarantine*, *routine*, *fascine*, *fatigue*, *intrigue*, *glacis*, *invalid*, *machine*, *magazine*, *marine*, *palanquin*, *pique*, *police*, *profile*, *recitative*, *mandarine*, *tabourine*, *tambourine*, *tontine*, *transmarine*, *ultramarine*. In all these words, if for the last *i* we substitute *ee*, we shall have the true pronounciation. In *signior* the first *i* is thus pronounced. [Mr. Sheridan](#) pronounces *vertigo* and *serpigo* with the accent on the second syllable, and the *i* long, as in *tie* and *pie*. [Dr. Kenrick](#) gives these words the same accent, but sounds the *i* as *e* in *tea* and *pea*. The latter is, in my opinion, the general pronounciation; though [Mr. Sheridan's](#) is supported by a very general rule, which is, that all words adopted whole from the Latin preserve the Latin accent. ([503, b](#)) But if the English ear were unbiassed by the long *i* in Latin, which fixes the accent on the second syllable, and could free itself from the slavish imitation of the French and Italians, there is little doubt but these words would have the accent on the first syllable, and that the *i* would be pronounced regularly like the short *e*, as in *Indigo* and *Portico*. See VERTIGO.

113. There is a remarkable alteration in the sound of this vowel, in certain situations, where it changes to a sound equivalent to initial *y*. The situation that occasions this

change is, when the *i* precedes another vowel in an unaccented syllable, and is not preceded by any of the dentals: thus we hear *iary* in *mil-iary*, *bil-iary*, etc. pronounced as if written *mil-yary*, *bil-yary*, etc. *Min-ion*, and *pin-ion*, as if written *min-yon* and *pin-yon*. In these words the *i* is so totally altered to *y*, that pronouncing the *ia* and *io* in separate syllables would be an error the most palpable; but where the other liquids or mutes precede the *i* in this situation, the coalition is not so necessary: for though the two lat-

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