

TROUBLESOME DIPHTHONG

(Written for "The Listener" by PROFESSOR ARNOLD WALL)

This is the second part of an article in which Professor Wall discusses the pitfalls of pronunciation encountered with the diphthong "au." Part I. appeared last week.

[[I]] Freaks

TWO isolated, aberrant, and freakish members of the "au" group are "laugh" and "gauge." "Laugh" has a peculiar phonological history which could not be easily explained without much wearisome technicality, and "gauge" is just a freak spelling which is past praying for and ought to be abolished.

Special Cases

I take the Frenchmen first. "Chauffeur." After about forty years of life this fellow has at last sown his wild oats, but is not perfectly settled yet. The recognised pronunciation is "shohfer," but the word is by many stressed on the "er." The illiterate "shaffer," and similar variants, have entirely disappeared, at any rate I never hear them myself.

"Pau." This place, being in France, is pronounced "Poh." If it had happened to be in Germany or in German-speaking Switzerland, it would be "Pow," and if Anglicized, as so many French names are, it would be "Paw."

"Mauve." This is an example of the French word which has resisted any tendency to Anglicization, for we pronounce it, as in French, "mohve." But I should not be much surprised to hear it in this country as "mowve."

"Dauphin." This title has been so familiar to English speakers for many centuries that it was long ago Anglicized as "Dawfin"; as in the last case "Dowfin" would not take me aback, but "Dohfang" would indeed.

Now a couple of Germans.

"Munchausen." This useful synonym for a monumental liar, having been familiar to English readers for over a century and a-half, since 1785 to be exact, has naturally been Anglicized long ago, and is pronounced "Munchawzen"; it would be pedantic now to say "Munchowzen" though speakers of German may instinctively use this pronunciation.

"Morgenthau." This, the name of a famous American statesman, is pronounced in the U.S.A. in the English manner, "Morgenthaw," instead of the German, "Morgentow." It seems a pity that a name like this should not be just translated into English, "Morningdew," pretty isn't it? But perhaps not very suitable for a politician with its suggestion of freshness and simplicity. This example is very like "Rothschild," always pronounced as English; "Rohtshilt," the German version, would hardly be understood by us.

"Faust" and "Faustus." This pair are treated by us in the oddest possible manner. The name is Latin and the proper pronunciation would be "Fowst" and "Fowstus," but because, in the case of "Faust," it is associated chiefly with Goethe's famous poem, we call it "Fowst," while in its full Latin form it is called "Fawstus" because the well-known play, "Dr. Faustus," is the work of an Elizabethan Englishman, Marlowe.

"Gautama." According to the best authorities this alternative name of Buddha may be pronounced either "Gowtama" or "Gawtama" with preference for the former. The stress is thrown strongly on the first syllable, so that, if

the second of these pronunciations is used, it makes an almost perfect rhyme with "Mortimer."

"Nautch" The "correct" pronunciation of this Hindi word is "nawtch," not "nowtch." The Hindi form is "nach" and the form "nautch" is, I take it, a relic of the bad old system of spelling Hindi words with "au" or "aw" to represent the sound of a long a, as in "dawk" bungalow, or "the Ghauts" or the Tamil "mulligatawny."

"Nautilus." This Greek word, which we have in its Latin form, is one of the hundreds which are pronounced with the English sound of "au," "Nawtilus," not "Nowtilus," which the New Zealand speaker is tempted to use.

"Saud" in "Ibn Saud" and "Saudi Arabia." The correct Arabic pronunciation may be represented by "Sah-ood" and our "Sowd" comes as near to that as is conveniently possible. This is one of those cases in which the New Zealand speaker is likely to be "right" when the Englishman is tempted to say "Sawd."

"Gaucha." This is Spanish, or rather, probably, the Spanish form of a native South American word, and, like "Gautama," is allowed to have either the "ow" or "aw" sound. "Gowtsho" is, I should say, the better of the two, but "Gawtsho" cannot be called wrong. Father Time will give a decision at his leisure.

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