

## The Deseret Alphabet.

The preparation and use of the Deseret Alphabet was a favorite project of Brigham Young. It was started at his suggestion and afterwards was adopted by the Keryncy of the University of Deseret. It was designed with the view of enabling young people to learn more easily to read and write.

This alphabet was designed and arranged principally by George D. Watt, a phonographic reporter in the employ of Brigham Young. The forms of some of the letters were originated by Mr. Watt, those of others were selected by him from some of the ancient alphabets found in the front part of Webster's unabridged dictionary as published about thirty years ago.

With a view to make the type wear well, neither top nor tail extensions were incorporated in the forms of the letters.

The alphabet was used phonetically, modified somewhat after Pitman's style and arrangement of pronunciation.

In June 1859, this alphabet was commenced to be used in keeping Brigham Young's ledger, by Thomas W. Ellerbeck and was continued in such use by him about one year.

This alphabet was also used to some extent in the Historian's Office in this (Salt Lake) City, in June

~~to~~  
journalizing  
analyzing and re-compiling history, during a similar pe-  
riod in 1859 and 1860.

The alphabet and brief articles in the character were published in the Desert News, sometimes weekly, and at others occasionally, during a similar period in 1859 and 1860.

Then, other matters demanding attention, the Desert Alphabet went out of use by a kind of tacit neglect, or by general distaste for it.

The subject, however, was subsequently revived, though many persons favored Pitman's phonotype, as being but slightly varied from the common alphabet, and therefore easier for most persons to learn, and affording a readier transition to and from the ordinary Roman character, than was the case with the Desert Alphabet. The Regency of the University of Deseret actually voted to adopt Pitman's characters. But on the 2nd of Feb'y, 1868, the Regency rescinded that vote, and voted to adopt the Desert Alphabet, and to ask the Legislature for an appropriation of \$10,000 to print school books in that character.

April 18, 1868, Orson Pratt commenced to prepare school books in the Desert character.

In November of the same year the Regency employ- ed Orson Pratt to transcribe the Book of Mormon into the Desert character.

In that year also the Desert News, 38 pages, illus-

trated, was published by the Deseret University in the Deseret character.

In 1869, the Book of Mormon, Part 1, 116 pages, was published in New York, in the Deseret character. The same year the Book of Mormon entire was published in that character in the same city. Both these publications were under the auspices of the Deseret University, to be used for educational purposes.

Some efforts were made to teach and use the character in various schools in the Territory. But it was an uphill task. It was found that the tailless characters, however economical in the wear and tear of type; were inimical to the eye, the monotonous evenness of the lines making it more difficult for the eye to follow and distinguish the words than when set in the ordinary type. It was also difficult to insure uniform pronunciation and consequently uniform orthography with the Deseret character. As is the case in other communities, the people generally did not take kindly to the new characters, so that in a short time the Deseret alphabet <sup>fell</sup> into desuetude, from which it has never been resurrected, and no desire for its use appears now to exist. Besides busier times came on, and railroads, mining, and other business interests pressed upon the attention and absorbed much of it, so that the Deseret Alphabet was soon found to have been practically and virtually discarded, lost sight of, and almost forgotten.

However, an effort was made subsequently to have the Book of Mormon printed in Pitman's Phonotype, and with that view Orson Pratt left Salt Lake City for England in July, 1847, and when there began to make arrangements to accomplish that work. But the death of Brigham Young in August of that year necessitated the return of Mr. Pratt to Salt Lake City, and the project of publishing the Book of Mormon in Pitman's phonotype was abandoned. Since that time, there has been no effort at authorized publication of books in the English language in any other than the common type, in or for Utah.

The type used by the Deseret News in 1859 and 1860 in printing articles in the Deseret character was made in this city by John W. Kammell. That used in printing the Book of Mormon in New York in 1869 was procured by him while in that city.

Dr. J. W. Park, principal of the University of Deseret, might be able to inform you of the number of the editions of books which have been published in the Deseret character, unless he has already done so in the communications forwarded to you some time since by me.