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# The Throat and The Voice: Part 2, Chapter 5: Vocal Culture

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of cartilage being only rudimentally developed in the great majority of males. It is possible, therefore, by examining the image of the larynx of an individual, to pronounce as to the practicability of the production of head-tones. If the little projections in the posterior portion of the vocal bands, due to the presence of these processes of cartilage, do not exist, the voice can only be injured in useless attempts to acquire head-tones.

Similar nodules, but much smaller in size, exist at the anterior attachments of the vocal bands. These are usually larger in the larynx of the male than in that of the female.

# CHAPTER V.

## VOCAL CULTURE.

PRACTICALLY, all vocal sound is musical, save only the automatic-like tones emitted by the speaking deaf-mute (*mute* no longer, however). Modulation of speech is musical intonation; but the compass employed is a limited one, and the transitions slide from one tone to the next instead of proceeding by fixed intervals, as in song. The sounds of speech are chiefly concrete sounds, and the sounds of song are chiefly discrete sounds. The sounds of speech are run together, as it were, save such separation as is requisite for distinct enunciation. The sounds of song are separated from each other, save in the utterance of the consonants of words. The sounds of songs without words are altogether discrete.

The compass of voice utilized in ordinary speaking in the United States rarely extends beyond the musical interval of a fourth (C — F, half an octave, four white keys on the piano), except in localities where extremes of modulation are customary; while the compass of the ordinary singing voice may approach two octaves.

So many theories have been advanced as to the proper method of cultivating the voice, and the proper period at which its systematic cultivation should be commenced, that it is difficult to select the good and eschew the evil. Most of these theories have been evolved from the inner consciousnesses of their advocates, with little knowledge of the vocal organs, and often without any at all. The theories which carry most weight to my own mind are those advocated by Mrs. Seiler, of Philadelphia, in her excellent manuals on "The Voice in Singing" and "The Voice in Speaking;" for they are based upon accurate anatomical knowledge of the vocal organs, rare musical talent, original investigation, and extensive experience in teaching. The remarks to follow will chiefly concern the well-being of the voice from a hygienic or medical point of view, rather than an artistic one.

The voices of children are much alike in the two sexes, and remain so for a few years, sometimes comprising the entire period of childhood. The vocal organ of children is quite small, proportionately to the bulk of the body, and the pitch of the voice is high. When girls arrive at the age of twelve or thirteen, however, and boys at from fourteen to sixteen, the vocal organ begins to enlarge rapidly, so that within from one to three years it becomes nearly double its former size. During this period there is what is popularly known as a change of voice, most



marked in boys, the pitch of whose voices will fall an octave, and much less marked in girls, in whom the pitch will fall but one or two notes. At the same time the quality or timbre of the voice becomes modified, acquiring the mature clang which it retains during adult life. *During this period there should be no systematic cultivation of the voice; and children at school should be excused from participating in elocutionary or other sustained vocal exercises, without any detriment to their standing in their classes.*

There is perhaps no other period of life, except the extremes of infancy and old age, at which the voice cannot be cultivated with advantage; it being understood that very much more can be accomplished with youthful, fresh, and flexible organs than with old, misused, and rigid ones. If a child shows marked talent for singing, and its parents are desirous that the talent should be cultivated, it is not too early to begin about the fifth or sixth year of age,—provided a competent instructor is employed, who will take care of the voice and preserve it, rather than develop it. Appropriate exercises and songs for such pupils should be limited to the compass of an octave or thereabout, and should not be practised for more than twenty minutes in the twenty-four hours. This plan of treatment will preserve the flexibility of the vocal organs until such time as they are physically susceptible of undergoing the requirements of the higher culture.

Above all, the mistake must not be made that an inferior instructor will be amply sufficient until the child is older or further advanced. Far better intrust the little one to its own unaided and spontaneous efforts; for the disposition, on the part of well-meaning teachers of poor judgment, will tempt them to display the immature vocal abilities of the child to the immediate gratification of its relatives, but to the sure detriment of subsequent culture. Another point to be borne in mind by parents is this, that it is usually a mistake to intrust a female voice to a male instructor, unless that instructor is in the habit of utilizing skilled female assistants to develop the voices of female pupils. So much is left to imitation, and even to mimicry, in vocal tuition, that a pupil intuitively attempts to imitate the quality or timbre of the instructor's tone as closely as possible; and thus, under a male teacher, a female voice is insensibly robbed of some of its peculiar feminine quality. This remark is applicable, though to a more limited extent, to the cultivation of the speaking voice in elocution, as well as to the cultivation of the singing voice. Children of either sex may be safely intrusted to competent female instructors; but after the voice has changed, boys should be taught by men only.

Teaching in chorus is not calculated to develop the inherent capabilities of exceptionally good voices, though useful for other purposes pertaining to discipline. Defects are less apparent; and therefore in-



correct habits are more likely to become confirmed. Class instruction, therefore, should be supplemented by a sufficient amount of individual supervision.

For the full development of the voice and for the maintenance of any excellence that may have been acquired, systematic exercise is requisite. Control of the organs for delicate effects is soon lost, if practice is long intermitted, just the same as it is with the fingers of the skilled instrumental performer. Said Wilhelmj once, "If I neglect to practise for one day, I notice it; if for two days, my friends notice it; and if for three, the public notice it." This explains the reason why those who use their voices in public at infrequent intervals are less successful in their results, and more amenable to injury from over-effort, than those who are accustomed to frequent appearances. The actor who treads the stage nightly has a great advantage in this respect over the clergyman who enters the pulpit but one day in the week. The clergyman should practise daily for a few minutes in his study, and then he will become less susceptible to the special form of sore throat associated with intermittent labors, and to which histrionic vocalists, as a rule, are not subject. For a similar reason, the amateur elocutionist or vocalist who would attain excellence and maintain it, should keep up a moderate amount of systematic practice in the privacy of his own apartments.