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The Throat and The Voice: Part 2, Chapter 7: Vocal Gymnastics

Jacob Solis Cohen

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should be at first under the supervision of a competent critic or instructor.

In order that respiration be properly performed during vocal exercise, it is essential that there should be no constriction at the waist. The waistcoat of the male and the corsage of the female should be sufficiently loose to permit of free abdominal respiration. Close fitting or tight corsets, therefore, interfere mechanically with efficient respiration, and impair the vocal powers accordingly.

An easy position of the body should be assumed during public use of the voice or during vocal practice. The erect position is the best, with the book, manuscript, or score at an easy reading distance, at about the level of the neck or chin, so that the head need not be depressed, and thus interfere with easy utterance and intonation. The body must not be turned too much to the right or left of the middle line, as that prevents distinct hearing by the audience at the opposite side of the room. There is hardly any public hall which permits equal facility of hearing in every part of it. It is proper, therefore, to address the central portion of the audience; by which plan those at the two sides are placed under equal advantages. Addresses first to one side of the room and then to the other deprive those at each side, successively, of the remarks which are being made to the people at the opposite side of the house.

CHAPTER VII.

VOCAL GYMNASTICS.

THE value of systematic gymnastic exercises, in developing the capacity of the muscles in general, is universally conceded. There are a number of exercises of this kind which develop the flexibility and control of the muscles which are employed in the production and use of the voice. These are the muscles of the diaphragm, of the chest, of the larynx, of the pharynx, palate, tongue, mouth, and jaw. The gain to the individual in prosecuting appropriate exercises of these muscles is being appreciated by instructors in elocution and in singing; and certain forms of exercises have been adopted with success by some professional cultivators of the voice. The methods employed vary with different teachers.

The muscles of the diaphragm may be exercised by forcible distention or expansion of the abdomen, followed by a quick recession of its walls, as if shrinking from a threatened blow. These movements are repeated a number of times, with varying degrees of force, extent, and rapidity, until they begin to become uncom-

fortable, when they should cease for the time. They may accompany the phases of the respiratory act, the walls of the abdomen advancing during inspiration and retreating during expiration, and may be performed partly with the mouth closed and partly with the mouth moderately or widely opened.

The muscles of the chest may be exercised in a variety of modes. Jumping the rope back-door, as it is called, is a very good method of developing the large muscles of the upper portion of the front of the chest. Men often prefer the use of dumb bells or Indian clubs. Movements of the arms forward and backward, as if pushing something forward and then pulling it backward, likewise develop these and other muscles. Movements of the trunk of the body forward, backward, and to either side, the motion taking place at the hips, develop the lower muscles of the chest and those of the abdomen. Walking, swimming, and rowing likewise develop the muscles of the chest. Deep inspirations through the nostrils, or through a tube of some kind held in the mouth, develop certain intrinsic muscles of the chest which extend from each set of ribs to the adjoining ones.

The muscles of the larynx are best exercised by systematic singing exercises on the tones at and near the middle of the ordinary compass of the individual. Repetitions of the first portion of the act of swallowing, the mouth being closed, exercise the muscles of

the pharynx, palate, base of the tongue, and some of the muscles of the larynx, which can be felt to ascend and descend during the movements. Forcible expiratory efforts with the lips firmly closed, so as to prevent any escape of air, strengthen the muscles of the pharynx and upper part of the front of the neck.

The muscles of the tongue are exercised by protruding and withdrawing it, by turning the tip up to the roof of the mouth and down to the floor of the mouth, and by turning it to either side of the mouth.

The muscles of the mouth are exercised by systematic movements of the lips.

The muscles of the lower jaw are exercised by moving it forward and backward.

Flexibility of the voice is best practised, according to Mrs. Seiler, by simple exercises on the syllable *koo*, at intervals of tones and semitones, and with gradually increasing quickness.

A good deal has been written about the position which should be given to the escaping current of air during vocalization, so as to vary the effect according as the column strikes different portions of the mouth, throat, and nasal passages. Views vary a great deal with different instructors, and I know of no general rules applicable to all individuals. Exercises are best instituted under the guidance of the singing or elocution teacher, to correct defects of utterance as presented by individual pupils. The chief fault is that

the waves of sound are directed too much towards the back part of the throat, instead of towards the front of the mouth. The peculiar attractive tones of the Italians are due to their custom of directing the waves of sound towards the lips. The guttural character of the tones of most English-speaking people is due to their habit of directing the sound-waves too much towards the back part of the throat. When the sound-waves issue from the mouth, as it were, their shape or form is more regular than when they issue more from the throat; and, as we have seen (p. 101), the timbre or quality of sound is due to the shape or form of the sound-wave.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEFECTS OF VOICE.

A GREAT defect in vocal utterance, the organs being healthy, is due to pitching the voice in too high a key, that is to say, in too high a portion of the vocal register. Prolonged efforts at public speaking in too high a key are fatiguing, painful, and injurious to the voice. The fault may be corrected by paying particular attention to one's utterance for a time, even in ordinary conversation, until the proper method gradually becomes habitual, so as not to require attention any longer. The so-called chest portion of the register is the proper one to use, especially for men; but care must be taken not to use the very lowest portion of the register, as that would develop a defect in the opposite direction. When we speak in such tones that the chest is felt to vibrate under the impact of the sound-waves, we are using the voice in the most efficient and agreeable manner; and if we endeavor to imitate the tones of the voice of a friend whose utterance is particularly agreeable to the ear, it will be evident, by our sensations, that the