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Charles Kensington Salaman Esq.,
Hon. Mem. Acad.^a

^a St. Cecilia, Rome

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JUNE 4, 1877.

PROFESSOR W. H. MONK IN THE CHAIR.

*ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS A LANGUAGE
FOR MUSIC.*

By CHARLES KENSINGTON SALAMAN, Esq., Hon. Mem. Acad.
St. Cecilia, Rome.

AN impression has long prevailed in the minds of Englishmen, no less than of foreigners, that our language is unfitted for music. This, I maintain, is a fallacy, originally accepted without due reflection, and since upheld, because no person, as it would appear, has deemed it his duty to subject to careful examination the foundation upon which it rests.

Intimately connected as this subject is with the vocal art, and more particularly with English vocal music and English singing, the Musical Association will doubtless welcome it as one of sufficient musical and national importance to claim attentive consideration. Should, as I hope, a discussion follow my Paper, I believe that ideas will be thrown out which cannot but prove of advantage to our poets, our musicians, and our singers. Opinions emanating from an association such as this should have weight and importance in all musical circles.

It is probable that the prejudice which still obtains against the English language as a language for song commenced with the introduction of the Italian opera into this country; for it is difficult to conceive that it could have had existence while the illustrious Henry Purcell flourished; he who, in every page of his vocal music, whether for the Church or for the stage, afforded irrefragable proof of the fitness of the English language for English music. 'Purcell,' says a contemporary writer, 'was particularly admired for his vocal music, having a peculiar genius to express the energy of English words, whereby he moved the passions as well as caused admiration in all his auditors.' With what perfection Purcell has married his immortal music to immortal verse need not be told to the privileged minority who have delighted in making acquaintance with his compositions. When Italian operas were first imported into England, and English translations of the Italian text were called for, it was

discovered that our language would not amalgamate with the music of Italy; and as it had already become the fashion to consider that nothing was worthy to be designated 'music' which was not of Italian origin, the notion that the English was not a musical language was then sown, it took root, and widely spread. 'I have more than enough discouragement to drop the pursuit of obliging my country,' wrote old Henry Playford, when publishing, in 1702, the second part of the '*Orpheus Britannicus*,' 'since foreigners meet with a reception that is inconsistent with the interest of one that has the honour to be a native. But let them under-sell me as long as they please, and transplant their foreign musick into these climates, the judicious will be of my side when they make an estimate of Mr. Purcell's works, which are equal to those of the best masters of Italy.' It does not seem to have occurred to those who then raved about Italian music, to the disparagement of their own, that every language should engender its own vocal music, and that as the Italian language had created Italian vocal music, so in like manner should the English language generate English vocal music. 'The only fault I find in our present practice,' wrote Addison, in 1711, in allusion to the introduction of *recitative* into English opera, 'is the making use of Italian *recitative* with English words. The *recitative* musick in every language should be as different as the tone or accent of each language; for otherwise what may properly express a passion in one language will not do it in another. Everyone who has been long in Italy knows very well that the cadences in the *recitative* bear a remote affinity to the tone of their voices in ordinary conversation, or, to speak more properly, are only the accents of their language made more musical and tuneful. Thus the notes of interrogation, or admiration, in the Italian musick (if one may so call them) which resemble their accents in discourse on such occasions, are not unlike the ordinary tones of an English voice when we are angry; insomuch that I have often seen our audiences extremely mistaken as to what has been doing on the stage, and expecting to see the hero knock down his messenger when he has been only asking him a question, or fancy that he quarrels with his friend when he only bids him "good morrow." For this reason the Italian artists cannot agree with our English musicians in admiring Purcell's compositions, and thinking his tones so wonderfully adapted to his words, because both nations do not always express the same passion by the same words.'

I do not claim for the English language that it is the *best* for song; but I contend that it is at least as good a language for English men and women to sing as any other, and that, after all, is what we have chiefly to consider in this inquiry.

The successful alliance of native poetry and music, which is not sufficiently appreciated by our own countrymen, cannot be expected to appeal to the comprehension of foreigners, who find our language difficult to pronounce in speech, and yet more

difficult to articulate in song. The suitableness or unsuitableness of the English language for music, and the difficulties of its pronunciation by foreigners, are distinct questions, which must be argued separately. All educated English men and women are presumed to be capable of enunciating their native language with ease, fluency, clearness, and correctness in song as in speech. That this 'consummation, devoutly to be wished,' is rarely realised is patent to all. We hear mispronunciation on the stage, in the opera house, the concert room, the senate, at the bar, and in the church. The last time I attended a provincial cathedral service the precentor, while intoning the Litany, persevered in repeating '*miserubbul* sinners.' Many of our best reputed vocalists frequently mispronounce and indistinctly articulate their native language to such an extent, indeed, that an almost painful degree of attention is requisite in order to discover in what language they are singing. 'Bid me *duspair*,' and 'I'll *duspair*,' is frequently noticeable when Hatton's fine song, 'To Anthea,' is sung. Too much aspiration and the want of it is as often observable. In a song called 'Good bye, a long good bye,' I have heard, instead of

'He said 'twas hope, I only saw "good bye,"'

'He said 'twas *soap*, I only saw "good bye."'

A very common error, committed even by some of our most eminent singers, is to subdivide monosyllables:—'*O re-est* in the Lord' (*Elijah*) is commonly heard.

Such faults cannot be too strongly censured; for they tend to bring not only English singing, but the English language, into bad repute. As amateur vocalists more frequently imitate the defects than the perfections of public professional singers, these errors, widely spread, become chronic, and at length are accepted as correct. The difficulties of pronunciation by foreigners are certainly very great, and, in some cases, are insurmountable. They cannot pronounce the *th*. With them '*brothers*' are '*brozzurs*,' or '*brothers*.' The irregularities, uncertainties, inconsistencies, and eccentricities in our pronunciation are indeed bewildering. I leave to grammarians and orthoepists to assign a reason why *h-e-a-r-d* is pronounced *herd*; *h-e-a-r-t*, *hart*; and *b-e-a-r-d*, *be-erd*; why *t-h-e-r-e* is *thare*, and *h-e-r-e*, *here*; *b-e-a-r* is *bare*, and *t-e-a-r*, *tere*. These eccentricities can no doubt be accounted for by tracing to foreign sources the origin of some of our words, but these and many other difficulties to foreigners in singing our language should not be regarded as such by our own countrymen.

Referring to the abundance of monosyllables in our language, which 'gives us an opportunity of delivering our thoughts in few sounds,' Addison remarks, 'This, indeed, takes off the elegance of our tongue, but, at the same time, expresses our ideas in the readiest manner, and, consequently, answers the first design of speech better than the multitude of syllables which make the words of other languages more tuneful and sonorous. The sounds

of our English words are commonly like those of string music, short and transient, that rise and perish upon a single touch; those of other languages are like the notes of wind instruments, sweet and swelling and lengthened out into varieties of modulation.' Words of one or more syllables difficult to pronounce should be slowly, firmly, and repeatedly uttered aloud, carefully dividing the syllables; and they should in this manner be as assiduously practised as a difficult passage upon a musical instrument.

I do not presume to discourse with authority upon this topic; but, having been occupied, in pursuance of my vocation, in composing music to English verse for more than forty years, I venture to think that, as the result of so long an experience, I may succeed in advancing some satisfactory *data* to prove that our language is in fact not *ill*-suited to music. I aver with confidence, that when the English language fails to fulfil the requirements of vocality, the fault will lie, not with the language, but with those who misuse it. It may be the poet who has not well chosen his words and arranged them for lyrical use with judgment and discretion; it may be the musician, who, perhaps, wanting in genius, experience, and good taste, and not having regard to the character and prosody of the language, has unskillfully set it to music; or it may be the singer, who has misinterpreted the words of the poet and the aim of the composer; who has failed to enunciate correctly, to articulate clearly, to utter distinctly; and who has, perhaps, neglected to give due emphasis to words and syllables, and to impart to both verse and song the true vocal expression.

While supporting the claim of our language to be regarded as one in every way suited to the requirements of English music and English singers, and to such foreign singers as can correctly pronounce our language, I shall not shrink from the avowal that the English vocabulary includes harsh and rough-sounding words in common with many other languages. I admit that it abounds in consonants, digraphs, gutturals, diphthongs, and sibilants, and that there are in it few vowel-ending words of pure Anglo-Saxon origin; but I do not concede that, upon that account, our language is not suitable for vocal music. It is suggested that the singing voice requires a language whose verse contains a majority of words formed of open syllables—free for vocal utterance. It must be allowed that the minority of words of this class is amongst the inherent difficulties of our language as a language for music. My experience in the composition of English vocal music has, however, shown me that every difficulty is capable of being surmounted, and must be overcome. Whatever defects may be discoverable in our language in the matter of gutturals, and consonants, and sibilants, and want of euphony, are amply compensated for by a balance of advantages. Where is there a language, ancient or modern, more copious in words adaptable to every class of subject, 'grave or gay, lively or severe,' and capable of portraying every phase of human passion and expressing every shade of human sentiment?

Let it not be forgotten that in our language roughness is tempered with smoothness; that harsh-sounding words are balanced by those that are euphonious; that what we lose in sweetness we gain in strength.

'Our language,' says a critic of the last century, 'has been thought to be very deficient in harmony of sound; yet the melody of its versification, its power of supporting poetical numbers without the assistance of rhyme, is a sufficient proof that it is far from being inharmonious. Even the hissing sound of which it has been accused obtains less frequently than has been suspected; in the final syllables, especially, where the letter *s* is transformed into a *z*, which is one of the sounds on which the ear rests with pleasure: as in *has, these, loves, hears, &c.*' In his essay on 'The Euphony of Language,' Dr. Burney has noticed that we have filed off 'the Saxon roughness in words in which the letters *gh* occur: as *cough, rough, trough, laugh, plough, thought, eight, freight, enough,*' which in early times were pronounced in the Teutonic manner, and which are still guttural in Scotland and in some parts of England.'

Words such as these should not be used for musical purposes, if they can be dispensed with; but if used should be introduced sparingly, and with judgment and discretion, and not in near proximity. It is a mistake to imagine that only soft-sounding, open-vowel, and vowel-ending words are required for vocal music. When energy and force are to be represented in song—when we have to express and describe rage, frenzy, revenge, despair, the natural war of the elements, and the unnatural war of human beings—we must use expressive words, albeit rough and tough and harsh sounding; we must set aside considerations of euphony, and only think of poetical and musical expression, but bestowing, at the same time, upon vocality as much careful attention as possible.

Exception, on vocal grounds, may perhaps be taken to the following spirited and pathetic lines by the late Rev. George Croly; but I have long considered them admirably adapted for music:—

Hark to the knell !
It comes on the swell
Of the stormy ocean wave.
'Tis no earthly sound,
But a toll profound
From the mariner's deep sea grave.

When the billows dash,
And the signals flash,
And the thunder is on the gale;
And the ocean is white
In its own wild light,
Deadly, and dismal, and pale;

When the lightning's blaze
Smites the seaman's gaze,
And the sea rolls in fire and in foam
And the surges' roar
Shakes the rocky shore,
We hear the sea knell come.

There ! 'neath the billow,
 The sand their pillow,
 Ten thousand men lie low ;
 And still their dirge
 Is sung by the surge,
 When the stormy night winds blow.

Sleep, warriors ! sleep
 On your pillows deep,
 In peace ! for no mortal care,
 No art can deceive,
 No anguish can heave
 The heart that once slumbers there.

In the foregoing, the poet, as a writer of lyric poetry, has fulfilled all its requirements. Should the composer be equally attentive to the exigencies of musical expression, and observe as carefully the rules of vocality, there will be nothing left to desire either in the poetry or the music.

I will turn for a moment to the language of Italy, which Dryden considered to have been invented for the sake of poetry and music, and which Metastasio designated '*La musica stessa.*' 'The vowels,' says Dryden, 'are so abounding, and the pronunciations so manly and so sonorous, that their very speaking has more of music than German poetry and song.' And yet Salvoni has calculated that out of forty thousand words in the Italian vocabulary, six thousand only can be used for the Italian *opera seria*. 'The others,' he says, 'are deficient in dignity and softness, qualities which are essential for vocal expression.' Despite the natural advantages which the Italian tongue is known to possess, its exquisite melody, its remarkable pliancy and elegance, and its aptitude for vocal display, yet the old composers of Italian song deemed it necessary for the perfection of the vocal art to subject every word of this mellifluous tongue to a severe scrutiny before setting it to music. The Count Algarotti, an Italian writer of the past century, referring, in his '*Essay upon the Italian opera,*' to Jacopo Peri, the reputed inventor of recitative, and the composer of *Euridice*—'*La prima opera in musica*'—says :—'He carefully observed the Italian words which are capable of intonation or consonance, and those which are not. He was exact in minuting down our several modes of pronunciation, as well as the different accents of grief, of joy, and of all the affections incident to the human frame.' . . . 'So nicely scrupulous was he in his course of vocal experiments, that he scrutinised intimately the very genius of the Italian language.'

Of Tommaso Bai, the composer of the *Miserere* (1713), sung in the *Capella Sistina* at Rome during Passion week, Dr. Burney says : 'He is much commended for his attention to prosody, or the accentuation of words, in which his notation is generally so exact, that the proportion of long and short syllables is as strictly preserved, in singing this psalm, as it could be in reading it.'

'What,' you may perhaps inquire, 'has this to do with Eng-

lish verse?' Much. Had all our composers of vocal music studied their language as attentively as they studied their music, and had submitted it to as careful an examination as the Italians did their native tongue, ours, no doubt, would have been spared much unjust condemnation.

Our pliant language is susceptible of the utmost refinement and the highest polish, and can naturally, and as it were affectionately, lend itself to every kind of musical expression. We have such a wealth of words at our disposal that, when found necessary, on the score of euphony and variety, to substitute one word for another, we can do so to almost any extent with ease, and without the sacrifice of either sense or strength. My friend the late Sir Henry Bishop informed me in 1843 that when he and Thomas Moore were conjointly engaged upon the *National Melodies*, which he harmonised and adapted to Moore's original poetry, the poet, in order to ensure the most musically sounding words, so often substituted one word for another that in the end, after three years of revision, scarcely one word was retained that had appeared in the original manuscript.

The English language is confessedly wanting in some of the essential vocal qualities for which the Italian, above all others, is distinguished. It is not a less noticeable fact that we have in our vocabulary words almost as serviceable as vowel-ending words, and which may be used as equivalents with an almost equal effect if articulated, and sung with refinement, fluency, and grace; I refer to such words as heart, part, fair, tear, know, care, calm, charm, despair, depart, and others of a similar character, of which we possess a superfluity. I will read two stanzas from Swinburne's lovely poem, 'A leave-taking,' which I have lately set to music, in illustration of my meaning. You will find here a collection of final words of remarkable sweetness, and as useful for vocality as if they had been vowel-ending. Observe the last word of each line, how soft and musical it is!—

'Let us go hence, my songs; she will not hear.
Let us go hence together, without fear;
Keep silence now, for singing-time is over,
And over all old things, and all things dear,
She loves not you nor me as all we love her.
Yea, though we sang as angels in her ear,
She would not hear.

'Let us rise up and part; she will not know.
Let us go seawards as the great winds go,
Full of blown sand and foam; what help is here?
There is no help, for all these things are so,
And all the world is bitter as a tear.
And how these things are, tho' ye strove to show,
She would not know.'

The entire poem is of equal beauty. Can any lines more harmonious be desired in lyric poetry? Need any words be softer for musical expression?

It may be objected to these lines that the word 'singing' is

half a sibilant and half nasal, and that it closes the throat; that 'silence' begins and ends with a hissing sound; that 'up' closes the lips; that 'past,' although it opens the mouth, immediately after presses the tongue against the teeth; that 'foam,' and 'help' and 'world,' after the final consonants have been sounded, engender an added sound, a kind of literal echo. I cannot but admit—to borrow a line from Swinburne—that 'All these things are so'; but I emphatically deny that they are objectionable, or that they present any obstacles to free vocality.

Alliterations, which are regarded as ornaments in poetry intended to be read, should, as much as possible, be avoided in poetry intended to be sung. The following ill-chosen words are to be found in Balfe's *Bohemian Girl*:—

'When the fair land of Poland was plough'd by the hoof.'

It has been remarked that the word 'song' is unsuited to be sung: because it commences with a sibilant and terminates with a nasal sound. I must confess that I do not participate in this objection. The alliteration of sibilants is objected to. They abound in Shelley's famous serenade, 'I arise from dreams of thee.' When, in 1836, I set these exquisite lines to music, I was fully alive to the defects which might arise in consequence of the sibilants, and was determined to avoid their *ill* effects by separating them as far as possible. Observe the sibilants and alliterations.

'I arise from dreams of thee
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low,
And the stars are burning bright:
I arise from dreams of thee,
And a spirit in my feet
Hath led me—who knows how?
To thy chamber window, Sweet!'

Sibilants when slowly and carefully uttered in singing may be made to produce a soft and pleasing effect; a rapid enunciation of them results in hissings. Like every other difficulty in the English as a singing language, the ill effects of sibilants must be avoided.

As an example of the misuse of our language, I would point to a comic air in Balfe's first English Opera, *The Siege of Rochelle*, in which English words intended to be rapidly sung are set to music which may have been intended for the Italian language. The English is unfitted for such uses; rapidity of utterance is inconsistent with its character.

This song, extremely clever as music, continues in the same manner through many pages. And upon such evidence the English language is held up to censure as an unmusical language. It is certainly unfitted for Italian *Roulades*. In Purcell's and Handel's music, however, we find, in the fashion of the period, upon monosyllables, effective musical passages of two or more bars' duration. The introduction to 'Oh, ruddier than the cherry!' may be cited as an instance.

The rolling passages of scales in the *allegro* of the same song upon the divided word mer-ry is as effectively vocal as it would have been upon any Italian vowel-word:—

The music Handel has set to

'Yet hard to tame, as raging flame,
 And fiercer as storms that bluster,

is in entire conformity with the sentiment sought to be conveyed

by the text. Words and music entirely agree, and leave nothing to be desired on the score of vocality :—

blus

ter; Yet hard to tame, As

ra - ging flame, And fierce as storms that blus-ter.

Translations of Italian operas into English are rarely satisfactory. The best I have met with are those by Mdme. Natalie Macfarren, as regards the successful application to brilliant vocal passages of words whose sounds resemble, as nearly as possible, the original Italian text. To place upon the same notes and phrases not only similar sounds, but meanings identical with the original text, would seem to be beyond the power of the most experienced translator.

The following example, from the first tenor aria, 'Ecco ridente in cielo,' in Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, will illustrate my theory. It is as good an English version, or translation, as may be found; but the alliance, after all, is unnatural and to some extent unsuitable :—

Andante.

Ec - co ri-den-te in cie - lo
Dawn with her ro - sy man - tle

Allegro.

Oh dol - ce con tin - to, che r -
Un - til I have told her my

gual heart no, she not

'Oh dolce contento, che e gual non ha,' for the sake of vocalty, is anglicised thus:—'Until I have told her, my heart she enchants.' The words 'my heart' and 'enchants' serve very well for the brilliant passages composed to the Italian words, 'e gual' and 'non ha'; but, at the best, it is an unsatisfactory combination of both words and music, and is an additional proof of the unfitness of the English language for *Italian music*.

The lyric poetry of Shakspeare, Milton, Dryden, Herrick, Shelley, Byron, Thomas Moore, Campbell, Proctor, Hemans, Longfellow, Tennyson, and the more recent poets, Swinburne, Rossetti, and O'Shaughnessy, has been set by many of our most eminent native composers, who have enhanced the special beauties of each poet by their music. Such works, it is hoped, will endure as favourable specimens of the successful alliance of English verse with English music.

While Handel was yet engaged upon the composition of Italian opera, and before he had entered upon the *Via Sacra* of Oratorio, whose sublimity has placed upon his brow the wreath of immortality, Addison penned the following lines in the *Spec-*

tator (June 14th, 1712): 'I could heartily wish that there was the same application and endeavours to cultivate and improve our Church music as have been lately bestowed on that of the stage. Our composers have one very great incitement to it. They are sure to meet with excellent words, and, at the same time, a wonderful variety of them. There is no passion that is not finely expressed in those parts of the Inspired Writings which are proper for Divine songs and anthems.' 'Our language,' continues Addison, 'has received innumerable elegancies and improvements from that infusion of *Hebraisms* which are denied to it out of the poetical passages in Holy Writ. They give a force and energy to our expressions, warm and animate our language, and convey our thoughts in more ardent and intense phrases than any that are to be met with in our own tongue. There is something so pathetic in this kind of diction that it often sets the mind in a flame, and makes our hearts burn within us.'

'Since we have, therefore, such a treasury of words, so beautiful in themselves, and so proper for the airs of musick, I cannot but wonder that persons of distinction should give so little attention and encouragement to that kind of musick, which would have its foundation in reason, and which would improve our virtue in proportion as it raised our delight.' . . . 'Musick, when thus applied, raises noble hints in the mind of the hearer, and fills it with great conceptions. It strengthens devotion and advances praise into rapture.'

Handel knew and appreciated well the language of his adopted country. 'Comfort ye My people,' 'He was despised,' 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' 'Total eclipse,' 'Deeper and deeper still,' and other sacred works by the same illustrious master, will live everlastingly to testify to the aptitude of our Scriptural language for our sublime music, and to prove irrefutably that pathos, tender expression, energy, and force can more than compensate an Englishman for the want of vowel-ending words, and for the presence of words replete with consonants, sibilants, and every other objectionable quality which may be discoverable in our rich and noble language.

My auditors who hold views different from my own will no doubt express them, and thus give to the Musical Association the benefit of their experiences. Should my opinions be shared by others, I hope that they will supplement any points which I may have omitted, in order to add force to the arguments which I have this day ventured to bring forward in vindication of our language as a language for music.

DISCUSSION.

Mr. A. J. ELLIS, F.R.S., said: The question of spoken sounds in relation to singing had engaged his attention for some years

past, not with regard to the English language especially, but with regard to language as a medium for the expression of music. It was a very difficult thing to understand what in fact made a language good for singing. If it were merely, as in a great part of Mr. Salaman's paper seemed to be assumed, the power of expressing good and noble thoughts, or all kinds of feelings and passions, such as would naturally lead a musician to compose music in accordance with them, one might almost say that every European language was good for singing; but when one examined the sounds of a language as adapted for the expression of musical sounds, considerable distinctions must be drawn, and each person would probably consider his own language the best adapted for the purpose. He was told, for example, that the Hottentots or Kaffirs were extremely fond of music, and that the sound of their language in singing was really beautiful, notwithstanding the interruptions formed by the 'clicks,' which were, of course, impossible to sing upon. In the English language there were a great number of sounds which would not lend themselves to music at all. Mr. Salaman spoke of singing the *s* softly and gently, but he (Mr. E.) must own he was totally unable to conceive an *s* being sung at all; it was an interruption of music, just as much as the wind which escaped over the embouchure of a flute was an interruption to the passage the flute-player was producing. The mute consonants, *p*, *t*, and *k*, could not be sung upon at all, and *b*, *d*, and *g* could only be sung upon for a very short time. Last year he had an opportunity in a class of thirty persons of trying experiments on this matter. He tried to make them sing merely on *b*, *d*, and *g*, but they were soon stopped altogether by the condensation of air inside the mouth. *F*, *th*, and *sh*, again, were quite unvocal. He was amused at Mr. Salaman thinking the *z* a rather nice sound for singing, and he illustrated it by some word such as *has*, in which he showed the unnatural unvocality of such a buzzing sound by dropping his voice before he finished it, ending it with an *s*, as was commonly the practice; and he was sorry to say that in much choral singing the final *s*, instead of being lightly touched, became very marked, so that words ending with a real *z* became words ending with a very disagreeable *s*. If you pronounced the *z* alone, without running into the *s*, the buzzing of it was about as musical as that celebrated instrument, a piece of paper over a comb. He had had a class sing passages in *z*, in *dh*, in *zh*, and so on, and the effect was enough to show them, at all events, that they must not allow any strong enunciation of such sounds if they wished to sing pleasantly. The only consonants which could really be sung were *r*, *l*, *m*, *n*, and *ny*. With regard to *m*, *n*, and *ny*, *m* was the least disagreeable; *n* was much more so, and *ny* was about as bad as could be; and he remembered an especial instance of this many years ago in the singing of 'The Sea, the Sea, the open Sea,' by Mr. Phillips, who insisted upon pronouncing the word 'open,' without any perceptible vowel between the *p* and *n*. The *l* was the most vocal of all consonants,

the *r* being disagreeable because it was founded upon a beat, and was therefore like the beating stops which were sometimes heard on barrel organs and instruments of greater pretension. The vowels were, of course, all vocal, and were the sounds relied upon for producing musical effects; but there were vowels and vowels, and on submitting them to a strict examination you found there was only one real musical vowel, namely, *ah*, and this was very deficient indeed in the English language. It was frequent enough in Italian, and with a slight modification in French, German, Spanish, and most languages. That it was the one which lent itself most naturally to singing was shown by the singer's habit of *lah-laing* passages, the *l* being the most vocal consonant, and the *ah* the most vocal vowel. A vowel was an original quality of tone produced in the larynx, which was afterwards modified in the resonance chambers above, between that and the lips. Those resonance chambers were more or less well or ill—generally ill—adapted to the expression of musical sounds, because they were not adapted to reinforce those partial tones of which the musical tones were composed, and which added greatly to their richness. The vowel *ee* was about the most abominable to sing upon, as might be proved by singing it near the middle register of the voice, and then running down upon it as low as possible, when the vowel became scarcely recognisable, and a harsh, disagreeable, reedy sound resulted. This, of course, applied to the Italian *i* quite as much as to the English *ee*. The *ā* sound was not so bad, and when broadened it became a pleasant musical sound. The peculiar English short sound of *a*, which replaced the short *ah* of other languages, as illustrated in the words 'that black cat,' was most horrible, and required very great judgment in the singer to produce it. For vocal purposes he recommended a slight alteration of it into the finest possible French *a*. The French *a* at present current in France was very much finer than the German *a* or the long *α* as the French used to be, and it was often heard even in England from the finest speakers, in such words as 'ask,' 'pass,' and so on. He would not go further into detail on this subject, but he had found it necessary to advise that almost all English vowels should be slightly altered by the singers in order to render them more easy to sing upon at different pitches than the true spoken vowels. There was an inherent difference between speech and singing, which was a matter of great importance. In speech the pitch did not vary very considerably, generally about a fifth, and rarely more than an octave; and, again, in speech the same pitch was not held for any length of time. In singing, however, it was totally different. Again, in spoken language we were bound to certain stress of syllable and certain difference of rapidity in vowels, but composers very frequently set that at naught. He had heard passages very similar to that from Balfe which Mr. Salaman had put before them, in burlesque operas from the French, the effect produced being perfectly ridiculous; you heard very little of the music, and a great deal of hissing. Those were inherent

difficulties, not in the English language alone, because, if you examined languages separately to find which were the most vocal sounds they contained, you might arrive at very curious results, which, perhaps, would not be very valuable. The fact was, a singer brought out a musical expression, but he did so in words which were not always audible to those who did not know them previously, or had not a book of the words, but which sufficiently adumbrated those words for the audience to follow the meaning and expression. They were, however, often hampered by the unvocal sounds put before them. This might be readily noticed in the case of a long ballad or hymn in church where the same music was repeated to different words, a very different effect being produced on the qualities of tone according to the vowels pronounced. In order to show that upon a somewhat exaggerated scale, he had upon one occasion taken a simple air, 'See the Conquering Hero comes,' and got a chorus to sing eight bars of it, first to *lee*, then to *lah*, and then to *loo*, and the effect was like that of three different instruments. He thought with Mr. Salaman, that too much was said against the unvocality of the English language; an Englishman might speak, perhaps, as strongly against German as an Italian could against English. He recollected the first time he heard Polish spoken it seemed to him nothing but a series of hisses, yet an educated Pole told him he had been to see 'Hamlet' performed, and he described the sound of the English language much in the same way. That simply arose from non-acquaintance with it. One of the lines quoted by Mr. Salaman—

"The heart that once slumbers there"—

he thought very ill-adapted for singing, on account of the concurrence of *s* hisses in 'once slumbers.' The Germans had a similar difficulty with their guttural *ch*, which they had to cut and chip in a way which sometimes rendered it scarcely intelligible; yet he must say, for his own part, he preferred German as a vehicle of music to English, and to show the different effects produced by different speakers, he might say that he had never heard any language spoken more softly and pleasantly than German, or more harshly and unpleasantly than Italian, and he had had opportunities of hearing both from a great number of people in their own countries. The conclusion he came to was, that the national language any person used was, for that person, the best language for singing.

Mr. G. A. OSBORNE thought, if the English language was not considered a good one for music it was mainly attributable to two causes. In the first place, to the musicians who composed music for English words—many of whom were not singers, and consequently did not sufficiently study the requirements of the vocalist. An interesting instance of this came under his notice on one occasion in Paris, where there was a young English lady who was a thoroughly good musician and an excellent reader

A composer had written a song and said he should like to hear it sung. The young vocalist offered to sing it, and her brother accompanied her on the piano. After the symphony she opened her mouth to sing, and suddenly put her hand to her throat as if attacked by a spasm. The symphony was recommenced, but with the same result, and it then appeared that the cause of this curious effect was, that she had to commence the song with the word 'music' on a very high note, and of course the *m* had to be pronounced with the lips closed. If the song had commenced on a low note probably there would have been no difficulty. For the other cause we were greatly indebted to foreigners, who came here in such large numbers. We were glad to see them, and they were glad to come, and often liked to remain here. But they thought it necessary to patronise us by singing our language, sometimes without the slightest understanding of it, trusting to their good ear to catch the proper sounds. Thus he had heard 'Home, sweet Home' sung in a style to make it appear anything but a desirable place.

Mr. W. H. CUMMINGS said: He took considerable interest in this subject, having devoted attention for some years to the matter of vocal music. He thoroughly agreed with Mr. Salaman that the English language was equal to any for musical purposes, but at the same time he differed from Mr. Osborne in thinking that any word in the English language was not fit for singing. He should be pleased to try any word which could be put before him. Mr. Ellis's experiments, he thought, were on a wrong basis altogether. He had a class of thirty persons to sing certain sounds; the question was, were those people educated vocalists? if not, surely they were not the people to test the English language: you could not sing without learning how to do it. He also found fault with consonants, but there were no such things as pure consonants; *t*, for instance, was a compound of a consonant and a vowel, and the vowels themselves were nearly all compounds. He also differed from Mr. Ellis as to the vowel *a* being the *only* proper one to sing upon, for singers very frequently employed some other vowel; and he maintained that vocalists who had given years to this study would be the persons to decide what were the best vowel sounds to use in practice. He thought there was not a letter or a sound which was not good for music. You might take the works of two great men, Purcell and Handel, who had set words of all kinds to music, and always successfully, and you would not find any difficulty even with Handel's fiorituri, although sometimes there was want of taste in adapting the character of the music to the words, Handel not being sufficiently well acquainted with the language; but in Purcell you never found any difficulty at all. Tom D'Urfey, the celebrated writer, once wrote a poem into which he contrived to put all the most difficult sounds the English language was supposed to be capable of, and defied Purcell to set them to music; but he did so, and fortunately the music was in existence, and was capable of being sung by anyone of moderate

powers. Mr. Ellis had complained of the vowel *e* as not being musical, but he had heard most excellent strains where the vocalisation was on *e* alone. Of course in good vocalisation the consonants almost disappeared; they came fairly at the beginning and ending of syllables, and a good singer sang principally on the vowels. There was now a school, fortunately with only one prophetess and, he hoped, few pupils, teaching that vocalists should shut up the nose and sing on the consonants, but he was quite certain that that would not obtain; it never had been the custom in England, at least, since Chaucer's time, and he trusted never would be.

Mr. STRATTON agreed with some of Mr. Ellis's remarks. He was, no doubt, a great master of the constituents of language, but it appeared on the whole that the English was about as good as any other. There was no doubt we ought to study our own language more. He should also like to draw attention to a work which was not very generally known, 'The Music of Nature,' by Wm. Gardiner. He said the French spoke in the nose, the Germans in the throat, and the English through their teeth; also that there was no more beautiful English spoken than by ladies, which he attributed partly to their knowledge of Italian; whilst in another place he said they spoke better than men from the superior shape of their tongues. Another thing was, that if they wished to speak properly they must study how to speak. He also gave the quality of different languages, and suggested that in southern climates speech was softer, and riper, and more flute-like, while in the northern climes, through people having to keep their mouth shut, they were more accustomed to speak in the throat. He gave a high character to the English language, as being most copious, though not rich in short words. He thought that every true musician was also naturally a poet, and if he would only master the mechanical difficulties of the language, would be able to write his own words, and in that way many of the anomalies they heard of would be removed. Wagner was an example of what might be done in that way. There were 10,000 words in the English language beginning or ending with *s* or *st*, and you sometimes found words in a song such as 'ask'st,' which, of course it was almost impossible to sing.

MAJOR MCCREAGH remarked that a foreign writer had said that the English was the language of snakes, and the German that of horses. No doubt there were difficulties in the English language with some of the consonants, although they were necessary. They had been called the crutches for the vowels to lean upon, and were certainly indispensable. Perhaps the best test of a language was its power of being translated for musical purposes. For instance, the 'Bohemian Girl,' which was written in English, had been translated into Italian; but some of the best airs in it, as, for instance, 'The heart bowed down,' were not nearly so effective in that language as in the original. There were other instances, such as the opera of 'Macbeth,' where the witches' scene was rendered perfectly absurd by its translation.

One great cause for the preponderance of the letter *s* in the English language might be mentioned, and that was the change which had taken place in the 3rd person singular of the present tense in every verb, which was comparatively recent; and in addition, the plurals of nearly every noun, and the possessive case, were all made to terminate in *s*. If they were met in solemn conclave to remodel the English language for musical purposes, he should be inclined to suggest a return to *th* for the 3rd person singular; for though it might be found fault with as a rather lisping termination, it would be preferable to the extraordinary number of *s*'s. One reason given for this *th* being turned into *s* was for the purpose of rhyme, which some writers had found great fault with, and he thought the jingle at the end of each line might be compared without much exaggeration to a blow on a drum to mark each bar. Some people could not distinguish poetry from prose except from the jingling rhyme at the end; but he thought if we could go back to the classic times, when poetry was written without any rhyme, it would be a great improvement, though 'Paradise Lost' was originally snuffed out in popular favour by Hudibras mainly on this account. He believed that, on the whole, the English language might compare favourably with that of any nation, even with regard to smoothness, if the words were well chosen.

The CHAIRMAN (Professor W. H. MONK) said he could not help thinking that many speakers, as was natural under the circumstances, had been a little at fault as to the difference between language considered *per se*, and the vocal execution of language, which, after all, had been the point at issue. They had been professing to speak on the musical performance of language; and in that there were undoubtedly two component parts, for every syllable of every language contained a vowel, and sometimes one, or perhaps more than one, consonant; whether it were guttural, labial, or otherwise. The singer had to do primarily with the vowel, and the very classification of letters with which all were familiar into vowels and consonants was into what could be uttered by the *vox* and what could be only uttered by the help of something else, and was therefore called *consonant*. A singer produced his vocal effect, long or short, high or low, good or bad, on the vowel, and should be taught to sing passages of music on every one of the vowels indifferently. He might venture to say that if there were any Englishman who had not been taught to accomplish this, he stood at a disadvantage compared with a well-educated Italian. He thought also it would be useful for those who had so much difficulty in singing or speaking the English language, to begin by making a catalogue of all the English words they could discover in which no vowel was present. A singer could treat the vowels of the universal language successfully, whether he were singing English, German, or Italian. That the latter language enjoyed a rich advantage over all others in respect of smoothness would not be denied, and

the very growth of the language showed that such a result must have happened. It was founded mainly on the old Latin; but so much had been softened and beautified in pronunciation by the generations which had passed since it ceased to be a living language, that it might almost be said that the Italians had *lived* for their language. Those who had studied the history of the growth of the Romance languages would see that in many respects the Italian would be remarkable for this quality. But even this consideration did not touch the main point of the accusation against the English tongue, because, as it stood, no English syllable was without a vowel, and he did not see why a vocalist should be less successful in his own language than in any other. He agreed with Mr. Osborne that other causes had been at work, and he might mention one not alluded to by that gentleman. The cultivated foreigner, in singing English, attacked the language from a different point from the ordinary one at which an Englishman began. If you asked an English gentleman or lady to sing a passage, you got for each word, not the thing you should get, or that you would get from the same person if he or she were called upon to sing a passage in Italian or German, but a certain *Bourgeois* pronunciation with which we were accustomed colloquially to be satisfied. Now the vocal teacher ought to correct this universal English fault, and he had often occasion to ask his pupils to suppose that they were singing a language of which they understood not a syllable. In such a case they would look at every word as composed of certain letters, and for each of those letters they would try somehow or other to produce the vocal equivalent. But not so with English; they produced the *Bourgeois* word to which they were accustomed, not the word written. Looking at language from this point, what was wanted was not so much a reformation in the art of spelling as in that of pronouncing the letters visible to the eye. He agreed most entirely with Mr. Cummings with reference to the necessity of *learning how* to sing English. But there was also to be mentioned a prevalent failing in the immense number of musical compositions, constantly issuing from the press, the authors of which did not understand how properly to express their ideas, but it must be thought meant one thing and wrote something else; for he could not otherwise account for the frequent extraordinary misplacement of accent. He might remark that the Italian language had suffered quite as much as the English when operas written in another language had been translated into it. For example, *Faust* was very poorly rendered into Italian. The consonants and vowels being tilted against one another led to the English being called a consonantal language, and the Italian a vocal language; but there were many instances to be found in the writings of the great Italian composers where they had shown the difference between *vocalisation* and the treatment of *consonants*, and the extremely effective use which could be made of the latter in some cases. A most magnificent instance of this might be remembered in the baritone part in Rossini's *Semiramide*.

Mr. SALAMAN said that he had very little to add to what he had already advanced in advocacy of the English language as a language in every way suited to music. He had treated the subject of his Paper from a musical point of view. He could not but agree with some of the remarks which Mr. Ellis had made. All the observations of a man of such celebrity, and such great experience as a philologist and scholar, were entitled to respectful attention. At the same time it must be stated that the consonants which Mr. Ellis says *cannot* be sung, and the vowels and sibilants which he considers difficult to sing, *are* sung by educated English vocalists, and have always been sung, and without any difficulty. Mr. Salaman thought that Mr. Cummings and Professor Monk had successfully replied to Mr. Ellis's objections. Those gentlemen are not only practical musicians, but famous and experienced instructors in the vocal art, and their opinions, the result of a long experience, are of the utmost value in such an inquiry as the present. It was patent to all that England possesses some of the best vocal music that has ever been composed, and that native singers capable of singing it have never been found wanting. Mr. Salaman believed that to the end of time England would produce native musicians who would compose good music to native verse, and that educated English vocalists of both sexes will be forthcoming to sing it effectively, with ease and fluency.