VOCAL NODULES.

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IN *THE LARYNGOSCOPE* of November last appeared an article by Dr. Frank E. Miller, of New York (*The Cause of Vocal Nodules*), in which I have been misquoted as to the method advanced by me for the cure of singer's nodules. As my method has been in use for some fifteen years and has been accepted by the greatest singers of today as the most efficient means of relieving the condition known as singer's nodules, a condition so frequently encountered in operatic coloratura artists, it seems but just that I should be rightly quoted.

Alluding to the investigations made by Prof. Oertel, verified by Koschlakoff, Simanowski and myself, in regard to the manner of vibration of the vocal cords,¹ Dr. Miller, on page 850, makes use of this most remarkable and complex sentence: "Of course, we will have our own opinions, and, having made some investigation, we think that this is not proven beyond a doubt; and we do not believe that it can be so, for the one grand reason that it is impossible to make proper observation with an instrument which employs a human subject whose cords are to be seen, again the eye and hand of the operator, and still further an instrument whose revolutions are too rapid for the human eye to make correct observation; and then again in all of these observations we can see only the one side of the cord, that being the upper side."

It is clear to my mind that Dr. Miller has never seen a laryngostroboscope, and has never studied the principle of the siren; for only by means of this instrument can the cords be studied in vibration. This is accomplished by making the pitch of the siren the same as the note sung. The instrument is illustrated and fully explained in my book entitled "*Voice Building*." No argument, consequently, is possible on this subject. Again, on page 860, Dr. Miller says, in referring to the treatment of nodules: "Dr. H. Holbrook Curtis's demonstration consists in depressing the chin on the sternum, using supra-costal respiration, at the same time singing the syllable 'Maw' at middle 'C' falsetto, while plucking the lips with the finger and focusing the tone 'Dans le Masque.'"

¹ *Arch. f. Laryngol.*, 1895 and "*Voice Building and Tone Placing*," D. Appleton & Co., N. Y., 1896.

"Dr. Curtis's idea might be explained on the ground that by singing falsetto the position of the arytenoids are so changed in their action on their cricoid facets that the edges of the vocal bands have a different alignment, hence vibration under such conditions might benefit and reduce the nodular condition of the cord, as it would no longer be irritated by the opposing cord. But the voice specialist should not use vocal exercises for inflammatory conditions nor allow singing at all for at least ten or fourteen days, dependent, of course, upon circumstances."

It seems to me that Dr. Miller is taking a very narrow view of the causation of singers' nodules, if he narrows it down to the presence of cheesy deposits in the tonsils, and he has wasted much valuable time in experimenting with his goats and dogs. Ingrowing nails may be quite as prolific a cause of nodules, or any other bodily ailment as well, provided it give sufficient discomfort to disturb the vocal poise.

I have seen a pair of well-developed nodules result from singing an opera after news of the death of a child was received immediately before a performance, and I have seen many nodules appear on the cords of the great artists, who have scarcely a vestige of tonsillar tissue between the pillars of the fauces.

Dr. Miller leads one to infer that my exercises are to be sung in the falsetto register. I have shown frequently with my own voice in the falsetto register how a soprano should do these exercises, but my specific rules are as follows:² "If a soprano, take middle C, or a note thereabouts, for example,

"1. Hum a tone with the mouth closed, preceded by a slight puff of air through the nose, as one would imitate the hum of a bee.

"2. After making this tone as pure and musical as possible (by musical is meant resonant or full of overtones), fix the mind upon the word *Maw* and mentally bring forward the tone, almost saying it, until we fell conscious of the vibration upon the lips; at the same time the position of the initial tone should not be changed. To ascertain if the mouth focus is correct, simply pluck the lower lip with the finger as you would pluck the string of a musical instrument, and if the mouth tone is sufficiently far forward an explosive sound like *Maw* will answer. If this tone is not of almost equal purity to the head tone, which all the time must be sounding, the equilibrium of tone, i. e., the division into

² "Voice Building and Tone Placing," p. 154.

the mouth and facial, is not satisfied, and we must experiment until we get the mouth tone as pure as the facial.

"3. Having gotten the purest tone possible, let us now direct the pupil to drop the lower jaw and open the mouth by simply allowing the weight of the jaw to accomplish this without the slightest muscular effort. Our mental *Maw* now breaks on the lips into tone, and we have the pure vowel with its prefixed consonant without being aware of the effort that has produced it—it comes so spontaneously and beautifully, and seems to originate on the lips. The mouth is now closed, and if we have not interfered with our focus of attack, we hear the initial *Hum* still vibrating pure and beautiful in the facial resonators.

"4. After this exercise with the correct focus of tone has become thoroughly familiar, the next step is to take a phrase and sing the notes with *Maw* or *Ma* instead of the words of the song, always commencing in that portion of the scale which will allow of the easiest initial tone for the focus.

"These are the exercises so much appreciated by singers that we employ for the reduction of nodules of attrition on the cords, which exercises, strange to say, have been the object of ridicule by certain laryngologists who have undoubtedly not given the subject of physics a proper amount of consideration. We are indebted to the stroboscope for the scientific vindication of our theory and treatment of singers' nodules. The word *Maw* should be sung in this manner for several minutes at a time and every hour in the day. It makes no difference on what note it is sung, provided the resonators add new overtones to the voice, and thus produce a rearrangement of the vocal cords in their manner of vibration. These exercises must be accompanied by the high-chest method of breathing, as described in the chapter on respiration. As we have so often stated, an additional resonance and consequent augmentation of overtones is derived from this source, and constructively assists in the rearrangement of the manner of vibration of the cords, at the same time increasing their tension. After all, the correct focus of attack or the proper placing of tone is the most important thing to be studied in singing. Without it our voices do not possess charm and the vitality is jeopardized. By the steady employment of them for an hour the above exercises have pulled many a weary voice together, and enabled many a distracted artist to go with confidence upon the stage or platform. Their daily use gives new overtones to the voice, prevents

attritus and allied affections of the cords, and enables the singer to use his voice through many a cold with comparative immunity. In the treatment of relaxed cords and of congested cords, a good piece of advice to give a pupil is this: Until you can do a pure *Hum* with the mouth closed and without effort, do not attempt to talk, simply whisper and make the attack upon the lips even while doing this. By observing this rule many a prolonged hoarseness may be prevented. In either of the above conditions the *Maw* exercises may be commenced with benefit to the cords as soon as the head *Hum* is easily produced."

Dr. Miller sees fit to state that the vocal exercises advocated by me for a correct voice placement, and for the cure of singers' nodules, are "not a useful procedure" and are "apt to upset a voice mechanism acquired after years of study." He goes on to say: "By a remarkable combination of circumstances it has been my privilege to have under my professional care all four of the leading solo soprano voices of old Trinity, St. George's church, Heavenly Rest, and St. Thomas's." The doctor names them and goes on to state that the nodules found in their throats were all of tonsillar origin. That I do not gainsay, but, while I admit that nodules may be due to cheesy deposits, they are due also to many other causes. And while no such "remarkable combination of circumstances" may have occurred to me, I have made a most serious study of nodules and the theory of voice placement, and the system of cure I advocate has been endorsed by such singers as Jean de Reszky, Melba, Sembrich, Patti, Ternina, Caruso, Scotti, Fremstad, Plancon, Gadske and many others who have assisted me in the study of fundamental tone placing.

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