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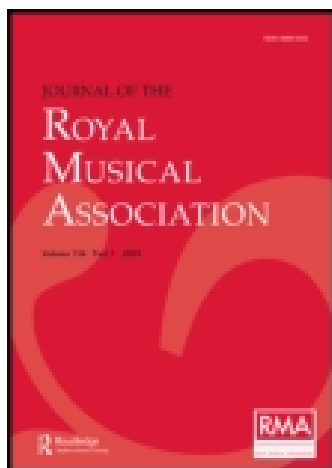
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Some Thoughts About Singing

Frederic Penna

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JANUARY 6, 1890.

H. C. BANISTER, Esq.,
IN THE CHAIR.

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT SINGING.

BY FREDERIC PENNA.

WHEN it was intimated to me that I might be invited to read a paper at one of the meetings of the Musical Association, I hesitated for a moment, should the invitation come, feeling doubtful whether it was in my power to say anything that would not be as well, or better, said by any one of its members.

But as our art has several branches, I thought on reflection I might briefly treat of two or three phases of that particular branch to which some of the best years of my life have been devoted.

With much pleasure, therefore, I accepted the invitation kindly forwarded to me by your Assistant-Secretary.

The subject of my paper I call "Some Thoughts about Singing," with reference to accent, to certain vowel-sounds and consonants, especially the vowel-consonant—the letter "R"—whether and why English vocal students should go to Italy; and, finally, about the production and the placing of the voice.

The records and the traditions of the vocal doings of some of the English and Italian artists who flourished here during the early portion of the present century go to show that singing, as an art, was much more seriously and sternly cultivated then than it is in the present day. The right production, placing, and cultivation of the voice was regarded as the first and the essential thing, for it was justly held to be the making of the instrument which had to be subsequently used in singing. This production and placing of the voice included then, as it should now, all that pertains to the art of breathing, and to the just employment of the various organs associated in the performance of the functions of the voice.

But I must not anticipate what I propose to myself as the last-point upon which I desire to speak in the present paper.

I must ask those of the members of the Association who may be as fully acquainted as I am with the headings of my

subject, to bear with me while I briefly unfold some of my views—not formed hastily or reflected by fancy—which I trust will be found to be in the line of truth (though they are called “thoughts,” and are not an exhaustive treatise on any portion of this “beautiful art”).

In speaking first upon accent in vocal music, I find there are too many instances in the past and present of song to justify the conclusion that, in the opinion of some writers, accent is but a very secondary consideration. I do not limit this thought to the less pretentious examples of vocal music, I speak of the comparative indifference, as it seems, on the part of some musical writers, as to whether the quality of the poetry they have to set is worthy the search after poetical emphasis. It is true, musicians do not, as a rule, set their melodies to the works of the great poets, and the “rhyming thoughts” of the present day are regarded but as pegs on which to hang melodies. The evil is, that the singer is unconsciously taught to be more or less indifferent to what ought to be a great power; for poetry (the outpouring of the heart of the poet-born), recited or sung, depends for its very life upon a just and full appreciation of the words and their right accent, by him who renders it. But the accent to be well enforced, the sentiment must be nobly wedded to a melody, or melodic inflections, in thorough sympathy with it.

Notes bearing musical accent should never be set to unimportant and unaccented words or syllables, words of a simply connecting character. If circumstances arise making it hard to avoid this, the difficulty may be partially overcome by an expedient. The artistic singer is justified in requiring this. Speaking generally, all notes partaking of the nature of dissonance should be allied to the more important words. In the diatonic scale, for instance, the second, the fourth, the seventh, resolving on the notes of the common chord, should be set, where possible, to the emphatic words or syllables. All words (which good elocutionists would strongly accent) should be set to these or other notes of a dissonant character, such as appear in the various chords of the seventh, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth. This gives the intellectual singer the chance that is his due. All intelligent singers study their words, and the very letters of which they are composed, and they are never pleased to find articles, prepositions, or conjunctions falling upon notes bearing primary or secondary musical accent.

That composers generally were not very particular in this respect at the time of Handel may be inferred from the fact that Handel himself did not regard it. But it will be rightly said, Handel, though an Englishman in heart and feeling, was not a master of the beauties and niceties of the English language; or perhaps he did not rightly estimate the great

value of verbal accent, otherwise he would not have given such force to the conjunction "than" in that otherwise splendid song, "O ruddier than the cherry." Most of his songs and arias will give evidence of this. I content myself with referring to one recitative, "Thus saith the Lord, the Lord of Hosts," from "The Messiah." The word "of" set in the dominant in an ascending passage of three notes from the third, is a departure from what one feels to be right from a singer's point of view. The late Sir George Smart, who had a very keen ear and mind for accent, and was laden with traditions, invariably made such offending notes very short by dotting the preceding note. This expedient partially removed the offence. But when the purists began to exert their influence, they, by their criticisms, caused vocalists to sing all their notes according to the length and accent given to them by the classical composers, and Handel, of course, was not allowed to be touched. Thus words and their just accents were ignored in the endeavour to present the musical composer with whatever inaccuracies he left behind him. Handel himself, it is on record, allowed his singers, in whom he confided, to make such changes as their good taste dictated, and the great singers who flourished sixty or eighty years ago, such as Mrs. Billington, Mrs. Salmon, the great Braham, and others, made occasional changes and introduced graceful ornamentations, some possibly handed down from the master's time; but in later days no one had the courage to do such things. Why, one might ask? Crivelli, in his great work upon singing, has some valuable arguments in favour of this permission. I have copies of some of Handel's songs marked with slight alterations by Sir George Smart (traditional, I believe), at the time of my being a pupil of his. But now, and for some time past, singers have not deviated from the "black letter" of the text, fearing, I suppose, the reproaches of the purists. The consequence of this is, the intellectual singer has to subject his appreciation of accent to a prejudice that has little to support it but a blind faith in the rectitude of leaving things just as they were found.

In the recitative referred to, "Thus saith the Lord," the word "little" in the phrase, "yet once a little while," as regards its second syllable, is sung to an offending "D" in its connection.

The terminal words of this recitative are important and potent: "Saith the Lord of Hosts"; and with my mind impressed with the laws of accent I submit whether, if Handel had known the English language better, or it had not been too much the custom to be indifferent to verbal accent, he would not have preferred some other musical ending. For the words "Lord of Hosts," Handel gives, as you all know, the leading note, the tonic, and the dominant. With

this close several recitatives in "The Messiah" terminate; some of these may suit the accent of the words to which they are set, but not this instance; the rise to the tonic for the preposition "of" is always jarring. It can hardly be argued that this particular form of close is necessary, or that words of varied import do not require musical phrases suitable to themselves. I urge this from a singer's point of view.

The pupils of the late Sir George Smart, who had the tradition of how Handel's songs and recitatives were sung probably from the time of the great master himself, through Mr. Bates, whom Sir George knew when he was a boy, and who himself was a boy in Handel's time, will be sensible what efforts he always made to equalize and rightly adjust the accents that seemed to war against the sense of fitness. It was for this reason that Sir Michael Costa always advised students to go to Sir George when they desired to be singers of Handel's songs. Sir Michael was one who regarded accent as the life and soul and excellence of singing.

Now the operatic music of Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi, especially the last-named, has much of its power from the fact that the absolute and relative accents of the sentiments expressed are, generally speaking, in perfect accord with the accents of the melodic inflections. Those who remember Giulia Grisi in "Norma" are not likely to forget her accents, and I think I am right in saying that Costa helped her to the consideration of some of these.

For the singer's sake, and for the vocal art, ought we not to expect the same perfection of united accent in the songs and *arias* of this country? Many indeed are the flagrant instances of false accentuation to be found in the "thousand and three" publications issued to amateurs every month.

Next as to vowels. It has always been held that the beauty of a voice is to be found in the sound of the vowels. The utmost attention then should be given that the vowels be rendered with the rarest purity and the utmost correctness. Every vowel having two, three, or more separate shades of sound, there are necessarily some eighteen or twenty in all that have to be attended to. Now in various provinces in England, some of these vowel-sounds differ from the sounds the same vowels have among the most educated speakers in London, and, I suppose I ought to say, the great seats of learning; and as the perfection of these should be aimed at, I shall be but uttering your own opinions if I say this perfection should be the standard of correctness for the singer. All his vowel-sounds, from whatever province or country he come, should be in accordance with this standard. Now several of these vowels are diphthongal; how, in these cases, should the phases of sound be distributed? The answer is—the singer must make his musical note always on the first

sound of his vowel (even if he have many notes to sing to it), and dispose of his second vowel-sound as quickly as possible, and thus make the musical part of his vowel resemble the Italian vowel. This requires a little practice, but his word will be the better understood.

But how is this purity of the first part of the diphthongal vowel to be secured? It is simply by keeping the organs of speech rigid, in one and the same position (the slightest movement alters the sound); the second sound, making up the diphthong, will come, as it were, of itself, by simply allowing the lips to relax themselves, or raising the lower jaw. Example: Pain, brave, bright.

Those who have not had their attention given to this particular will be surprised to find how soon the end is attained by the adoption of the means, and how much more tuneful and musical their notes will be.

This purity of vowel is what ought to be observed, that the singing of the present may be more like the singing of the best days of the art.

It is to be feared tastes are cultivated in too many musical directions, and in the schooling of the day there is such "express" anxiety to go from subject to subject, that the necessary devotion to one can be but rarely seen, and when seen, surprised at, as a thing out of time and out of date.

One word more before going to consonants. Most of the songs and ballads of the day (which usually whirl into a dance before closing) have for their main topic, love. Now it is unfortunate that the word love should have to be so many times repeated, as its vowel-sound is difficult (while in the Italian it is easy and beautiful, *amore*), and pupils, I find, are sometimes taught to give the first part of the vowel a sound foreign to itself. If the word *love* began with "s" instead of with "l," as pupils I speak of sing it, it would be *salve*. A heart that loves finds a *salve* for the wound when the love is returned, but I do not think, even then, that the two pronunciations should be united.

Whatever difficulty English vowels possess, that difficulty is overcome by the orator and good elocutionist, and it ought to be mastered by the singer, whose art-work rests no more upon the perfection of his intonation than upon the purity of his vowel-sounds.

In what I have said will be seen the reason of my thinking mistakes are made in vocal exercise books, which seem to insist upon the open vowel "a" (as in father) being made to bear the whole weight and burden of the vocal student's art-work. Until the voice is placed this may be well, but afterwards the "a," as in father, should have no more than its just share with the rest. The "a" in words such as rain is the one giving students the greatest trouble.

Now as to consonants. But little need be said with respect to them in general. Elocutionists divide them into two classes which they call aspirate and vocal, these again they sub-divide into explosives and sustained. I pass over the former of these two classes, with the caution that the distinction between the letters of the two classes, which somewhat resemble each other, should be carefully observed to prevent confusion. As to the vocal-sustained consonants, the word "sustained" will suggest that something may be had out of them beyond the mere germs of expression. The letters l, m, n, r, f, v, s, and some of the combinations, will serve the singer well who seeks the aid they can afford him. It is more than tradition, it is history, that the great tenor, Braham, got effects from them quite sensational. His words in recitative, in dignified utterance, in expressions of sorrow, when singing in "The Messiah," in "Jephthah," and in other works, were so delivered that the effect produced upon his enraptured and enthralled listeners was an abiding power, and it was through these consonants.

In singing the sacred name, Lord or God, he seemed to introduce, I am told, an aspirate after the initial letter, which gave an emotional sublimity to the word to which ordinary expression never attained.

This has come down to us from those who knew him well, and who, like the rest of his many admirers, of whom the present Mr. Gladstone, himself a musical amateur of great discernment and taste, was one (and who in those days was not ?), were powerless in his hands and subject to the spell of his superb genius.

My recommendation, then, to the aspirants of vocal fame would be to think well of the vocal-sustained consonants, and get all possible expression out of them, and thus let singing be distinguished from mere warbling.

Before passing to the question next proposed, whether students should go to Italy to learn singing, and if so, why ? I wish to say something concerning the vowel-consonant "r." Now this is a letter giving great trouble to many singers for want of a recognition of definite rules when it should make itself heard and when it should be silent. The rules I am about to give were, I have been told, observed by the great actors who flourished sixty or eighty years ago, and they were regarded by Macready, and I think they embrace every possible case. When "r" follows another consonant it should make itself heard, whenever it precedes another consonant it should be silent. This is simple enough. [Break, bring, brass, crush, drive, fret, grieve, prayer, praise, are examples of the one ; bars, bird, card, chord, earth, Lord, word, are examples of the other.]

When it ends a word, or when it terminates a word with

the vowel "e," it should be silent [rare, before]. When it ends a syllable, if the next syllable begin with a consonant, it should be silent [ex. purpose]; but if this second begin with a vowel it should be rolled [bearer]. If it terminate a word immediately followed by another word beginning with a vowel [father and mother of this boy], let it be heard; but if there be the slightest pause for effect or grammar's sake let it be silent, it will have done its office. Also, if in a word of two syllables both syllables end in "r" and a vowel begin the next word, the "r" at the end of this first word should not be sounded. [Ex. "To hold the mirror up to Nature"; "an error of mine."]

This not sounding of the "r" at the end of a word leaves the singer able to terminate his note (if the word end a phrase, or be followed by a rest) with the mouth open, which is greatly to his advantage.

I am by this consideration brought face to face with the question—Why do vocal students go to Italy? Is it because the air is softer there, and better for the larynx, the glottis, and the muscles of the throat? If that be the reason, they ought to have been there during the growth of these organs. Or, if this improvement be only while the student remains in Italy, the return to this harder climate would be prejudicial rather than otherwise to him. Indeed, lapsing into his former state would probably occasion mental depression besides. But it cannot be this, otherwise the great Italian artists who came to this country annually years ago for the opera would never have been able to go through their arduous work, which they did to their own satisfaction and the delight of the *habités*. Trying to account for it in another way, it may be that better artists, as masters, are supposed to reside there. This might have been the fact once. It cannot be so now, for the facilities for coming to this country by railway through the mountain tunnels enable Italian masters to find their way hither in large numbers. And they do come, whether they are masters or simply Italians.

The prejudice existing in this country is too well-known everywhere—that anything Italian is superior to anything English, excepting, perhaps, hot-house fruit and English roast beef. Well then, if not for the air or the masters, is it that the Italian ear is supposed to be more correct than the English ear, and that perfect intonation is catching, and that this true intonation is heard in every street and every corner of the street? No, not for this; for I have heard more out-of-tune singing at night in the streets of *Milano* than in London. But this I will say, that the exuberance venting itself in song was not the result of alcoholic intoxication, but it was the result of cheerful, not ardent spirits.

The one great reason, excepting perhaps for the traditions

of the real Italian operas, is in the language; for with an exception or two all the words end in vowels, and every vowel has but one sound in the same syllable; as the vowel begins so it ends; and while it continues the organs of speech should undergo no alteration of position. They should be rigid. Thus the truthfulness of tone is preserved; assuming the note to be correctly struck, the ear not deficient, and the organs of speech normal, the word is left off with the mouth open.

The consequence of this is that the voice travels and vibrates, and is in effect different from the voice of the Englishman, who has never sung anything but his own language, and naturally closes his mouth. But do all the masters of singing in Italy direct attention to the beauty and the correctness of singing Italian vowels in this manner? Do they not rather let the English students deliver their words as best they can? Or do all the masters of singing in Italy know everything in connection with the right sounding of their own beautiful language? It is the custom for persons in this country to think so. If this be correct it might be inferred by analogy that all English people know how to pronounce our harder but still very fine language. The simple fact that so many elocution masters are employed and known to be necessary is proof to the contrary. And if another fact as proof is needed, the indifferent reading of the service of the Church of England will furnish it.

I conclude then it is mainly for the language they go to Italy. And that they too frequently return to England without knowing how to render the delicacies of the Italian tongue needs no proof. They might just as well have remained here. It may be asked then, are there teachers here capable of imparting, or caring to impart, the niceties of this *bella lingua*? If there are, the supposed great necessity of going to Italy no longer exists. "But," says an English student bent upon working in Italy, "I go there that I may have the language always ringing in my ear." Then he must go to Rome and not to the English quarters; he must not stay at *Milano*, for there the people converse in *Milanese*, so different from pure Italian that an Englishman speaking Italian well would find himself quite unable to take part in a conversation carried on in that *patois*.

Lastly, he may urge as an important reason for going to Italy for study, that there he may learn how best to produce and place the voice for the purpose of singing. Whether this be so or not, and this I doubt, or whether the liquid nature of the language helps to this end without a guide other than nature, I am led by this question to the last point I propose to myself in this paper, which is—how the voice of the singer should be produced and placed.

In this case we must make our appeal to nature, for the rules of art are based upon the laws of nature. Art, in this case, is the offspring of science, whether the relationship be recognized or not. When we find that a direct appeal to nature is insufficient, we do wisely to make an appeal to science and to art. The voice is a gift from heaven. There are good and bad voices, throaty and nasal voices, voices made throaty or nasal through bad instruction. Whether the voice that sounds throaty to the listener sounds so to its possessor, or whether it seems the perfection of vocal tone to him, cannot quite be ascertained. For Edison's phonograph, in its practical application, has proved, I believe, that we do not know the real tone of our own voices as they sound to others. A sufficient reason this for the aid of a good master. Now, singing is somewhat of an effort, however easily some persons may sing. It is not like simple breathing, which is an unconscious action. True and good singing needs sustained breath—here is the effort. The first thing, then, to consider is respiration. The breathing power must be cultivated if singing is to be sustained.

Before speaking of how the breath should be expelled from the lungs, I propose to consider how it should be inhaled, inspiration preceding expiration. Experience has satisfied me, observation has strengthened that satisfaction, and authoritative books I have perused, some more than a hundred years old, written by those whom in these days we should style "specialists," have confirmed the view I express, that the inhaling of breath should be as free as possible through the nose. It is the natural way, we breathe thus sleeping—usually so; and it is an Eastern custom among those who have the charge of children during sleep, to close the lips of those in their charge when seen open in order to this. But singing is not thus natural, and therefore this breathing alone is not adequate. Still the nose should be a great channel for inhaling. What are the advantages of this? They are many. This breathing helps to keep the air-passage through the nose clear, it helps to prevent a tendency to cough which rapid breathing solely through the mouth occasionally gives rise to; and, speaking generally, it is by far the most healthy way (which is the reason of the Eastern custom), it prevents many a cold from being taken.

Inhaling through the mouth only has a tendency to clog up the air-passages through the nose, to give tones a nasal quality, and to limit the power and impair the quality of the head voice—the *voce di testa*—even if it do not greatly stifle it. And not exclusively breathing through the nose when coming out of a hot concert-room on a wintry night is not free from the responsibility of having brought to the grave many a delicate person. So that the sooner this breathing

becomes habitual with singers, the better for their singing voice and their health. Some persons, I know, find a difficulty in doing this, but by adopting its practice they would soon overcome its difficulty.

Now the lungs are the great reservoir of vocal power and are capable of holding some 300 cubic inches of air. I give this on the authority of very scientific men, whose studies were concentrated on this subject, such as Sir C. Bell and Mr. J. Bishop. Now, ordinarily, only about 40 cubic inches of air are inhaled and expelled in one act of respiration, while there is an ability to expel 200. We may see from this, how needful it is for singers and actors to cultivate the *filling* of the lungs, and to acquire the power of holding in, or back, the breath, so as to be completely master of the force of the lungs. How should we proceed to get an approximation of this large quantity of air into the lungs? for the possession of lungs of such capacity and availing ourselves of the power are not identical. There are differences of opinion as to whether the lungs of a singer should be fully inflated before the execution of a long or sustained passage. Crivelli, in his work on our art, writes in the negative; but my experience, falling in with authorities I consulted in days past, justifies me in saying that a singer and an actor should habituate themselves to inflate their lungs to the utmost, especially for sustained work. Now to this end there must not be restraint anywhere, from the throat to the lowest part of the chest. The ribs must have full play; and, that they should have the sensation of widening themselves, the shoulders should be kept down. Below the chest the muscles will naturally draw themselves in for a large draught (deportment masters and dancing masters insist upon this). The sensation to the singer should be, that if a pebble were put into his mouth it would uninterruptedly find its way to the bottom of the chest, instead of going down the œsophagus. I think singers and teachers are greatly advantaged when possessed of anatomical knowledge, so far as regards the position of the organs employed in the passage of the breath. Now I find students, in cultivating this breathing power, neglect the control of the end of the expiration. They re-inflate unconsciously and unnecessarily, and, owing to this neglect, in singing a long phrase, the last note or notes come out with a quivering exhaustion. This, of course, is very bad. In order that the phrase or sustained passage should have the whole of the breath, the glottis should be kept closed till the sound is about to begin. To those not habituated to it this is somewhat difficult; but time and patience accomplish marvels. But in the expirations of breath, what is its course? It comes from the great reservoir, through the

trachea (the wind-pipe), then through the larynx to the glottis, the ligaments constituting the vocal chords; it is then guided by the epiglottis (which is in a perpendicular position) to the pharynx at the back (whence the musical tones are formed in accordance with its dimensions); it next comes to the uvula and soft palate.

The sound now proceeds either through the mouth or behind the uvula, through the passages of the head. Now it is just at this point, the division between the two, that the tone of a well-placed voice should seem to be—this is the sensation point, forward as possible—reflected, if I may so speak, by the pharynx* (which extends from the base of the skull to the little bone at the root of the tongue).

This will assure us that the head should not on any account be thrown back. Now, for the *voca di petto*, the open tone, the uvula and *velum palati* should be raised, that the voice should come freely and with resonance through the mouth—not drawn back, else a throaty tone would ensue. This open tone through the mouth is capable of great delicacy and should be so cultivated. It should not be confined to loud and robust tones. Great care, however, is needed to find out its true natural limits, beyond which it should never be forced. These limits once well assured, cultivation should be kept within them, otherwise it would be at the sacrifice of the voice. How necessary then for a master to have real practical knowledge of how to treat a voice, if he have not scientific knowledge!

But for the upper register, the *voca di testa*, or head voice—not falsetto—instead of the sound coming through the mouth it comes through the cavities of the head. When the sound leaves the back of the throat, that is, the bag of the pharynx, it passes over or behind the uvula, and thus through the passages of the head.

I need not trouble you with any scientific statements as to the power of the trachea to elongate itself, or to contract its dimensions, or to the fact that it falls considerably when the *di petto* voice ceases, and rises again for the bright tones—the *voca di testa*. I will simply observe that the seat of sensation of these two productions should be as nearly as possible the same. There should be a note equally attainable from both registers, and it should be in the power of the singer to go from one register to the other and back again while on that note. (In an ascending passage, for example, requiring a note usually taken when alone in the head register, the progression would be improved by that last note being in the same register as the preceding one. This would prevent a sort of anti-climax.) The blending of the two registers here is a point I would urge as an evidence of the right placing of

*The bag at the back.

the voice. When they do not blend the production is usually not forward enough. When it is remembered that only the lower jaw moves in opening the mouth, I am at a loss to find out how it is that some persons throw the head back in the endeavour to reach a high note, when the several organs are in front. The result of this action rather impedes the sound from proceeding through the channels of the head, besides straining the muscles generally, and almost leading to the conclusion that a person so acting thought the voice passage and the food passage, the larynx and the œsophagus, were one and the same.

The blending of these two registers by some artists is so well done that it is at times difficult to say which is being used, the open or the "bright," as Braham used to call the *voca di testa*.

The fact that this upper register voice comes through the head will suggest that the head should incline rather forward than otherwise, the back part of the tongue slightly rising to direct the sound behind the uvula and soft palate and through the cavities of the head; but for the tone generally, the tongue should lie flat in the bed of the mouth, so that the sound should not be impeded.

Acting in this way with respect to the *voca di petto* and the *voca di testa*, the singer will be free from the two great defects of nasal and throaty tone, and, which is a great desideratum, free from fatigue after a good amount of singing.

If, as is the case, some of the greatest physiologists speak with becoming hesitation on this difficult subject, owing to the complexity of the structure and the many functions the several organs of the voice have to perform, your present reader, who speaks with extended experience and close observation, may content himself with giving opinion and judgment (with respect to the production and the placing of the voice) on the ground of sensation, supported by such scientific knowledge as he could master.

Permit me to repeat—that voice is best placed whose excellence is dependent upon its sensational proximity to the uvula and soft palate. Whether the sounds go through the mouth, or through the posterior nostrils by means of the *ponticello* (the little bridge), the sensation to the singer should be as nearly as possible the same.

With this I conclude. If it seem that I have unduly pressed this last point, I have done so because the question has at times been discussed with so much divergence of opinion, and because I find many unbiassed minds seem to have a difficulty in accepting any explanation offered.

I have said enough to make my views clear, which are not the formations of "yesterday," but the result of years of application, observation, and experience.

In thanking you for your attention, it remains for me but to say I should be pleased to hear any opinions that may seem to traverse mine on any of the topics discussed, in the hope that by such utterance we may get the nearer to that which all artistic natures aim for—truth.

DISCUSSION.

THE CHAIRMAN.—Ladies and gentlemen, we have been listening to a very suggestive paper, and I am sure you will all join with me in according our very best thanks to Mr. Penna for reading it to us. It has been a paper marked by much common sense, the result of observation and long experience, and free, I think you will agree with me, from quackery, which is more than can often be said of papers by those who undertake instruction in singing. I will ask you, first of all, to pass by acclamation a vote of thanks to Mr. Penna for reading this paper.

[The vote was passed unanimously.]

For the rest, it would ill-become me to take up your time by any remarks of my own on this subject, inasmuch as it is, to a large extent, a specialist's subject, and there are those present who are much more capable than I am of offering observations upon the paper. There is only one thing that I can think of as an apposite remark, quoted by Thalberg in his "Art of singing, as applied to the Pianoforte"—that it has been said, I am not sure by whom, that the art of singing is the same on every instrument; that is to say, that every musical performer should direct his attention to the production of a really solid, travelling and pure tone. That is what we, who are pianists, have to direct our attention to. It is an art that is very much falling into disuse now, because, as I think, the principles of touch are very much overlooked, and a very different school of teaching, and therefore a very different kind of tone, is now produced by pianists from that which prevailed in my student days.

Some of the observations that Mr. Penna has made in the early part of his paper seem really addressed rather to composers than to singers, and if there are those present who are engaged in the writing of vocal music, it would be well for them to give heed to all that Mr. Penna has said with regard to accent, and so forth. I will not detain you longer, but ask any of those ladies or gentlemen present, who understand more than I do technically about the art of singing, to discuss the points which Mr. Penna has so ably and suggestively raised.

The Rev. C. R. TAYLOR.—This is a subject to which I have

devoted much attention, and I have listened with considerable interest to all Mr. Penna has said. Perhaps I might be allowed to enforce his remarks about accent. The indifference of composers to this point is a matter which has often troubled me, especially in the services of the Church. The accent or emphasis is frequently given to syllables which would receive no stress from a good reader, while sometimes the converse of this is the case. Most conspicuously is it misplaced in the "Gloria," when we are made to say "Glory be *to* the Father, and *to* the Son, and *to* the Holy Ghost," with false emphasis on the preposition. If choirs were taught to lay stress upon the conjunction "and" it would be in accordance with the best reading, and would bring out more clearly the important truth which the Arian heresy tried to controvert by altering the original words. I am glad, therefore, to have this opportunity of stating how thoroughly I agree in the wish that our composers would be more careful in marking the proper emphasis and accent of their words, especially in the setting of the Church canticles.

Mr. Penna put before us some of the more important points in regard to breathing, but I did not quite understand whether he intended to speak in favour of or against what is called "abdominal breathing"; but, at any rate, he spoke very decidedly against having any restraint of tight clothing, and that is important. If persons, whether intending to sing, or to read, or to speak in public, would but get their voices wisely cultivated before appearing, it would be not only a great blessing to themselves, but also to all who attend concerts and lectures, and to thousands of church-goers who are pained beyond measure at the horrible way in which voices are abused and syllables mis-accentuated in churches throughout the land.

Mr. A. D. COLERIDGE.—Though I have but little to say, I should like to express my gratitude to Mr. Penna for his interesting address. I was glad to hear honourable mention of a musician too soon forgotten, Sir George Smart. The false accents to be found in the music of even such men as Handel and Purcell used to be subjects of irreverent jests to myself and many of us in school-days. One instance occurs to my mind in "The Messiah," "I know that my Redeemer liveth," where the stress invariably laid on the word "my" would seem to indicate a monopoly of salvation. In connection with Sir George Smart another name occurs to me, that of Joah Bates. I took some pains a few years since (Bates was a Fellow of my old college, King's College, Cambridge) to find out from Sir George Smart how it came about that a young B.A., though a good scholar and a distinguished man, should have been specially selected to conduct the first Handel Festival in Westminster Abbey. I

waited on Sir George Smart, hoping to get the information from that gentleman. I remember his saying—"I am not going to humbug you; Joah Bates was a grandee, and I, a young chorister boy aged ten years, never dared to speak to him; I merely stood by his side and turned over the leaves at the organ; I never questioned him as to his recollections of Handel, I was too young for that." I fancy that Handel was a better Italian scholar than English; some of his Italian letters are far better expressed than what I have seen in the English collection. Some three months ago I called at Hastings on Mr. Charles Lockey, a favourite singer of mine in boyhood, and he told me that Sir George Smart was the best authority for Handelian traditions. Lockey studied under Sir George for seven years, and owed to him much of his success as an interpreter of sacred music. After some experience of Italian masters in Milan, Florence, Rome, and elsewhere, I must endorse some of Mr. Penna's observations respecting them. With some exceptions, I think their merits, as a class, are exaggerated. They are too often very inferior musicians. The difficulties with English vocalists are in the management of the vowels, and notably with "e" and "u." Here the Italian has naturally the advantage of us, and can teach us a good deal. I heard at the Birmingham Festival a certain famous soprano shirk the word "beak," and substitute for it the exclamation "Ah!" Vowels are a great difficulty, but I have known English masters as competent to deal with such vocal difficulties as the Italians.

MR. HERBERT.—I imagine few have suffered more than I have from the bad marriage of music to words. I have had a good deal to do with congregational singing, English hymns, and so on, and the tunes that have been put to some Catholic hymns have been something so dreadful that I scarcely have words to express it. As to what Mr. Penna said about accent on discords, I also have felt that constantly in plain chant, always taking care that an accented note should be on a discord. I remember Braham very well, and can confirm everything Mr. Penna said about his wonderful singing in every respect. There is another thing about accent I should like to mention, and that is the definition of musical accent. I have often been asked to define it, and I did once try to do so. It occurred in this way. There was an organ recital at Bonn in Germany, where I was living, by one of the first organists on the Rhine, and the organ builder, in whose shop the performance took place, asked me afterwards what I thought of it. I said I did not think very much of it; it was correct, but there was no accent. Well, the organ builder said, it is not possible to play with accent on the organ. I said "indeed?" He said he did not think it was, and he turned to two professional men, a pianist and a violoncello

player, and he said, "Nicht wahr, meine Herren?" The cello player held his tongue like a wise man, but the pianist also thought it was not possible. So I said, "Well, supposing our definitions of accent differ, I should like to hear you define it." He hesitated a little, and he said: "I suppose I should define accent in a phrase or series of notes as playing one note stronger than the others." "Oh," I said, "that is quite enough; if that is your definition of accent I quite understand." Of course on the organ you cannot make one note stronger than another. There were no swells in Germany then. That led me to consider whether one could play with accent on the organ. I should say that I fulfilled the duties of organist at that time for seven or eight years, and at last I came to the conclusion that musical accent consisted in *taking a very small quantity from one note and giving it to another*. That definition has been given to several professional organ players here in London, and has met with very great approbation, and they said it never occurred to them, but they felt sure that was the right way of putting it. I do not know whether you will approve of this, but I give it to you for what it is worth. Then with regard to the projection of the voice. I was taught by a man whom some of you may remember, whose name was Herr Kroff. He was a Bohemian by birth, and he came over here and was the first who sang Schubert. On all the first edition of Schubert's songs—Wessel's edition—you will see "Sung by Herr Kroff." He had a certain theory which, I believe, died with him. I do not know how it is now-a-days, but I asked Mr. Thorndike, and he agreed with it to a certain extent. The theory was this, that as the voice rises in pitch the larynx descends. There was apparently something in it, but whether it was really founded on absolute truth I have no means of ascertaining. He had no professional pupils, but his own singing was something superb. I have heard him sing "Adelaida" as I have heard no one else ever sing it; and Handel he also sang very well. He agreed most certainly with Mr. Penna as to the pressure in the lungs preceding the emission of the voice, and since that time I have thought a great deal about it. It is the same as in the bow of the violin; the pressure of the bow must be on the string before the bow is started. The same thing with the organ, the wind must be in the bellows before the key is touched. If it is not, you will have a certain sound which we all know perfectly well. I think I might supplement Mr. Penna's admirable paper with a few remarks on speaking in public. We all know how few amongst us Englishmen know how to speak. First of all we do not know how to use our voice, and next, we never know exactly what we are going to say, and we hum and haw, and put in that extraordinary

"er," which every one is so fond of. Then, every one speaks on too high a note. Latrobe, who wrote on Cathedral Music, tells those who intone the prayers to do it as low as they can, "to the end that the people may the better hear," and I believe that in every case if speakers were to pitch their voices lower they would do well. I once heard the best preacher in the town where I lived, Bonn, preach a sermon, the first words of which were (in German, of course), "We want men." Those words he uttered at a shout—an absolute shout—as loud as he could and as high as he could. If, instead of that, he had begun quietly and then gradually raised his voice as the occasion required, a much better effect would have been produced. Another point is, that none of us, or very few of us, know how much of our voice is available for speaking. Of course you all know that everyone has, more or less, an octave and a half in his voice, and I maintain that the whole of that is to be used, and can be used, in speaking, if you know how. If any one would take the trouble to take a single speech, either the soliloquy in "Hamlet," or the soliloquy in "Cato," in Addison's play of that name, and begin on the lowest note on which he can speak distinctly, and then gradually raise the voice until he came to the highest note (of course that will not be what is right, that is scarcely credible), it would show how much of the human voice can be used in speaking. I believe the great majority of speakers confine themselves to three or four notes, and I certainly believe that they can use, and ought to use, a good many more.

MR. SOUTHGATE.—I should like to join in the tribute of satisfaction that has been paid to Mr. Penna for his paper; but there is just one part of the first portion which calls for a word of warning. It is what I may almost venture to term his denunciation of accent, not right accent, but accent in an unusual place. It must be remembered that (independently of the words) music itself has its accents—its rhythmic accents. It is not always possible that the musical accents and the accents of the words should coincide. No doubt it would be a very happy thing if they did. We know that in the early times this was a matter on which there was complete indifference; if I remember rightly, it is recorded that Lawes, in the reign of Charles I., first taught us how to place the accents of words and poetry together to produce a good musical effect. Of course, Mr. Penna's remarks would apply specially to what we may call solo singing; he would not so argue with regard to quartet singing or part-writing; in the case of fugues, &c., we have really no words, or words of very little signification. Fugues and canons are principally a set of exercises, if I may say so, on musical notes; therefore, I pass over that; it is just a question of the words of a song. Now in setting a poem,

a composer may have to adapt it to a certain time ; he feels that to get it into a rhythmical period, the time accents will not always coincide with the words ; he is therefore driven occasionally to put very important words, not at the primary, or first accent of the bar, but in some other place. The words must be there, and the music must fit them as well as it can. I quite agree with what has been said by Mr. Penna and others, that composers very often show a very large amount of indifference as to where they do place those words, and they might well place them better. In the case of Handel, it should be recollected that he was a foreigner, that he never thoroughly mastered our language, although he was here very many years, and there are in his oratorios many grotesque examples of his having misplaced words. One might cite a dozen, but there is one example in that chorus in Solomon, "May no rash intruder." It always struck me on hearing that, how false is the accent. It is a beautiful chorus, the harmony on a pedal point at the end of it is one of the most delightful things Handel has written ; but that "May no rash intruder," with a strong accent on the last syllable, jars on the ears very much indeed. Mr. Coleridge mentioned a good specimen from "The Messiah," and there is an example of the same character in "Israel in Egypt," "Thou shalt lead them forth." It is impossible for the singer to sing the music with the words Handel has attached to it. Neither can the breath be taken nor can the phrase be properly finished, and so it has to be altered. Of course, Handel was a foreigner, and did not know better ; but we have amongst us many composers who ought to know better, and fail to make the accents coincide. There is another view of the subject which I venture to think presents much greater difficulty in making the accents go right. What are you going to do in the case of the large collections of songs translated from foreign languages ? Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, and others have written songs in German, and in other languages which people will have sung in English, and they must be put to the best English words you can get. What a terrible difficulty the unfortunate translator and adaptor has to cope with. There are accents which may fit the words to which the song was originally written very well, but they can no longer fit them in the adapted version, and therefore they cannot coincide. Though we may agree with Mr. Penna, we must exercise a little caution in condemning misplaced accents. If you place rhythmic restrictions on translators and adaptors you may fail in obtaining an exact rendering of the music, which foreign composers have set to other than English words. With regard to going to Italy to study and hear music, I can endorse all that has been said. I have been to Italy and, I

must say, more dreadful music I have never heard, either in churches, theatres, concert-rooms, or streets. The charming Italian music is all a myth, according to my experience. But is there not one reason for professional singers going to Italy which seems a more likely explanation—the fame of the great Italian schools of singing? I think there is a sort of feeling existing among our thoughtful students that if we go to a singing-master in London we shall first run through our exercises, and then we shall get on quickly to songs. If you go to Italy, it is for a long course of grinding at the scales and solfeggios, and for very few songs—so I am informed. That affords something like an explanation why people go there. The most important part of Mr. Penna's paper, I think, was that in which he rightly and properly complained of the mispronunciation of the English language. I am afraid that does not apply to singers only, as Mr. Taylor told us, it is also applicable to speakers, and we all recognise that. Most people are not taught to speak properly; possibly the fault is not quite their own; one consequence is that when people begin to sing, instead of taking special pains to master the words of their songs, they treat them just as if they were words they were going to speak, and get through the song in the best way they can. That is one common fault we are all painfully aware of. In a song of Mr. Gérard Cobb's, I recently opened, I saw a good little note he had put at the commencement, which struck me as being quite advisable for singers to turn their attention to. He says it is necessary, in order to sing a song properly, and to get the proper amount of expression from it, to master the words first. He prints the words at the beginning of the song, and begs singers to sing them through and appreciate their significance before attempting to render them. I think that is a very good idea. There is one special singer before the public now who is a great favourite; it would not be right to mention the name, but so badly does she pronounce the words that I have frequently heard her sing, and for a long while have not been able to determine the language she was singing in. I say that, having some little knowledge of foreign languages myself; but it was impossible to tell what language was attempted. That is a very great blot, and one we ought all to set ourselves to remove; because, if music is to heighten the effect of words, and to give forth emotions beyond the mere utterance of words, then pray let us get the words clearly so as to obtain the dual effect of the music and the words together. As to the latter part of Mr. Penna's paper, I think possibly only experts should speak; but I must say, from my limited knowledge of what was stated, I should quite agree with him; and in the statement he made about the tongue lying flat in the mouth, it is very necessary to

allow the breath a free passage of sound over it ; but there are sounds in the English language which require the tongue to be brought forward. In almost all cases where the letter "t" occurs it is absolutely necessary for the end of the tongue to touch the teeth, and there at once you get a restriction of the sound. Possibly, in reply, he may say a word on that point.

MR. PENNA.—Generally speaking, I am happy to find that my views have been confirmed by all who have done me the honour to make remarks on the various points referred to in my paper. I am much obliged to Mr. Taylor for assenting to everything I said, and I beg to confirm what he said with respect to improper accents in church music. When I was bass singer at St. Andrew's, Wells Street, I used to be very much concerned at times with the bad accents on words, because, prior to that time, I had been a student of elocution, and knew quite well where the accents should be in speaking, and therefore I was very much irritated in finding so many accents which jarred against my sense of what was right. With respect to the diaphragm breathing, I do not know whether I ought to say that I quite coincide with that ; I do not wish to say that it is wrong, but, at the same time, my idea is that you should get as much breath in the lungs as you possibly can to the very lowest part, and I have always thought, and found it to be true, that the abdominal muscles drew themselves in when you inflate the lungs. You should have the sensation of widening your chest ; I do not mean to protrude it at all, but just to widen it to get it inflated. I do not quite understand diaphragm breathing ; if it is meant that there should be a depression of the muscles here, I do not think it gets a larger amount of breath into the lungs. But I think if you take breath in without thinking that you are doing it, the lower muscles are drawn in, and the more you inflate with that view I think the more successful you will find you are. I am pleased also to find so much assent to what I have said by Mr. Coleridge and others. With respect to Sir George Smart, he had the tradition of the Handelian songs to a remarkable degree. I was not so long under Sir George as Mr. Lockey was, but I received a great deal of instruction from him when I was in a position to appreciate it to its full. I need not say anything of what he said to me any more than that he expressed gratification with the attention which I assuredly paid to what he said. He gave me reason to believe that many of the alterations he had made in Handel's songs were traditions handed down by the great master or accepted by him. There are ample reasons for thinking that Handel himself allowed Mr. Beard, who was his great tenor, and other singers whom he confided in, to make just what alterations they pleased, not only with respect to accent, but with

respect to ornamentation; but, as I said in my paper, nobody in the present day seems to have courage to do such a thing. Whether the mind or intellect is wanting I do not know, but I do not see why there should not be made graceful notes. Crivelli has some very valuable arguments in its favour in his work on singing, and introduces an example from Gluck, and those who read his book will be quite of opinion, I think, that the change of notes for accent's sake in the Italian makes an improvement. This remark I ought to make, too, in connection with what has been said with respect to translations. Mozart's "*Clemenza di Tito*" was, I think, composed in German,* and when it is in Italian some of the notes are altered, and in one case, I think, a minim is changed into four quavers, or something like that, in order to get the best sense of the words out. The remarks which Mr. Herbert has made I coincide in, and I think his definition of accent is something quite unique and worth consideration. It is rather like what is called *tempo rubato*, is it not, taking from one note and adding to another a minimum of it? [At this Mr. Herbert shook his head.] But a good effect is produced at times by *tempo rubato*, and one can understand perfectly well that accent may be estimated according to that definition. My remarks certainly appertained to solo singing. Of course, Mr. Southgate is perfectly right that in quartets it would be impossible that every word and note should have the right accent, otherwise the quartet would be all up and down, anyhow; you must recognise *musical* accent entirely in concerted pieces. Translation is a great stumbling-block. I have said for years that if an Englishman is to sing Schubert's songs, or any of the German *lieder*, he must sing them in the original language. It is very difficult to give the full sense of the phrases in the new tongue. I do not know that anyone is perfectly justified in making the necessary alterations in a German composition while the writer is living, in case he might find fault with it; but it has often been a stumbling-block to thoughtful singers to render translations of songs, and it is very rarely that any good comes of it. About the words in speaking, elocutionists are needed in this country, not only as regards vowels, but also as regards consonants; and I thoroughly confirm what has been said as to keeping the voice down; if you speak in a high key the voice vibrates too much, and you never quite hear what the word is. If people will speak deliberately, sound the vowels and consonants rightly in a low key, the voice will travel. With respect to the tongue, for the voice to come well out of the mouth in the open tone you must keep the tongue down and the tip of it should be against the lower teeth. I quite agree

*I have been informed that though the opera was first produced at Prague it was rendered in *Italian*.

in that, but, of course, for certain words you must raise it; but I was speaking in a general way with respect to tone. To get a volume of tone out of the mouth you must have the tongue in the bed of the mouth and its tip against the lower teeth. When you elevate the uvula and soft palate at the same time you have a fine opening for the sound. I do not think there is anything else I need say. I rather thought there would be more divergence of opinion, and it is a source of happiness to me to find that the labour of all these years has not been in vain, but that it is confirmed by gentlemen with very large experience, whose remarks have afforded me exceeding pleasure to listen to. I am much obliged to you, sir, for presiding on this occasion, and I thank you all for the kind attention you have given to the paper.

Mr. SOUTHGATE.—I might be allowed to add that some foreign composers have been very particular with regard to the words. It was lately my duty to examine the original score of the "Elijah" of Mendelssohn, and Mrs. Bartholomew kindly placed it at my disposal. It was Mendelssohn's habit to send the score in pieces to Mr. Bartholomew to put the English words to it; so exact a man was he that frequently he was not satisfied with the words Mr. Bartholomew had written, and, knowing our tongue very well indeed, understanding and appreciating our accents, he frequently altered and selected much better words than Mr. Bartholomew had adopted. It is easy in the original score to see this, because Mendelssohn has written his words in lead pencil, whereas those of Bartholomew are all in red ink, and I must say in many cases Mendelssohn's English was the better of the two.

A vote of thanks to the chairman concluded the proceedings.
