THE SINGER'S ART

LETTERS FROM A SINGING MASTER

BY

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TO

MY PUPILS

IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE MANY

HAPPY HOURS THEY HAVE GIVEN ME,

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I HAVE tried to make these letters so simple that the youngest student can understand them. I have refrained from using long Latin words, and the "problems" loved by men of science find no place in them.

When the pupil has achieved the necessary mental and muscular dexterity in his art to become a "singer," he at once regards singing as a very "easy game." I want to show the student that the process of acquiring this dexterity, or *technique*, to give it its artistic name, may be made a very "easy game" if you set to work in the right way and understand the reason of every rule and exercise.

All the same, I want to make it quite clear that I do not pretend that this book can be used as a substitute for personal instruction from a good teacher. In all the Arts there are some things which can only be acquired by the advice, instruction, example and criticism of a living artist.

As it is impossible to achieve a Parisian accent solely by the aid of a dictionary and a grammar, so I take it that you will not win fame and fortune as a singer either at Covent Garden or in Queen's Hall if you do nothing more than read my book. But I do hope that the path to fame and fortune

under the instruction of a competent teacher, will be lightened and brightened if you do read it.

Some singers may think that many of my suggestions are dangerously original, because they are the result of my own experience and have not been copied out of other people's textbooks. I only ask you to give them a fair trial. I am telling you what has helped me. I cannot do more and I will not do less.

I also hope that these letters may be useful to both singers and teachers who happen to live at a distance from musical centres and who consequently cannot fly to an oracle at a moment's notice to obtain a judgment upon some knotty point of technique.

I cannot help feeling that the process of acquiring technique chokes off many promising students—especially the younger ones. For if the teacher is not gifted with the art of making the pupil's path attractive, instead of a thing of monotonous drudgery, then the "casualty" list will be deplorably high.

In the suggestion which I make in my letter on "Practice" I aim at reducing this "casualty" list.

I have drawn from works set to English words almost entirely in my "Examples of Songs," and I have quoted only those songs which one finds in the repertoire of the ordinary artist. But the methods employed will apply equally well to every song which is worth singing.

I regret to say that some singers murder our beautiful language. Occasionally it is impossible to hear any words at all; frequently it is impossible to

grasp the sense, because the singer only allows an occasional word here and there to be recognized.

I have always had a soft spot in my heart for the poor patient public which sits uncomplainingly in concert-halls hoping to comprehend some sane thought from the welter of sound.

If my letters help the singer to add to the enjoyment of the poor patient public by singing pure English distinctly, I shall indeed be a proud man !

The Author tenders his best thanks to the following publishers for their kindness in consenting to his quoting extracts from their publications—

Messrs. Edwin Ashdown.
Messrs. Boosey & Co.
Messrs. G. Ricordi & Co.
Messrs. Weekes & Co.

THE SINGER'S ART

I

CHOOSING A MASTER

MY DEAR COUSIN BETTY,

I have received your letter in which you ask me to help you in selecting a singing master. You tell me that you have a good voice and that you have already had a year's tuition from Mr. Smith, your church organist, and feel you need some finishing lessons. I think the latter statement is probably true.

Now, remember that although Mr. Smith is a complete master of the organ, and could successfully train you in organ playing, he probably has not a complete mastery of the arts of voice production and singing. It is very unusual to find that a successful instrumentalist is also a good vocalist. So it is not surprising if you have to go to a successful singer to complete the instruction that Mr. Smith has given you.

Singing is not the only thing the voice has to do. There is also speech. Both are the product of the voice, the training of which demands a knowledge of the voice itself, i.e. phonology. Both are based upon the proper understanding of the instrument.

The art of singing can only be completely taught in its entirety by—*a singer*, and it has always been, and always will be, a matter of wonder to me how anyone could for a moment think otherwise. If you want to learn the violin, go to a violinist; for the piano to a pianist. If you want to learn golf, go to a golfer. If you want to study singing, do it with a singer. That seems to me to be common sense, and if you once get away from *that*, either in art or in anything else, you will find yourself in trouble. Why should singing be the only thing in the whole world that is taught by a man who never did it? Sit down and think it out, my dear Cousin, and try and decide whether the position is ludicrous or tragic, or both. Who but a singer can have any real, practical knowledge of the thousand and one things that arise in the course of the interpretation and performance of any great work? Believe me, it is all a question of technique, whether in singing or any other art, and the only one who knows all there is to know about the art of singing is—a singer.

And now to advise you as to how to proceed in your choice. Is there any singer of high rank and reputation whose technical and interpretative powers are recognized among those who know, and whose art appeals to you personally? Failing this, can you hear of any such by inquiry amongst your musical friends? Take your time over it, and remember, too, that it does not follow that because a man is a good singer he is also a good teacher, but he *must* be a singer. When you have found your man, go and have one lesson from him, and

pay for it. If he is the man you are looking for, you will know it in five minutes and know it most certainly. If you are in doubt, don't go to him again.

What you have to beware of in singing is "faddism," in itself crafty imposture that has been fostered and practised by the incompetent for generations to the confusion and detriment of thousands of good voices. The mischief is that many students glory in fads and simply revel in having them practised on them. I have heard of one teacher who made his pupils bend down under a table, and in this crooked position attempt to sing. The worst of the whole ridiculous business was that both the student who told me of it and her parents thought it was a marvellous thing to do and said, "Isn't it wonderful?" Truly I think it was. Of course, if one *had* to sing in that attitude, it would be an excellent thing to practise, but one is led by this sort of nonsense to wonder why the teacher did not extend the field of his operations and make her sing standing on her head or with one hand tied to the roof of her mouth.

So, beware of fads; there should be no fads in singing. It is a perfectly natural and simple operation. If it is not simple it is wrong.

Now, the result of your first lesson will be that you have made up your mind whether or not to take a whole course. I believe you are gifted with common sense and will have no difficulty in deciding for yourself, for the art of singing must be based on common sense, and if you feel the master is not the man you want from every point of view, you

will wish him " Good morning," and try again, and eventually you will find the right one.

If you cannot make up your mind and decide for yourself, forgive me for suggesting that you will resemble Mr. Facing-both-ways, who did not achieve much.

II

BREATHING

MY DEAR ANTHONY,

I went to Queen's Hall last night to hear you sing, and, as promised, I am writing to give you an account of some points in your performance that call for remark. I told you I should be quite brutal in my criticism, and I am going to keep my word.

I shall pass over the many excellent things you did; I was sure there would be plenty of these, and was not disappointed in that direction, but what was the matter with your breathing? I was at the back of the stalls, and both saw and heard nearly every breath you took.

The correct method of breathing is the very first thing to be mastered by a singer, and once acquired should never be lost. It is the simplest thing in the world if you do it rightly. But you cannot breathe in singing in the same way as you do in walking or when sitting in an arm-chair. I suppose you were always told (as I was) to breathe through your nose during the ordinary occupations of life, and rightly so, but in those circumstances you must remember that you have plenty of leisure in which to do it. In singing, however, you have no such time to spare, and the object to be attained is

the maximum of breath in the minimum of time.

Correct breathing for a singer is largely a question of "attitude." The student should assume the exact attitude of singing *before* he takes his breath. He should stand quite firmly, quite erect and, above all, quite comfortably. Every part of his body should feel loose and relaxed. His chest should be as high as it will go with comfort and expanded to its utmost. His mouth should be open to the extent of the natural fall of the jaw. There is no golden rule as to *how* wide open the mouth should be. Some cannot sing without having it *very* wide open. Others quite the reverse. (Santley opened his very little indeed.) It is safe to say that it should be comfortably wide open. His throat, too, should be wide open. His tongue should lie loose and flat and *forward* on the floor of the mouth. Now, if that attitude is adopted, and it is a perfectly natural and simple one, the student can take a full gulp of air through the mouth in a twinkling, and it will go right down to the region of his lower waistcoat buttons. The front wall of the body at that spot (for a space of about four inches downwards from the end of the breastbone) will fly out in response to it, and that is the only place where the smallest movement can be observed; then without waiting for a fraction of a second, he should *sing*, and he should feel as if he is singing from that place. Straight from there to the front of the mouth, everything between those two points being wide open and *loose*. Remember that tone comes from below as well as from above and joins forces with articulation on the lips and tip of the tongue.

It is a perfectly easy operation and perfectly simple. If there is the very slightest movement of the shoulders or upper ribs, the student is breathing incorrectly and is wasting time.

If at the moment of intake the throat is wide open it will be a quite noiseless operation; indeed, he can't make a noise if he tries to. If it is at all closed it will be a quite audible one.

I have found many students take the breath noiselessly and correctly, but then immediately close the throat as if to prevent its escaping. It is only a habit, but it is a serious one, and must be overcome, as, during the moment of closing, everything is rigid and stiff, and there should never be any such condition as that in the act of breathing.

All the above is for the intake.

The exhalation of the necessary amount of breath for making the tone will look after itself if only the student will maintain precisely the same attitude. But the greatest care must be taken to see that there is not the smallest *waste* of breath. After all is said and done, it is what *goes out* that matters, and no more must be permitted to be used than is necessary to make the tone. So see to it that the *breath never gets in front of the tone.*

The lower ribs should remain distended while the breath goes out, though they will, perhaps, close in a little at the very end of it. Those lower ribs will, however, do their own job quite automatically and correctly if the student's attitude and methods are the right ones. But what he has to do meanwhile is to see that his shoulders and chest do not fall in the slightest degree. In due time he will

be quite or almost empty, and then, without the least movement of the mouth or throat *or anything else*, he is all ready for another intake.

If you let your chest fall when the breath goes out you will have to lift it up again; therefore don't let it fall. It is a tiring and most unnecessary habit; tiring because it throws a lot of work on the upper part of the chest which it has no right to bear; unnecessary because Mother Nature has constructed the lower front wall of the chest and the upper wall of the abdomen so that they can fly in and out for that especial purpose. In addition to this, it is stupid because it wastes time.

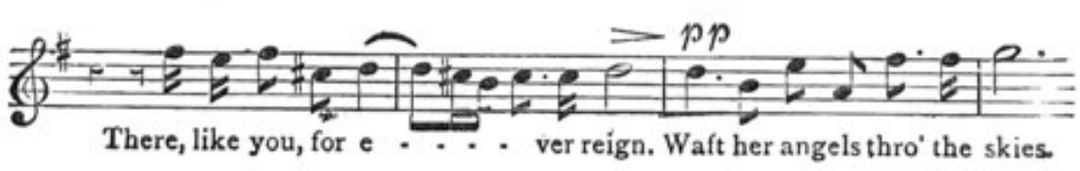
If you close your throat before or after a breath you've got to open it again. Therefore don't close it! There can be no sense in closing the throat in singing. The same applies to the mouth, unless, of course, a consonant demands it.

Now there can be no other way than this of getting a full breath in the smallest possible space of time. If you study these rules carefully you will see that it is all unutterably simple. If it were not so it would be wrong.

Many years ago when I was just beginning to sing, I went to the promenade concerts (they were held at Covent Garden in those days) on purpose to hear Sims Reeves; especially to study his method of breathing and particularly to note where he took breath in a certain song. I had just arranged to study with him, and was to take my first lesson on the following day. I stood quite close to him (certainly within ten feet) and watched and listened, but I never found out.

People had told me wonderful tales of how he sang whole pages in one breath. Of course he did nothing of the kind, but what he did do was to take breath without anyone being aware of it. This you and I and everyone can do if we only go the right way about it. When I met the big man at my first lesson I told him my experience of the night before and asked him how it was that I couldn't find out where he had taken breath. His answer was, " My dear fellow, you didn't look at the right place," and when he explained his methods to me I understood what he meant.

Sims Reeves had wonderful breath control and an extraordinarily " long wind," and this lasted till the day of his death. Only a few weeks before he died I had my last lesson with him. The work I was studying was " Deeper and deeper still," and " Waft her, Angels." It was truly an illuminating experience to go through such a song as that with such an amazing teacher. At the conclusion of my lesson he suddenly said " I'll sing it to you " (a thing he had never suggested before). My wife played the accompaniment and he stood in the middle of the big studio and, without a copy, but using a little gesture, interpreted the song from beginning to end. I look back on that performance as, beyond comparison, the greatest piece of singing I ever heard. I will leave it at that. As an instance of his breath control I may tell you that he sang the whole of the following in one breath :



and that without drawing one's attention to the fact.

It is a heaven-sent gift to be possessed of—a long breath—but to draw your audience's attention to it is bad art. It must be possessed and concealed like the rest of the singer's technique.

So, my dear fellow, do look to your breathing—study very carefully what I have said and you will soon get it right. I will summarize it all in the following directions, and I should advise your giving the first five minutes of every practice to this exercise. I attach the greatest importance to having the mouth and throat open *before* the intake, and remember that the whole operation is to be done quite easily in a quarter of a second.

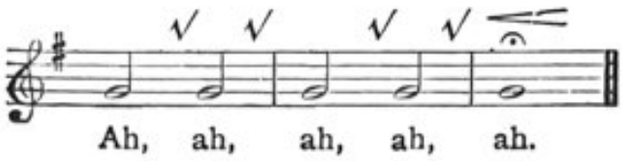
Stand perfectly erect with the head poised absolutely straight.

Chest as high as it will go and a feeling of looseness all over your body.

Mouth and throat open before the intake of the breath.

Then your quick and absolutely noiseless gulp of air through the mouth straight down to the region of the lower ribs and exhale as slowly as you like on the vowel "ah"; taking care that the chest does not fall to the smallest extent during the exhalation, always remembering that there must be no *leakage*, and that the breath must never be allowed to get in front of the tone. Repeat the whole process several times without having closed the mouth or throat, or indeed having altered your attitude in the very slightest degree, and allowing only the smallest fraction of a second between the notes.

Then sing the following little exercise, taking care to follow all the above rules:



taking the breath between each note at the latest possible moment, keeping a perfectly steady rhythm and holding the last note with a *crescendo* as long as you can.

Look to it that the mouth does not move at all between the notes. You will do well to watch yourself in a mirror while practising this exercise.

After a very little while you will be quite sure of yourself, and your breathing will be practically inaudible and imperceptible.

III

PLACING THE TONE

MY DEAR ANTHONY,

I am glad to hear that you have settled down comfortably in your beautiful old city and that you are steadily building up the teaching connection you hoped for when you left London for the North.

You ask me to jot down a few points on tone production for your guidance, and I shall endeavour to do so in this letter. It is not a subject that can adequately be dealt with by correspondence, for it is such a very personal and individual thing, and you, as a sort of vocal doctor, will have to treat each separate voice with due regard to the various difficulties you may encounter. You will meet with all kinds of voices, good, bad and indifferent, and you will have to do the best you can with all of them. Some of them will be really ugly, but we will dismiss those altogether for the moment from our consideration.

Every voice has a character and individuality of its own which you must not attempt to alter. Your job is to preserve and develop that individuality and eliminate only the faults. Always remember that there are no two voices alike and that you have no right to make them so. A voice is a

part of the personality of the one who possesses it, and that voice should not be *altered*. What is needful is that its beauty should be enhanced and its blemishes removed.

Tone is the product of the whole resonator, which comprises three resonant spaces, the neck, the mouth and the nose. That in the neck is the most important for "tone" and general quality, the mouth for vowel quality and the nose a powerful accessory to be added in due proportion. Below the larynx, i.e. windpipe and lung cavities, there is no proper resonation, but some vibration transmitted through the air and through the attachment of the larynx to the breast-bone.

Tone may be defined as resonance within certain limited spaces. We must consider what those spaces are. There is the large space in the mouth, the space behind the uvula, and (most important of all from an individual characteristic point of view) the nasal cavity. In addition to these, there is the big tube below the larynx that runs right down to the lower depths, and of course there are the big spaces in the chest. Now, resonance being the thing we are aiming at, it follows that the bigger the spaces are the more resonance we shall get, provided we *use* those spaces. Therefore have the mouth as wide open as it can be with comfort, not *stretched* open but just easily wide open. The cheeks should be high (as in smiling), as this brings them away from the side teeth, thus increasing the width of the cavity, besides which it makes the singer look happy. You will never get a bright tone with a dull face.

At the same time it is necessary and advisable to

warn students against wearing a perpetual set smile. It kills most of the vowels and stiffens the jaw. Freedom and looseness are equally necessary in both joy and sorrow.

The space behind the uvula should be wide and gaping, but not stiff. The larynx[1] as low as it can go and loose too (which it will be if the breath is taken correctly). It is unconsciously drawn downwards and forwards in relation to the sense of expansion, and is adjusted to the needs of every vowel position. It is drawn up in the guttural consonants K and G.

As the voice ascends in the scale the larynx must not be allowed to rise up, as it will often want to do, but must remain low and loose exactly the same for the high notes as for the low ones. The tongue should lie flat and limp and forward on the floor of the mouth. The lower jaw should hang quite freely without the smallest feeling of tightness.

The spaces in the mouth and behind the uvula can by these means be enlarged to their utmost. "Gaping" is the right word. When you sit on the edge of your bed and revel in your first great morning yawn, your throat is in just the right position for singing.

Now, it will be obvious to everyone that those two spaces can be enlarged. We cannot enlarge either the big tube or the nasal cavity, but we *can* use them.

There is nothing that will add character and individuality to the voice so much as the proper use of the nasal cavity. It must, of course, be used with discretion. It is all a question of balance. The

[1] Larynx, the organ of voice, "Adam's apple."

larger you make your other spaces the more you can use your nose. There is a vast difference between a nasal and a nosey tone. The one is beautiful, the other is not. The use of the nasal cavity is like the pinch of salt in the soup. Without it the finest soup will taste insipid.

Why is it, do you think, that if you hear twenty throaty tenors sing they all sound alike? It is not only caused by their contracting or closing their throats but to a very great extent because they don't use their noses. You can quite easily prove this by experiment. So, when you are teaching tone production, you must see to it that all the spaces are used in their proper balance for the purpose of obtaining the necessary resonance, and it follows that the more you use the back spaces the more you can use the nasal cavity.

Remember that tone comes from below and must be focussed in the front of the mouth where it joins forces with articulation.

You will find that nearly every new pupil that comes to you will sing almost entirely at the back of the mouth. This is to a great extent caused by our damp climate. It doesn't happen in Italy. Nearly all the throats are wide open there. It is a fault that must be cured at once. Usually the root of the tongue will be clogging up the space behind it, and the cure for it is to bring that unruly member forward and let it rest peacefully and flat on the floor of the mouth. It must not be stiffened, for, if it is, the lower jaw will be stiff too, and vice versa. The thing to be achieved is to bring the tone to the front of the mouth. It is quite obvious why this is essential.

Singing is glorified speech. We speak on our lips and in the front of our mouth. Nearly all the consonants live there. If the voice is at the back and the speech is at the front, the one is pulling against the other all the time and the result is a continual struggle. Get the student to say the syllables *la*, *na*, *ta*, *da*, and get him to notice what part of the hard palate the tip of the tongue touches for all these consonants. It is just over the teeth. Call that the target, aim the focus of the tone at it and score a bull's-eye every shot. Every note that we sing, high or low, loud or soft, must be kept focussed on that spot and must not be allowed to go back on to the soft palate. It *will* go back if you let it, but you mustn't let it. If you do, away goes your tone-colour and you won't be able to get it back again until something drastic, such as a *forte* or a fresh breath (and consequently a fresh start), comes to the rescue.

Remember that all the bright tone-colours are in the front of the mouth. You need not bother much about the dull colours. It is easy to be dull.

Many people approach the act of singing as a tremendous business. It is quite a usual thing to see a singer walk to the piano in a perfectly easy, natural and graceful manner, and then, just before the song begins, the body stiffens, the arms become rigid, the hands, perhaps, clenched tightly, the face and jaw and throat and the whole box of tricks become set fast, a frown makes its appearance, and a look of dull solemnity takes the place of the bright and natural smile. The singer is making the awful, though silent, announcement, " Ladies and Gentle-

men, I am about to sing." Why all that fuss? How much better it would be if he would retain his natural ease and attitude, and simply open his mouth and sing. The ease and naturalness of the performance is half the battle, and the message of the song will go straight to the hearts of the listeners if it is unhampered by a whole cargo of unnecessary contortions, all of which are detrimental to the production of a beautiful tone. That tone must flow out in a continual stream, just touching the consonants on its way, not stopping to do it, but touching them as it passes, unimpeded either by them or by anything else. It must be like a man walking past a series of posts and tapping them with his stick as he goes. He doesn't stop to do it; he strides on the whole time and taps them as he proceeds, his movements not being impeded, but in fact enhanced and embellished by the act. So it must be with the outward flow of tone.

You will find that many students will stop the flow of the tone immediately they come against a consonant, obviously separating the one from the other. Try to get them to weld them together and take the tone through the consonant whenever possible.

Having achieved beauty of tone, the next thing must be to enlarge it to its utmost. This will be done by the use of the *crescendo* on single sustained notes, beginning always in the middle of the voice (say A natural) and working downwards to, say, E natural, then starting again a note higher than before and working downwards again, and so on. The *crescendo* should be maintained on each note as long

as the beauty of the tone remains unimpaired. The moment the smallest sign of strain or forcing appears, the pupil must stop and begin a new note. There must not be the slightest alteration or movement of any part of the vocal instrument at any time during the *crescendo*.

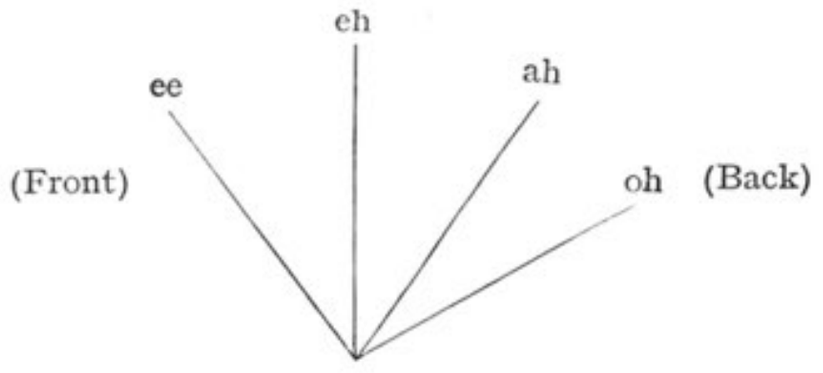
Try to make the pupil realize what he is doing, and that he must feel as if it is all coming from below and focussing in the front of his mouth. Sometimes he will feel something in the region of his diaphragm,[1] but he should feel absolutely nothing in his throat. If he has those sensations at the bottom of his big tube and in the neighbourhood of his front teeth and *nowhere else*, he will be well on the way to mastering the art of tone production. These rules will apply to his loudest *forte* and his softest *piano* as well as to all intermediate stages. Never cease to impress on him the fact that if he feels any sensation in his throat he is doing something wrong.

The development of the tone on these lines must be left to you and the pupil, and for both of you common sense will play a big part. There is nothing in what I have said that is not perfectly natural and simple, and if the whole thing is not governed from that standpoint you may take it from me that it is wrong.

The best vowel sounds to start with in the case of a pupil who is inclined to be throaty (and nearly all of them will suffer from this complaint in the early stages) are *ee*, *eh*, *ah* and *oh*, in that order. The feeling the novice will have, when he first sings these

[1] Diaphragm, the large membrane or skin that divides the chest from the abdomen.

vowels, will be that they take the following positions on the roof of his mouth.



Get him to sing them in rotation, bringing them all where the *ee* is shown (which is of course the front of the hard palate). Then let him prefix the consonant *m* to the same vowels and do the same thing. He must take care to sing right through the *m* (and it should be a good long one) into the vowel with the quickest possible opening of the lips to their full natural extent. Slow movement of the lips (and the tip of the tongue too) is fatal to good diction. All the forward consonants should be used in turn for this purpose, and, whether the tone be a loud or a soft one, the consonant must always be so distinctly sounded as to be quite obvious at the end of a concert-room.

Remember also that the various vowel tones must *match*. You will understand what I mean by that. One sometimes hears a singer whose voice seems to alter to an appreciable extent with different vowels. This should not be. But you will not have much trouble in this direction provided you get your pupil to bring all his vowels to a forward focus.

If you keep all these points before you, I think you

will find that they will help you in your work, but the thing I want you to bear continually in mind is that you must always foster and encourage the individual and personal quality which is invariably to be found to a greater or less degree in every voice.

And now as to the ugly voice. Some cynic has said that *all* voices come more or less under this heading, but we will ignore him at once as a hopeless philistine. It is seldom that you will meet with a really ugly one. A throaty voice may strike one as ugly on a first hearing (to my mind a throaty baritone is even worse than a throaty tenor), but throatiness is usually so easily cured that we need not discuss it for the moment.

No one possessed of an ugly voice need despair, provided he has personality, intelligence and the power of interpretation. Some few really great singers have been the possessors of voices the reverse of beautiful and yet have achieved world-wide reputations. I have one or two especial instances of this in my mind.

A great deal of the ugliness can be removed by careful and skilful treatment. The best way to begin with a pupil who is in this category is by experiment with the various vowel sounds. You will soon find the one that gives the best result in the way of beauty of tone, and having found it you must work very patiently on that vowel on the lines I have laid down, and very gradually take the other vowels from it, being careful to make them all *match* in tone colour. There will surely be some personal characteristics in every case of this kind, and you must take care that you do not eliminate these. After a time

you will find that the pupil will become possessed of a new kind of voice, and it should not sound an artificial or *made* one. I know many instances of the latter kind, but there is always something unsatisfactory and unsatisfying in them, however much it may be hidden (and it often is) by the art and personality of the singer.

One of the best pupils I ever had came to me originally with a voice quite the reverse of beautiful. So you must not despair of the ugly voice, but you will have to take even more pains with it than with the beautiful ones, and you will soon find that the training of the one can be made quite as interesting as that of the other.

IV

THE BREAK

MY DEAR ANTHONY,

The questions you ask me on the subject of the "break" are difficult to answer by letter, but I will do the best I can to lay down a few rules for your guidance in dealing with this rather dangerous part of your work.

You need not attempt to explain to your pupils what happens during the crossing of that little bridge. They will all be conscious of it when they get to it. The great point is to see that the bridge is built at an easy and safe place over the stream and that it is inconspicuous.

Remember that "chest voice" is a misnomer often applied to unnatural low notes accompanied by throat closing and distorted vowels. With proper expansion and open throat "breaks" often disappear or never exist as difficulties when the note is supported on the breath.

To consider the female voice first; it is a somewhat strange thing that many quite heavy contraltos can, and often do, carry their chest voice up higher than do sopranos. I think it is usually caused by the joy the unthinking singer may experience in making a big noise. Someone has said that "the contralto with big low notes is in great danger," and it is a

truism if ever there was one. There have been more fine contralto voices ruined through the dragging up of the chest voice too high than from any other cause, and when the bad habit is established it is a most difficult thing to put right again.

In such a case you will often notice that, when the singer has to sing such a phrase as this—

there is a break or jodel that goes off like a pop-gun between the B♭ and the G, and perhaps another lesser one between the F and the E♭.

Make it a rule never to allow any soprano or contralto pupil to bring the chest voice up beyond E♭. You will be quite safe in doing that. They will, in many cases, think that they are sacrificing tone in foregoing the big noise they could otherwise make on E and F, but you must make it your job to convince them that beauty of tone in that region of voice can never be obtained by that means.

Have you not often remarked that some contraltos have some splendid notes both at the bottom and at the top of the voice, but in the middle have a foggy patch covering three or four notes, and sometimes more? That condition is almost invariably caused by that practice of dragging the chest voice up too high.

It is a most aggravating fault to cure, and it is only to be done by most careful practice and patience. Such a pupil must be given simple exercises that carry her both upwards and downwards from one side of the "break" to the other, using the different

forward vowel sounds for the purpose and being careful to keep a loose open throat and focus the tone on the front of the hard palate. You must stop her the moment any sign of the "jodel" appears. As the voice has to move upwards and downwards, it is best to practise all vocalizing from the middle upwards and downwards and back to the middle with as little change of position as possible. Breath and ear are then made responsible for changes in pitch and intensity.

These exercises should be begun *piano* and the tone increased very gradually. It will not be very long before an improvement will be clearly manifest, and after a while the fault will be entirely overcome. Then you will see how greatly the E, F and G above the "break" will have increased both in beauty and volume.

Both you and the pupil will have to be very patient, for the blemish is a very obstinate one and will not be hurried, but you must persevere.

The one who suffers most, however, from the inconvenience of the "break" is the tenor, particularly the one who is apt to be at all throatily inclined. He, too, will be quite safe in taking his full chest resonance up to E♭, but no further. His E and F will be his downfall and will ruin his high notes if they are not properly placed.

There is an old-fashioned expression about "closed" tones on those two notes that is most misleading, and, I am confident, has wrought great mischief to thousands of good voices. Never use such an expression. There is no such thing as a "closed" tone in singing.

This E and F must never be negotiated by closing the throat. On the contrary, it must be wider open than ever on those notes, the vowel a little broadened and the tone focussed still further forward, with, perhaps, a little additional nasal resonance. All the vowel sounds will be used for the purpose, and great care will be necessary to see that the tone "matches" both those below and those above.

One often hears a tenor with a fine voice, who has very good middle and high notes, but who seems to have quite a different voice on E and F (and sometimes F♯) that does not "match" with the rest. It is, of course, the "break" that is responsible for that.

I have known many tenors who, as soon as they reached that part of the voice, gave one the impression that they could not possibly go up another semitone without overstepping their effective limit, and yet, when they got past it, could sing away on their G's, A's and B♭'s, with ease and effect, and great beauty of tone.

I am quite sure that, if you will adopt my suggestions in dealing with such a pupil, you will get the best possible results, but, whatever you do, don't let him close his throat.

Baritones and basses will overcome any similar difficulties by the use of the same methods, and they, like the tenors, must be careful not to carry their voices up too high before they put them into practice.

I hope these suggestions may be of assistance to you, but, as I said at the beginning of this letter, it is a difficult subject to tackle.

V

VOWELS

MY DEAR ANTHONY,

I think a great deal of the difficulty you encounter in getting your pupils to sing in a refined manner will be overcome if you will adopt the methods I am suggesting in this letter.

I have found in my experience that many pupils who speak in a perfectly correct and charming way become more or less " Cockney " as soon as they begin to sing. This is usually caused by the failure to grasp the correct vowel sounds and the proper way of dealing with the compound vowels. There are so many of these latter in our language, and the treatment of them is one of the principal things by which you may recognize the cultured singer.

Let us take some of these vowel sounds and consider them. In such words as *night, bright* or *light* there is a prevailing idea that the compound vowel is a combination of *ah* and *ee.* That is quite wrong, and if those words are sung with those vowel sounds the result is an ugly Cockney pronunciation.

There is an essential difference in the treatment of a monosyllable containing a single vowel and one containing a compound vowel. In the case of such a word as "*feet*" there is no difference between the spoken and the sung word, except that the former is

short and the latter long. In speaking such a word as " night " we have *n* and *ite* joined together, and it is quite easy to say, but when we come to sing it on a prolonged note we have the *n* at one end, *ite* at the other, and between them we have a sustained indifferent vowel sound which does not exist at all in the spoken word. That indifferent vowel must be joined on to the *n* and must be sustained right through the note, however long it may be, until the very end, and then (and not until then) comes the complete syllable *ite* enunciated as shortly as possible.

The long vowel to be chosen for this purpose must in all cases be one that does not dissonate with the completion of the word.

The dominating vowel in the word *night* is not *ah* but the short *u* (as in the word *nut*), and that vowel must be sustained right through to the end, and close not with *eet* but with *ite*, this complete ending of the word coming at the last possible moment, very short and crisp but without the slightest jerk ; thus—

Of course, that looks all wrong, but if you will sing it and compare it with

you will see at once that the one is refined and the other is common.

The words *hear, tear, fear* etc., are instances of a different kind. The vowel sound in these words is

not the same as in the words *meet, feet* etc. In such a word as *tear* the correct vowel is the short *i* (as in *tick, tin* etc.), not the long *ee* at all, thus—

If sung with the broad *ee* vowel, this beautiful word will sound stilted and unnatural, especially with a horrible rolled *r* at the end of it. Try it and see.

Then take *flower, bower* etc. These, where possible, should be made one-syllable words. The music will not always let you do this, but usually it will. Great care is necessary with this. The vowel *ow* (sometimes so reminiscent of our feline friends) must be carefully negotiated. It is impossible to write down exactly what the correct sound should be, but if you will speak the word *flower* a few times, dwelling gently on the vowel sound, you will soon get it, and what you *say* you will *sing*, always finishing the word at the very end with the complete syllable *ower* as shortly as possible.

The words *hill, will* etc., are often pronounced in a horrible way too, with an obvious short *oo* (as in *pull*) before the closing *ll*. There is no *oo* vowel, short or long, in those words, and the way out of the difficulty is to make your pupils sing a short *ill* at the very end of them, taking care that there is not a ghost of that little short *oo* in it. You will find this a difficult thing to do, but it must be done.

Tale, fail etc., must be treated in the same way, without any sign of the same short *oo*. It *will* creep in unless great care is taken.

Fire is an awkward word. How often have we

heard this mispronounced in the *Messiah.* "For he is like a refiner's fah-ee-er," three syllables instead of one. Of course the first vowel sound (which is the short *u*, not *ah*) should be taken right through all the three notes of the phrase, finishing with a short but complete *ire.*

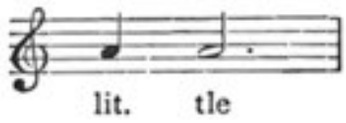
There are a great number of these pitfalls. Some are quite easy to negotiate, and in this connection I need only mention such words as *make, hope, ride* etc., which, on a semi-breve, will not be sung

but

There are hundreds and hundreds of similar instances, but if you treat them all in the same way and remember that the dominating vowel must go right through to the close of the syllable and then finish with a short and *complete* ending of the word, you will find your pupils will soon overcome the difficulties, and form a habit of correct and refined pronunciation, remembering always that singing is glorified speech, and that they must sing English, and not the gibberish we so often hear.

One must admit, though, that there are some words that cannot be sung on sustained notes in the same way that they are spoken, and these are deserving of special consideration. The word "little" is one of

them. The *spoken* pronunciation is of course "lit-l" without any real vowel sound at all in the second syllable. But what are we to do with that second syllable if we have to sing the word on these notes?



What vowel are we to sing on that dotted minim?

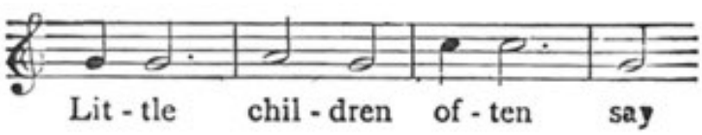
I have heard it sung as "littel," "littool" (as in "book"), and even as "littul" (as in "duck"). Neither of these is the correct vowel sound. There can be no question about it, we must compromise, and I think the way out is to *speak* the word quite naturally a few times, gradually lengthening the second syllable. You will find that the vowel that will finally emerge from the experiment will be a sort of nondescript somewhere between the *e* (as in "her") and the *oo* (as in "book").

Another awkward word is "children," which is often sung in a stilted manner, the second syllable being pronounced "dren" to rhyme with "men." There is a story of Beerbohm Tree, who, after vainly endeavouring to get one of his company to speak the word in a natural way, said to him, "My dear fellow, don't say 'my chil*dren*.' That word is the plural of 'chee-ild.'"

We must not be stilted with a word like this, and you will find that the best vowel to use when the second syllable has to be sustained is something between the short *e* (as in "bed") and the *e* (as in "her").

The same vowel will apply to such words as "often," [1] "patient," "even" etc.

Some such compromise as this is essential to naturalness of speech in such a phrase as the following—



Just think how stupid this would sound if it were sung in a stilted manner with no modification of the vowel sounds.

There is not the smallest necessity for distorting our beautiful language with the mistaken idea of improving the tone. Some teachers deliberately alter the vowel sound in many of our most beautiful words because, forsooth, they think they get a bigger or better tone by reason of that distortion. A young baritone came to me not long ago who told me that he had been taught by his master to sing about "My lawvely Rawses" for the reason that he sang with a better tone on those vowels.

Put your foot down firmly on such bosh as this, and see that your pupils form the habit of singing pure English; precisely the English that is—or should be—spoken. Then they will be able to deliver the message of their songs and it will go straight to the hearers' hearts. Ours is the finest language for singing in all the world.

[1] The *t* in this word is silent, the correct pronunciation being "of-n." It will be well, however, I think, to broaden the *o* a little.

VI

CONSONANTS

MY DEAR ANTHONY,

In my last letter we discussed the vowels. Let us now consider the consonants.

These are quite as important as the vowels, for on their clearness depends whether or not the audience hears our words and, as a consequence, understands or not what we are singing about.

After the habit of correct vowel sounds has been fully acquired a very good motto is, "Take care of the consonants and the vowels will take care of themselves." I have, you know, an old-fashioned notion that an audience likes to hear the singer's words. If they don't, or can't, why all that fuss about it? Of course they are entitled to hear them. It is what they pay their money for. Apparently, from what one too often hears on the platform, singers do not as a rule recognize this right, or at any rate do not satisfy the demand.

If the proper method is applied there is no difficulty about it, and if every singer would mount the platform with the fixed determination that every soul in the audience shall hear every word he sings, he'll do it, and that quite easily.

Some time ago I attended a recital given by a man with an extremely good voice, and who was a good

artist too. He sang in German, French, Italian and English. Very bad German, but I heard every syllable; execrable French, but again I heard every syllable, and the same with his Italian. Then he sang a group of English songs and I couldn't hear one word in three. Why was that? I think I can tell you. You see, he had had to *learn* his foreign languages, and probably didn't know which were the important and which the unimportant syllables, and consequently accented all of them to an equal extent, besides speaking his words as plainly as he could. When he came to his own mother tongue all his carefulness departed, and he not only seemed to take no trouble with his consonants, but he dropped his voice on all his small syllables, with the result that not one single sentence was heard in its entirety in the middle of the concert-hall.

You may take it from me that when a singer's words are imperfectly heard the fault lies in weak consonants and in the dropping of the voice on the small syllables.

Whether the singer is singing *forte* or *piano* every consonant must be as clear and clean-cut as a diamond.

P and T have a moment of absolute silence preceding them. B and D so nearly so as to warrant our treating them as silences too. These four as well as K and G should be made as short as possible when they are initial consonants, but when they are finals must be followed by a distinct exhalation of the breath, and care will be necessary to see that no vowel sound escapes with that exhalation. "Good-er-bye" or "Good-er-night-er," for instance, is dreadful.

All the other consonants can and must be *sung through* with as little diminution of the tone as possible. Remember that the consonants should not *divide* the vowels, but should link them up and unite them.

The initial consonants should be sung through *before* the beat, the advent of the vowel marking the rhythm. You have no doubt heard many singers (and good ones too) who give one the impression of lagging behind the beat. The defect is usually caused by their being on the beat with the initial consonant instead of with the vowel that follows it. You will find, too, that the closing consonants need careful treatment, as a word is often lost to the audience by reason of the carelessness of the singer in this respect.

H, V and F should be rather exaggerated as they are poor travellers.

For Th the tip of the tongue should come well and firmly beyond and against the upper teeth and should fly back like lightning. Otherwise that consonant won't get to the end of the room.

Ing (final) will usually be found difficult to sing in the high part of the voice and should be brought as far forward as possible.

In the initial W care should be taken to avoid the *oo* sound that will creep in in front if you let it. It is most difficult to eliminate and will intrude unless great care is taken. The lips should be almost completely closed before this consonant and then thrown wide open as quickly as possible.

The H in such words as *when, what, which,* etc., of course comes before the W.

For L the tip of the tongue only is raised from its vowel position behind the lower teeth and is pointed to the L position behind the upper teeth. There is to be no other movement whatever, especially none of the jaw.

I think the R is the jolliest consonant of the whole lot. He is much abused and is often made to work when he should be resting. Try and get your pupils to roll the R whenever they would do it in *speaking* and nowhere else. If our message is going home to the hearers we must sing our words with no artificialities or unnaturalnesses. When I hear a singer, with perhaps a beautiful voice, sing " Lorrd, now lettest Thou Thy serrvant deparrt in peace, accorrding to Thy worrd," I want to kick him. It doesn't make me feel at all peacefully inclined. Just *speak* those beautiful words, and you will find that all the Rs are silent. Then speak them with the Rs rolled and see what tosh it makes of them.

No, my dear fellow, we are going to sing what we speak and roll the same Rs in song as in speech. Any other way *must* be wrong. The strength of R often depends upon whether the word is emphasized or not.

Some will need to be lengthened; some will be only just touched. If I were singing " Rise then, ye Priests of Baal," I should roll both those Rs because I should do so in speaking, but the R in " Rise " would be longer than the one in " Priests." In such a word as " forest " or " fairest " I should only just touch it.

One occasionally hears an R slipped into words

where he doesn't belong at all. I have even heard " Ar-men " sung.

This reminds me of a joke of Beerbohm Tree's when one of his actors at a rehearsal would insist on saying " I sawr a man." After stopping him more than once, Tree took him aside and said " Don't you know, my dear fellow, that the R in ' saw ' is silent."

I shall have some more to say to you (when I write you later on on the subject of " word values ") as to the method of treating words which end with a consonant and are followed by words beginning with one, but I think I have said enough in this letter to help you to attain good results from your pupils as far as regards their diction.

VII

SOSTENUTO

MY DEAR ANTHONY,

In writing you on the subject of sostenuto I am touching on one of the great vital essentials of the technique of our art. The sostenuto must never be broken except for a definite and artistic purpose. It is a thing without which no singer can be great.

Think for a moment of all the best singers we have ever had. I need not mention any of them by name. I mean the really great ones. Every one of them was, or is, a sostenuto singer. Without it, you may be sure they would never have been *great.*

On the mastery of sostenuto depends the whole art of phrasing. Without it the perfect performance of *crescendo* and *diminuendo* is impossible, and they will be but poor and disjointed things instead of things of beauty. What can be more beautiful to performer and audience alike than a perfectly sustained *crescendo,* one that begins *pianissimo* and, meeting the demands of the various notes and syllables that it has to encounter, gathers them all up into its arms, weaving them together as it rolls on its unbroken course to a final glorious *fortissimo,* and all so perfectly graduated that no one could tell where or how it was done. Have you ever heard such a *crescendo*

as that ? Or a *diminuendo* as perfectly performed ? Seldom, I'll be bound. It is only the sostenuto singer who can do it.

Many singers can sustain phrases on one vowel, but fail as soon as words come into play. Again, many singers can sustain *f*, *mf* or *p* as the case may be, keeping the same weight all through, but fail to sustain when they have to meet the demands of *crescendo* and *diminuendo* in the higher flights of the art of phrasing.

In the *crescendo* the pressure is often taken off at the end of each note of a phrase, sometimes only a little, sometimes to quite an appreciable extent, the result being that the *crescendo* resolves itself into a series of notes with a *diminuendo* at the end of each, though every note begins louder than did the previous one. That is no *crescendo*, but a series of concertina effects. The real sostenuto is not there. Each *crescendo* must be a sustained living thing, growing all the time irrespective of words or notes.

The perfect *diminuendo* seems to be even more difficult to achieve, but the same rule applies to it (of course the other way about).

A *diminuendo* must never *weaken*. It must *grow*. We must never *let* it *get* softer. We must *make* it *grow* softer, and neither the throat nor the mouth should be allowed to close in a *diminuendo*.

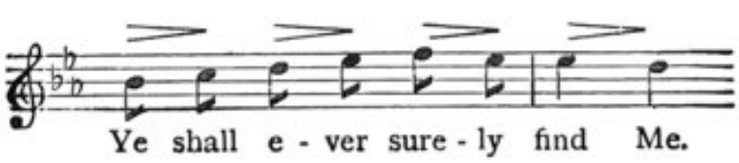
In both the *crescendo* and the *diminuendo* the sostenuto is the thing.

The continual flow of the sostenuto throughout the singing of a phrase will make the *crescendo* and *diminuendo* beautiful in the way I have mentioned.

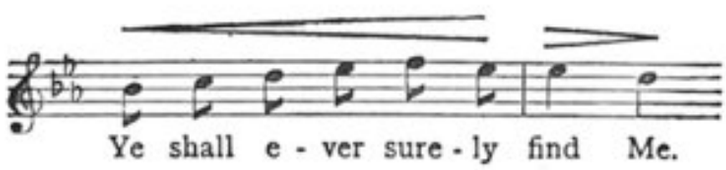
I do not think the absolute necessity of sostenuto is sufficiently recognized, or at any rate sufficiently put into practice, and I think, if you consider it seriously, that you will come to the conclusion, as I have, that the sostenuto should never be interrupted by the advent of a small word or syllable. In singing a sostenuto phrase, we should look ahead and find the important or dominating word—the keystone of the arch, so to speak—and sustain right through till we get there—let nothing stop us, least of all a small syllable. It matters not whether we are singing a *crescendo* or a *diminuendo* or maintaining an even tone, the music of the sostenuto is the thing, and must not be interrupted till we reach our climax, and the syllables we have to sing, whether they be large or small ones, must take their place in the scheme of the phrasing.

Another thing in connection with sostenuto is that where we have pairs of notes—two crotchets or two quavers together—the second is very often apt to be skipped. My advice is, look after the second and the first will look after itself. Especially is this applicable to tied notes in pairs. The observance of this rule will maintain the sostenuto and avoid the pumping effect so often heard in phrases of this kind.

In such a phrase as " Ye shall ever surely find me " in " If with all your hearts " (*Elijah*) do we not often hear this fine broad melody sung like this—



Do you realize what the singer is doing when he sings it in that way ? By dropping the voice on the small syllables which come on the second of each pair of quavers he is robbing the phrase of nearly all its music. He is making three *diminuendos* where there should be nothing but one splendid *crescendo*. Sing it over as I have written it above and then try it in this manner—



You will, I think, come to the conclusion that there is no comparison possible as regards beauty of phrasing.

The latter method puts all those small syllables into the scheme of the phrase and makes real music of it. It will most certainly carry conviction with it and will send the message home while the other will fail miserably.

I could give thousands of other instances of this kind, but really I don't think it is necessary to enlarge on what seems to me to be so very obviously the right way to do it.

The same rule that applies to the second of the pairs of notes should be applied to the small note that follows a dot. The dropping of these is fatal to sostenuto.

So, I always look upon small notes and the small syllables as I should look on babies. The smaller they are the more they require looking after. Take care of the small notes and syllables and the big

ones will to a great extent take care of themselves.

And now let me warn you against allowing your pupils to indulge in the horrible practice of portamento between syllables which is so noticeable nowadays among the singers of the less expensive of the drawing-room ballads. Never allow your pupils to slur from one syllable to another. Where you have two notes on one syllable a slur is permissible and often necessary. Where you have three notes on one syllable one slur out of the possible two is permissible —to make both will ruin the whole thing. Put your foot down firmly on this pernicious practice. It does more to spoil good singing than anything else. Cultivate a fine legato instead; the other will ruin the finest sostenuto in the world.

VIII

PHRASING

MY DEAR ANTHONY,

Here is my promised letter on phrasing. A great deal of the detail of this branch of the art of singing is covered by my previous notes on Sostenuto, but perhaps it is worth while to consider this subject more fully, for it is a very fascinating study and one that never loses its interest, even for the most mature and finished singer.

Perfect *crescendo* and *diminuendo* is essential to good phrasing, but it is not enough to be able to do that, however perfectly. Phrases have to be considered in their relation to the whole verse or the whole song as the case may be, just as the various notes have to be treated in *their* relation to each phrase. That is why they must be considered "in large."

Often we find several complete and distinct preliminary phrases leading up to a principal or dominating one, the whole making up what we may term a "phrase of phrases." Of course that dominating phrase is the "crown of the arch" and has to be built up to on definite lines, or we may find that it will fall flat when we reach it. The manner of achieving this must be left to the intelligent

discretion of the artist, but some method must be applied in the management of those preliminary phrases. It will not be enough merely to phrase them without any definite purpose in view.

It is quite conceivable that where there are, say, three of these preliminary phrases, the first might be sung, *on the whole, pianissimo,* the second *piano* and the third *mezzo-forte,* leading to a *forte* for the big phrase. When I say *on the whole* I mean that each separate phrase will carry its *crescendo* and *diminuendo* but will on the whole be *pianissimo, piano* or *mezzo-forte* as the case may be.

They may be treated in an entirely opposite manner and work downwards from *mezzo-forte* to *pianissimo,* or they may be sung, shall we say, the first *piano,* the second *mezzo-forte,* the third *pianissimo.* In fact, you may juggle with them in all sorts of ways, and the cultured singer will use his discretion in this as in all else, and he will be guided in the exercise of that discretion by the character of the words he has to deal with.

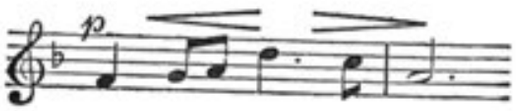
In the use of that *crescendo* and *diminuendo* in each phrase, the artist will not as a rule have much difficulty in deciding on the word or note up to which he will *crescendo* and from which he will *diminuendo.* The fixing of that note or word is quite an interesting little study in itself, and its variations are legion ; indeed, there is a great fascination in the practice of phrases that begin and end *pianissimo* but which have a short *crescendo* and a long

diminuendo, in some such proportions as this:

or, vice versa, such as this:

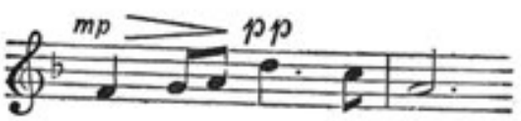
In these the singer will always be guided by the *shape* of the music, and the words he has to deal with.

Such a phrase as this:

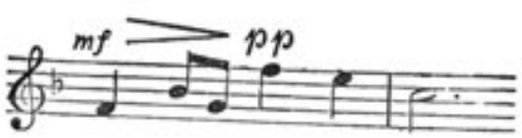


or this:

would not necessarily be sung as I have phrased them, though usually that would be the method adopted by most artists. How delightful they could be made, provided the words called for such treatment, if sung like this:



and this:



The singer must have a free hand in all his phrasing, and of course he would not treat several phrases

in sequence in the same way. There are many methods to be used and he will ring the changes on them all at his discretion.

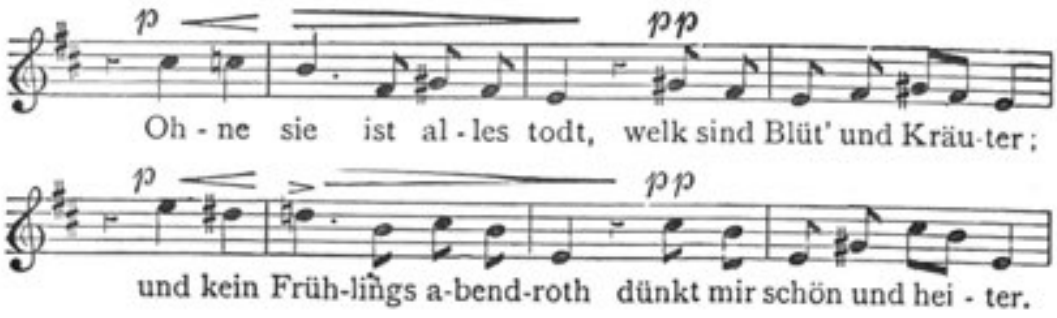
Brahms was nearly always writing "musical phrases" in his songs, so much so that in many of his greatest ones (such as "Die Mainacht") he runs the risk of being accused of giving undue prominence to his small words by putting them on the first beat of the bar, and by giving long notes to such words as "und" (and). In my opinion such a criticism is entirely in error. Brahms was thinking of his *music* and his *atmosphere*, and he got *both*. He didn't care one little bit about the first beat of the bar. There is not of necessity any accent on that. And as to the lengthening of such a word as "und," he knew that you do not give prominence to a word by lengthening it. That object is much more easily and emphatically attained by *shortening*.

The singer who cannot phrase had better not touch Brahms. You have only to glance at a few of his Lieder to see that perfect phrasing is one of the first essentials to their interpretation. The very *shape* of them will tell you that.

Look at his "Minnelied." The expression marks are not printed in. That does not mean that it is not to be "phrased." It means that it *is* to be, but he has left it all to the singer, as the great composers nearly always did.

There is a wonderful moment in the third verse where a great effect can be made by "phrasing" the first and third phrases, and, in a manner,

speaking the second and fourth very quietly without any sign of *crescendo* or *diminuendo*.



The beauty of the phrases in sostenuto songs such as this is often greatly enhanced by such methods as are here suggested, namely, the alternating with them of phrases, that are, in a sense, spoken rather than lyrically sung. The above example will explain to you what I mean.

In a great number of songs this opportunity arises, of, as one may say, *singing* one phrase and *speaking* the next, the latter being usually done quite softly and without any *crescendo* or *diminuendo*, but perfect diction is, of course, imperative. The result of this mode of treatment is invariably beautiful.

At the end of the same song ("Minnelied") there comes that wonderful phrase that works up in a long, long gradual *crescendo* (with a little *accellerando* too) right down to the last word "blühen," in the singing of which word the singer has to take us back all the way from *fortissimo* to the *piano* point from which he started, by means of a perfectly graduated *diminuendo* and only just enough *rallentando* to bring us back to the original

tempo. It is a splendid example of that long

that I referred to above.

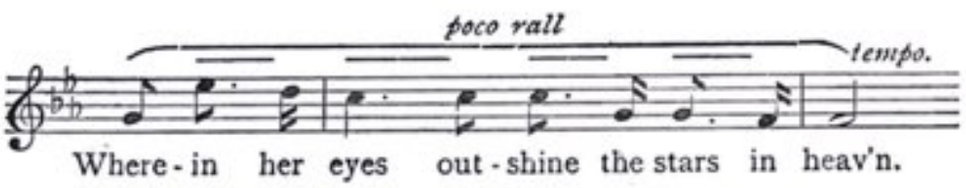
While on the subject of Brahms, let me warn you against the habit of making a *rallentando* at the end of his songs where none is marked. I do not of course suggest that a *rallentando* is *never* to be made unless it is written. That would be absurd. Brahms wrote a great number of songs that end *pianissimo* in the voice part and are finished with a lovely symphony. By the insertion of the *rallentando* before it, this symphony is rendered unnecessary, and it is often one of the great features of the song. In fact the piano, and not the singer, finishes it. In these instances you will usually find a *diminuendo* leading to the closing symphony. This *diminuendo* can, if perfectly performed, be made to form a beautiful finish to the vocal part, and is far more artistic than the insertion of an unnecessary *rallentando*.

To turn to another side of the question, have you ever noticed how the failure to *sing through* a long note will spoil what would otherwise be a good phrase? I have come to the conclusion that the long note is the stupidest thing in music unless it *does something*, and the longer it is the stupider it becomes. The singer must justify the existence of that long note and make it *worth while*. There are endless instances I could quote where the allowing of a long note to stand still doing nothing will completely spoil a fine phrase.

This also applies to a dotted note. How often

we hear a good phrase broken in two through the singer taking the pressure off in a dotted note. A composer dots a note for a definite purpose, and that half-beat taken from the following note becomes the outstanding feature of the note to which it is added. In other words, the dot is quite the most important part of the dotted note and should be *sung through*, even if it is only a dotted quaver. In such a song as "The Devout Lover" (Maude Valerie White) you will find that again and again the composer has given dots to the quavers in the voice part while omitting them in the accompaniment. The beauty of this effect will be completely marred if the singer fails to sustain through the dots, and the phrases will all be broken up into small pieces.

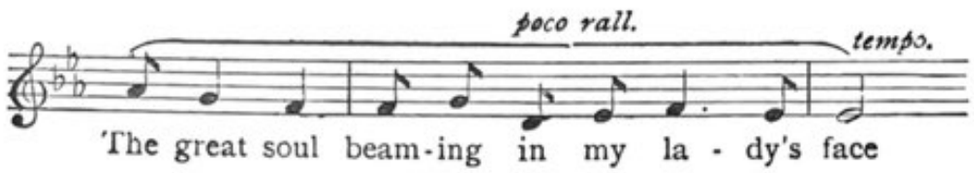
Take this phrase as an example:



You will see how completely it would be ruined if the tone were allowed to weaken in the lengthened notes on the words "wherein," "eyes," "shine" and "stars." It is a fine phrase if sustained right through. It would be a poor thing indeed if cut up into bits.

In this same song too we find an unusual number of instances of the perfectly legitimate liberty that may be taken in the way of bending the rhythm in the middles of the phrases, *provided always* that the time *must* be resumed with the arrival of the last

note of the phrase, and *not* waiting until after the phrase is finished. Thus :



and the example quoted above (" Wherein her eyes outshine the stars in heaven.")

The whole song would be entirely ruined if the singer were to complete his phrases before resuming the onward march of the rhythm. If he did that, the thing would be continually coming to a full stop, whereas, by the resumption of the time on the arrival of the concluding note of each phrase, it will be found that these bendings of the time will greatly enhance the beauty of the song and its continuity will not be interrupted. Such a song as this could not be tolerated if sung in strict time without those bendings. The composer has very wisely not notified them, but has left them to the discretion of the singer.

I do not think I need go further into this subject of phrasing, all-important though it is, but I should like you to read this letter in conjunction with my previous one on sostenuto and the one that I shall write you shortly on word values. Each is allied to the others, and I hope you will find them of use to you in the instruction of pupils who are sufficiently advanced to appreciate the beauties of this fascinating study.

IX

WORD VALUES

MY DEAR ANTHONY,

This letter comes as a continuation and amplification of my previous notes on the subject of vowels and consonants as allied to sostenuto and phrasing, and I want now to work out my suggestions to a practical solution of the difficulties we have all had to encounter at one time or another in our attempts to master the art of diction and pronunciation, so that, without any undue effort on our part, every single syllable we utter may be distinctly heard in the remotest part of the concert-hall.

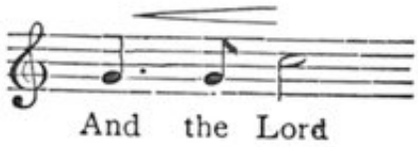
Double consonants will usually be found to be the chief stumbling-blocks in the way of the singer, though, as I have said, the dropping of the voice on the small words and final syllables of long words is largely responsible for our shortcomings. The same fault applies to speakers. How often have we heard clergymen, sometimes with fine voices and speaking perfect English, render themselves and their message absolutely valueless by reason of this continual habit of dropping the voice on every small word and syllable they come to. It is a thousand pities, and so very easily to be remedied.

The study of word values will do much to render

the cure for this easy of attainment, and, with that end in view, I am going to illustrate a few examples of these difficulties, and endeavour to lay down rules by which they may be overcome.

Let us take first the word that occurs most often in the English language. The word "the." It is the most abused and the most often skipped. It is always followed by an important word. I suggest to you that the word "the" should always be sung right through into the accent of the word that follows it.

Take such a phrase as this:



The sostenuto must be carried right through and the music of the phrase maintained, and it *will* be if "the" is given its proper value and *weight.*

Now let us take the word "and" in the same phrase. This word "and" finishes with a double consonant and "th" follows.

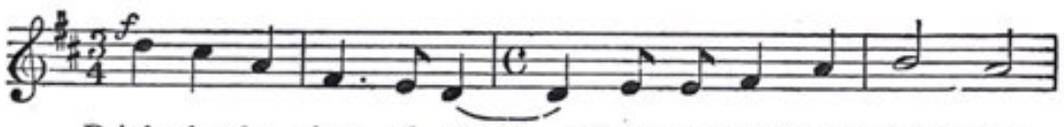
I suggest that quite a considerable portion of the note on which the word has to be sung should be spent on this double consonant "nd." If this is not done, the "nd" and the "th" will get mixed up together and will not be distinctly heard in a concert-room. The "nd" should be sung through quite soon, so that there is plenty of time to make the "th" tell in the word that follows. The word "and" being a dotted crotchet, a crotchet may be given to the vowel "a" and as much as a whole

quaver to the "nd." The whole thing cannot then fail to be heard and you will get an added rhythm by reason of the "nd" coming on the second beat.

Full value and *weight*, as in the case of the word "the," should always be given to such small words as "a," "of," "from," "to" etc., and we shall thus make the small words things of beauty instead of nonentities.

I have only chosen very simple illustrations, but the principles I have laid down will apply in the higher flights.

Let us take as an example Vaughan Williams' "Bright is the ring of words." Sing the first phrase over and drop the voice on the small syllables and see how it ruins both words and music. Then sing it as a fine bold phrase, with the sostenuto going right through the whole thing, and notice the difference.



"Ring of words" will sound unintelligible in a big room unless the "ng" in "ring" is sung soon enough, and unless "of" receives its proper value. In the following words "when the right man rings them," "right man" must of course stand out as the dominating words, and may for that reason be a little shortened, especially as both are followed by consonants. The "the" that precedes them must, on the contrary, *not* be shortened, but simply sung through at full weight into the accent of

"right," the tap-tap of the rhythm being perfectly kept on "when the."

Later on in the same song we have (*pp*) "Low as the singer lies in the field of heather": "In the field" will sound a jumble, unless "in the" is properly sung through with the beauty of the rhythm maintained. The same applies to "and the maid remembers" at the end of the song. These are excellent examples of the importance of the small word.

A difficult instance occurs in "Silent Noon" by the same composer. In the middle of the song come the words "Deep in the sun-searched growths," written in recitative form. There is very little time to get in all those consonants, for it is written in quavers, and, without some such method as I have suggested, it is quite impossible to make the words heard in a concert-room. But if we get on to the *n* in "sun" and the *cht* in "searched" as soon as possible, allowing half of each note for the closing consonant of each syllable, it is comparatively easy to make them heard.

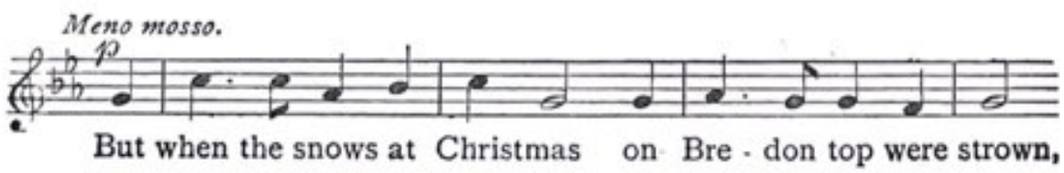
Then we come to the word "thread" in the following sentence, "like a blue thread loosened from the sky." This word "thread" should be shortened, to add to its importance, and to make the sense of the words tell. In fact, shorten it just as you would in speaking. The *nd* at the close of "loosened" will be given a whole quaver, and be got out of the way to make room for the *fr* of "from" that follows.

Another example occurs in the same song in the words "dropt to us," where, if the word "dropt"

is not shortened, we get "drop to us." And in the first verse we have "your eyes smile peace," where, if the *z* in "eyes" is not sung quite apart from the *s* in "smile," we should make it appear as if the dear lady had only one eye.

The shortening of the important word (as in the case of the word "thread" mentioned above), for the purpose of marking it, is a very important matter, for it is of great use in relieving a phrase (especially when it is a long one) that might otherwise run the risk of becoming somewhat monotonous. At the same time I should like to warn you that it must be exercised with the greatest discretion, for we must never forget that, after all is said and done, *the sostenuto is the thing*, and this shortening must never be used except to enhance the beauty of that sostenuto, and never to mar it.

In Somervell's "In Summertime on Bredon" (*Shropshire Lad*) there is another example of this where we have the following passage:



It comes at the beginning of a verse in which it is quite obvious that the sostenuto is absolutely essential. I have suggested above, and I do so again, that an important word can be made much more effective by shortening it for a special artistic purpose than is possible by lengthening it. Even if the sostenuto be maintained in the most perfect manner, there comes a time when a feeling of mono-

tony will creep in unless it is relieved by this shortening of an important word, just as in architecture a long straight line or curve may be relieved by some embellishment, but of course, as I have said, *the sostenuto is the thing*, and the method I am suggesting is only to be used for its relief and the enhancement of its beauty.

The shortening of the word "top," exactly as in speech, will achieve this, but the word "were" that follows it must be given its full value. Later on in the same song come the words "And went to church alone."

The effect of that phrase will be greatly enhanced by shortening the word "church," singing the closing *ch* on the second half of the crotchet on which it is written.

In these two cases the sostenuto deliberately stands aside for a moment for the sake of the words and resumes its place at once right through the syllable that follows.

Further on we have "groom there was none to see." The *m* in "groom" should come on the second half of its crotchet, and the same with the closing *n* of the word "none." But here there is no breaking of the sostenuto, for the *m* and *n* are sung right through, whereas in the case of "top" and "church" referred to above, there is a distinct silence after each word.

I should like you clearly to understand that there is not the smallest interference with the rhythm, but, rather, that an additional rhythm is given by the tap of the consonant on the half beat. Neither is it in any sense *rubato*.

This shortening of the important word must be done very sparingly, and, when it *is* done, the words that surround the shortened one must be all the more sustained, for instance "were" after "top" and the "a" in "alone" after "church" in the above illustrations.

Another example that I may mention occurs in Roger Quilter's "Damask Roses" (a sostenuto song full of colour). At the end of the song we have the words "hardly my mind supposes whether the roses be your lips, or your lips the roses." We find the word "lips" coming twice close together. The word will gain much by shortening it the first time it comes. Of course we must not shorten both of them equally, so the first word "lips" will be a quaver (instead of a crotchet) followed by a quaver's silence, and the second one will be shortened only a little to make way for the word "the" that follows it.

There are endless other examples that one could give, but I do not think I need give any more than the above, which are sufficient to illustrate the method to be adopted.

To sum up, the principal thing I want to emphasize is that, when a syllable ends with a consonant that is followed by a vowel, it should usually be sung right through into the vowel of that following word, but where a syllable ends with a consonant which is followed by another consonant the first word should be finished quite soon, in order to make way for the consonant that follows it, and final double consonants should come sooner than single ones unless they are followed by a vowel.

Thus the treatment of such a word as "from" will depend upon whether it is followed by another consonant or by a vowel; therefore, when we sing the words "from thee" the *m* in "from" belongs to that word and is sung on the note that belongs to it, but when we have the words "from us" we take the *m* off the word "from" and (as the French do) put it on to the word "us."

You may say that these are small things. So they are, but the difference between good and bad diction depends on little things, and in making these suggestions I am endeavouring to make it easy for singers to speak their words in a manner that will insure every single syllable being distinctly heard in a concert-room.

I have no hesitation in saying that the importance of word values as allied to sostenuto is not sufficiently emphasized, and, as I have said, I am convinced that the principal reason why words are imperfectly heard is that the consonants and small words are not given their proper place in the scheme of speech.

But it is essential to remember that sostenuto and rhythm are the bed-rocks of all good singing, and these must never be transgressed except for a definite and artistic purpose, and an analysis of the rules I have laid down for you will show that the object to be attained is that the words and music must be woven together into one beautiful thing. If we realize that as the end in view, we shall never drop our small syllables out of the music, but they, as well as the big words, will form a part of it. Why should we spoil a fine musical phrase for the sake of a small word? It is absurd on the face of it.

Let us take the whole of the words as a part of the music, and let the sostenuto flow along, treating the vowels and consonants, as we come to them, not as interruptions, but as embellishments of the music, and the thing is done, and done quite easily.

X

RHYTHM

MY DEAR ANTHONY,

I am not at all surprised to hear that you are experiencing difficulty, as you say, in instilling a sense of rhythm into your pupils, for that is one of the few things that we poor long-suffering teachers cannot do.

When you have taught as long as I have you will have come to the certain conclusion that rhythm is a separate and distinct sense, like that of sight or hearing. One either has it or one has not, and it cannot be taught. As well try and teach a blind man to see. The mere ability to more or less keep time or to count three or four beats in a bar is not possessing a sense of rhythm, and if you find more than one pupil in a hundred with this priceless gift developed to a marked degree, well, all I have to say is that you are more fortunate than I am.

Rhythm is one thing. Counting beats is another. The counting of the beats is in the pupil. The rhythm is in the music.

Of course you will usually be able to improve your pupils in the way of keeping time, but you will come across many to whom this would appear to be absolutely impossible, and indeed some never

seem to be able to make the smallest advance in this direction. Happily these are in a very small minority. One of the very best sopranos I ever had as a pupil was one with a splendid voice, who had most excellent taste and was crammed full of temperament and genuine emotion. She was a real worker too, and as keen as could be, but she couldn't tell whether she held a note for three beats or six, and as for counting her rests, why, she just couldn't do it or anything like it, and I couldn't make her. Why was it? Well, she had no sense of rhythm, and that is all there was about it.

At a students' concert she sang an operatic aria brilliantly, and achieved far more success than anyone else, but she was saved from disaster more than once by the pianist, though of course the audience were ignorant of that.

This kind of singer is to a certain extent safe under the guidance of a reliable accompanist, but just think what would happen if she had to sing with an orchestra.

Rhythm is the very heart-beat of music. Without it singing is anæmic and shapeless. No beauty of voice can compensate for its absence. It is the bond of sympathy that binds the song and the accompaniment into one perfect whole. It will carry the whole thing on its shoulders if we will only let it and not trip it up.

It is the only thing in music that we cannot alter. We can, and do, alter the notes, and words too, when necessary, but we cannot alter the rhythm. I like to compare it with a big wheel. We have all

seen an enormous fly-wheel in some factory, which dominates every bit of machinery in the place, though we can scarcely see that it is in motion. Well, we can do with rhythm exactly what can be done with that wheel. We can gradually retard it or accelerate it, but if we abruptly alter its beat, down comes the factory about our ears.

I am sure that very few singers have a simile of this kind (any will do) in their mind when making a *rallentando*. It is seldom that one hears a really perfect organic one. The ideal *rallentando* is one that is so gradual that the hearer is unconscious of it until it is finished. The same, of course, applies to the *accelerando*.

Some singers always lose a little time when they have to take a quick breath. Impress upon your pupils the necessity of taking the breath out of the note they are leaving, that is, the last note before the breath. They must never keep us waiting for the note that follows it. If that last note is only a semi-quaver, half of it must be for the note and half for the breath. Otherwise the rhythm will suffer, and that must never be allowed to happen. Of course, occasionally we come to a pause, and then (and then only) rhythm stands aside and has nothing to do with it.

Santley was one of the greatest rhythmic singers that ever lived. Did you ever hear him sing Hatton's "To Anthea"? He seemed to catch those six octave quavers as they flew off the mark and run off with them (not *too* fast), not only with perfect rhythm but in absolutely strict time, and he never

stopped or varied his stride to the smallest extent till he broke the tape on the very last note at the close of a glorious crescendo. He had us in the hollow of his hand from start to finish, we felt ourselves lifted higher and higher through every bar of it and he never for a moment let us down. And it was the rhythm that did it.

Now you must impress upon your pupils that, notwithstanding all this, there is nothing stiff or rigid in rhythm. On the contrary, it is elastic and resilient. There is a give and take in it, but the principle of the big wheel must govern every variation to its laws. It does not require that every crotchet shall be of the same length, any more than it will permit them all to be of different lengths. It is perfectly free, and so will you be. You will not be its slave, and it will not be yours. You will be companions in arms.

One cannot help feeling that some singers who undoubtedly possess a strong sense of rhythm, sometimes deliberately ignore its importance, and seem to make a point, whenever they come to a string of quavers, of too often making them all of different lengths. This should be done very sparingly and only when the beauty of the phrase is enhanced (which is not always so) by so doing.

I have found that by far the most difficult rhythm for a pupil to grasp is in $\frac{6}{8}$, $\frac{9}{8}$ and $\frac{12}{8}$ time when the first quaver of each beat is dotted.

In such a phrase as this the pupil will very often get it mixed up with:

and many will have great difficulty in realizing the difference between the two. Your best method in such a case will be to make him sing it quite slowly at first, with perhaps even undue prominence to the third quaver of each beat, gradually increasing the pace, but never losing sight of the importance of that third quaver. This is one of the most beautiful of all rhythms and is thoroughly English. It must not be slavishly followed all through a song, even if it is written throughout in that form. You will come across words in such a song that simply won't let you keep to the lilt of it, and in that case you must boldly take out the dot where the words demand it and sing even quavers. "Come lasses and lads" and "The gentle Maiden" are instances of this, though I have heard singers sing such songs as these without in one single bar giving us the real lilt of the rhythm.

I hope you will do your utmost to instil in your pupils a love of rhythm, for, when you have achieved that, you will find that the enjoyment of study and practice, both for them and for you, will be enormously enhanced.

In practically every song there are places where a little *rallentando* is permissible and even advisable in the middle of the verses. These must be *very slight* and never made obvious.

They are really more bendings of the time than

rallentandos, and the most important thing to remember is that in such cases the time is resumed not after the phrase is completed but with the advent of the last note of it. By this means the onward march of the song will not be interrupted, whereas, if the resumption of the rhythm is left until after the phrase is quite finished, there will be an ugly and unnecessary wait, and, if it occurs more than once or twice, the song is broken up into pieces and the continuity destroyed.

XI

INTERPRETATION

MY DEAR ANTHONY,

The path to be trodden by the artist gifted with the power of interpretation runs through fairyland and will reveal to him at every turn new beauties and new opportunities for expressing them. It is a land unknown to the mere vocalist. It is the thing that makes singing worth while to the one with limited vocal powers. It will enable him to get far more enjoyment out of the exercise of *his* art than is possible to the one whose only asset is a fine voice.

It must never be forgotten, however, that before he can become a fine artist he must be a fine workman. Therefore the technique must be mastered first, and that technique must be so perfect that both he and his audience are unconscious of it. The audience takes what he gives them without knowing how it is done. No one who is not a perfect master of his technique can ever become a really good interpreter.

In interpreting a song, the first essential is that the singer should take the song unto himself and make it *his own*. He will find it impossible to do this effectively with his eyes glued to a copy, and it is therefore another essential that he should make it an

invariable rule to sing every song from memory. There is nothing more uninspiring than a lot of black dots on a sheet of white paper. A story told or a message given straight from man to man is infinitely more effective than one read out of a book.

The first thing to be done in studying a new song is thoroughly to master the words. They should be *recited* again and again, and committed to memory before they are allied to the music. If this course is pursued it will usually be found that the melody itself will be learnt in a few minutes.

The artist should never be in a hurry to present a song to the public. He must give it plenty of time to "soak in." If it is a good song, the more he studies it and the more he practises it the better he will like it, and he will find that it is not until he has sung it again and again in its entirety that he will have discovered, not only all that it contains as a composition, but all that he himself will, by his artistry, be able to create from the material that the words and music give him.

Of course the many different kinds of song will require to be approached from different points of view. Each must have its own particular atmosphere, and, unless it is presented in the right way, it must fail, more or less, in its reception by the audience.

This atmosphere often changes several times in the course of a single song, and we must look upon these changes as a series of vocal pictures to be painted by the artist. Sometimes they are separated by a short interlude, and, in that case, the accompanist prepares the way for the new picture, but very often the new

atmospheres come one after the other without any interludes, and in that case the artist himself must prepare us for the new picture he is going to present. "Creating atmosphere" does not mean pitching us headlong into a new condition of things. There must be nothing abrupt in the change of scene, such as one sometimes sees in a badly joined up film at a cinema. The new atmosphere must be created in advance, so that the series of pictures is unified and continuous, unless, of course, the words of the song call for a sudden dramatic change, such, for instance, as an alarm of "fire" in the middle of Evening Prayers.

Another essential to good interpretation is that the *fortes* and *pianos* also should be prepared in advance (save in occasional dramatic instances). Where a phrase marked *f* follows on the heels of one marked *p*, that *f* should be preceded by a *crescendo* at the end of the *p* phrase, and if necessary the arrival of the real *f* may be delayed for a beat or so. And the same rule, vice versa, should be applied to a *p* phrase following a *f* one.

The artist must not slavishly follow the marks of the composers, and should not hesitate to alter or ignore them if they interfere with his intelligent reading of the song. Some modern composers smother their works all over with marks of expression to such an extent as to leave the artist interpreting them no individuality of his own. The best way in that case is to wipe them all out, find out what the composer *means*, rather than what he *says*, and start afresh. Then the song will become a living and interesting thing.

A glance at the songs of the great classical composers will show that, beyond a general direction, they used very few marks of expression, and that is by far the best way from the point of view of the intelligent interpreter. All those marks of expression are only of service to those who have no brains to think for themselves. If everyone followed exactly the same marks we should never get more than one interpretation of the same song, which would be an absurd conclusion to arrive at. Therefore every singer should work out his own scheme of interpretation, in his own way, of course drawing on his full store of knowledge, gathered, not only from his master, but from all the other singers he has heard, and from his own inspiration especially.

It is the master's duty, whoever he may be, to teach his pupil to interpret a song in the manner that he may consider the best for that pupil, but he never should insist on his slavishly following that teaching, for, if he does, he will get nothing better than a more or less parrot-like imitation. Personally, nothing would give me more pleasure than to hear a pupil of mine give an entirely different interpretation of a song from the one I had taught him. I should feel a greater pride in him than if he had given me the finest imitation in the world.

Imitation is the death of personality.

"Think for thyself—one good idea,
But known to be thine own,
Is better than a thousand gleaned
From fields by others sown."

Scott.

I remember on one occasion, when I was studying a song, Sims Reeves stopped me when I was taking some liberty with the phrasing, and asked me why I did that. I answered that I had done it because I had heard him do it. His reply was, " You should never do such a thing as that. What I do is none of your business. It is *you* who are interpreting the song now, not I."

We masters ought to foster and encourage to the utmost of our power the personality of the singers who come under our direction, and put our foot down on any inclination they may have to imitate other singers, either as regards voice or interpretation. The artist must be the creature of his own inspiration.

Let us now consider a few songs (the simpler ones first) and analyse them with a view to arriving at some method of interpretation.

Every phrase of a song must be considered in its relation to the verse in which it occurs, and every verse in relation to the song as a whole. When a song consists of three verses all set to the same music (such as " Annie Laurie "), it should be one of the objects of the singer to make those three verses sound as different as possible, while giving due regard to the expression the words demand. In the case of this song (" Annie Laurie ") it will be found that the best way will be to sing the first verse *moderato* with fine full sostenuto phrasing, in a manner spreading out this beautiful melody before the audience. The second verse should be begun softer and faster, working up to a *forte* ending, and the third verse should be sung slower and really

pianissimo right down to the words "and she's all the world to me," during which a perfectly graduated *crescendo* will lead us to an enthusiastic *forte* finish.

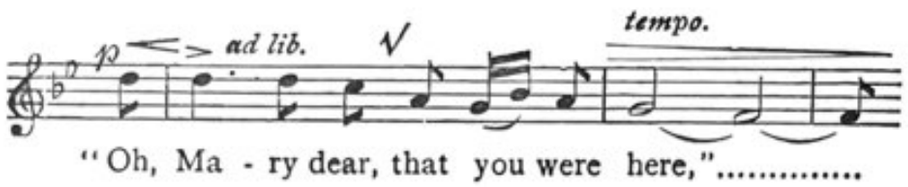
By this mode of treatment we shall get contrast in every verse and there need be no fear of monotony, which invariably creeps in when three or more verses sound all alike.

Similar methods will be found very effective when applied to the lovely old Scotch song "Touch not the nettle."

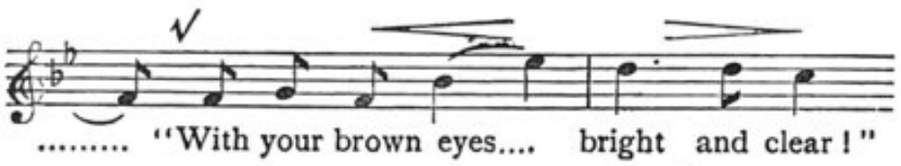
There are different ways of presenting songs that may at first sight appear to be of more or less the same character. For example, in "Annie Laurie" the singer is telling us what a lovely lass she is, enumerating all her charms, telling us what he feels about her and what he would do for her sake. In "To Mary" (Maude Valerie White), however, though he has somewhat the same kind of material to deal with, he is not telling us *about* her, he is actually singing the song *to* her. The cases are quite different. In the former he must take the audience into his confidence, and in the latter he must ignore them altogether and be conscious of no one but Mary herself, and sing his heart out *to her*. That is the spirit in which he should approach that song, and his intelligence, if he will only exercise it, will guide him rightly throughout as regards tone colour.

He must sing the opening words "Oh, Mary dear, that you were here" as if hers is the most beautiful of all names (and perhaps it is) and as if she is the only girl in the world worth singing to; as if he really wants her and can't do without her. He will

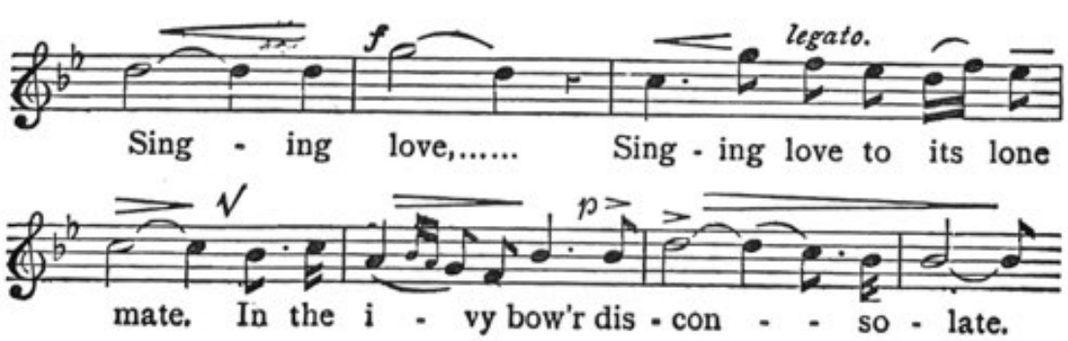
start *ad lib.*, but strict time (and not too slowly) will begin with the word " here."



Of course, when he sings of her " brown eyes bright and clear," he must do so with a bright and clear tone and he must *see* those eyes when he sings of them

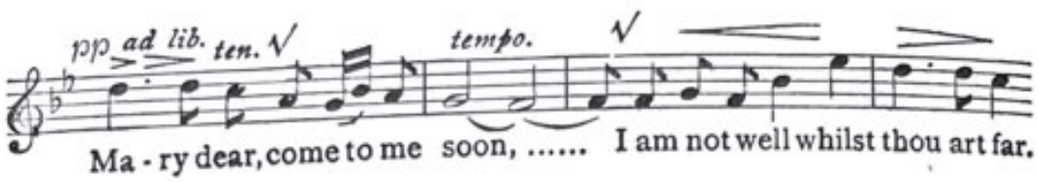


" Your sweet voice, like a bird " must sound as sweet as he can make it, and then will come the first *forte* phrase in the song, " Singing love to its lone mate," which will be reached with a fine *crescendo* in the first word " Singing " and which will *diminuendo* at " lone mate " (" lone " being an opportunity for tone colour) into the *piano* phrase, " In the ivy bower disconsolate." Accent the syllables " dis-con " and follow it up with a lovely *diminuendo*, but with no *rallentando*.

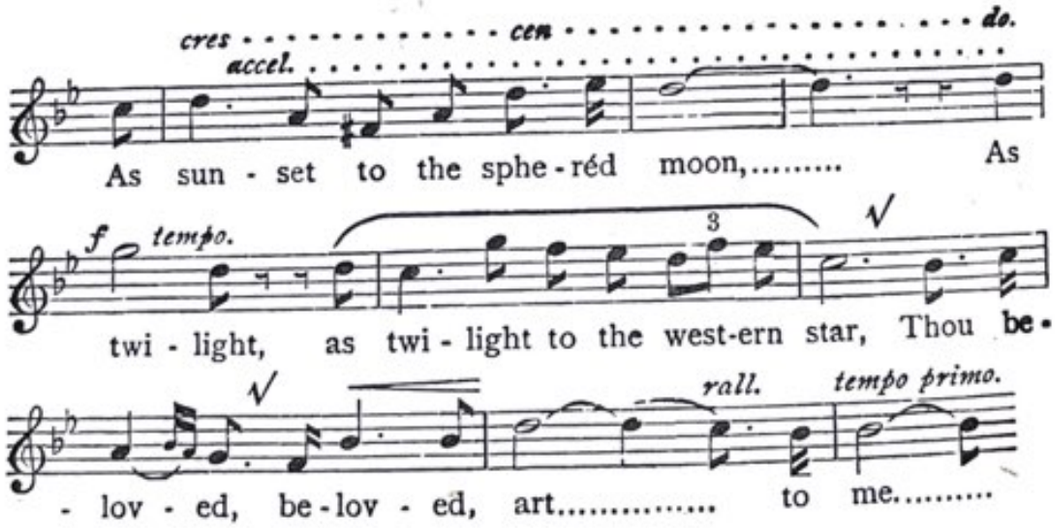


The second verse will begin *pianissimo, ad lib.* as before, with a little pause on the word " dear," strict

time resuming with the word "soon." "I am not well whilst thou art far" should be well phrased and should be sung in one breath.

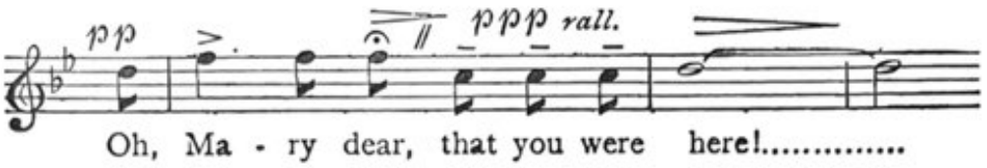


Then, from the start of the next phrase, "As sunset to the spheréd moon," on we go with a *crescendo* and *accelerando* right on to the fine phrase, "As twilight to the western star, thou, beloved, art to me," sung really *forte* with a *rallentando* on the second note of "art" and the word "to," time resuming with the recurrence of the original melody in the accompaniment on the word "me," during which word the voice will *diminuendo* and die away to nothing, this last note being prolonged as much as may be necessary for the purpose.



The song is now finished as far as Mary herself is concerned. The repetition of the first words of the poem is not sung *to her* at all; but the singer will

sing them (quite *pianissimo*) to *himself* and quite simply, with a little pause on the word " dear " and a beautiful soft note dying right away on the last word to a perfect finish.

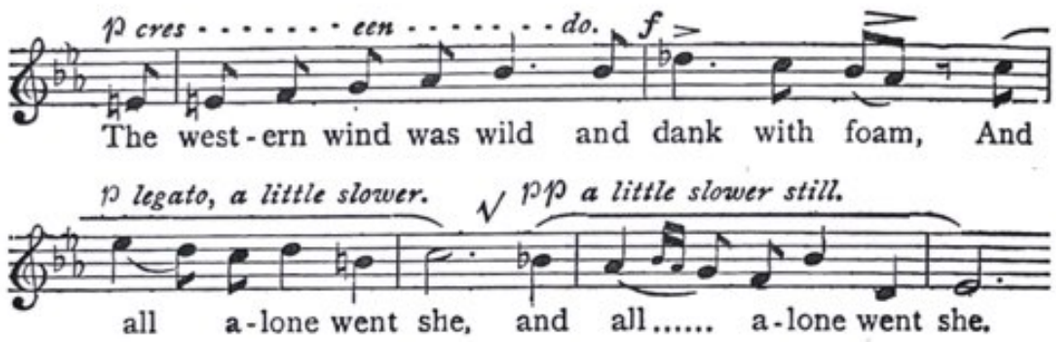


The singing of such a charming little song as this is of course easy sailing, but when we have to negotiate the deeper waters of a dramatic descriptive song such as the " Sands o' Dee " (Frederic Clay) a much wider technique is necessary.

The artist interpreting this song must first of all make up his mind as to his reading of the first verse of Kingsley's poem. I have heard it sung like a love song or a polite request, " Mary dear, will you be so kind as to call the cattle home." Sometimes it is sung with no regard to time or rhythm. Sometimes as if it was of no importance and didn't matter much how it was done.

In my opinion it was an order given by a brute in a brutal way, for we are told in the very next lines that a dreadful storm was raging, " The western wind was wild and dank with foam." So the whole of that first verse should be sung *forte* and brutally in absolutely rigid strict time, without the smallest *rallentando* at the end. The accompanist should be asked to play the opening symphony in the same vein. Then what follows is purely descriptive, and is one long series of vocal pictures to be painted in different colours and all in sequence. The words " The

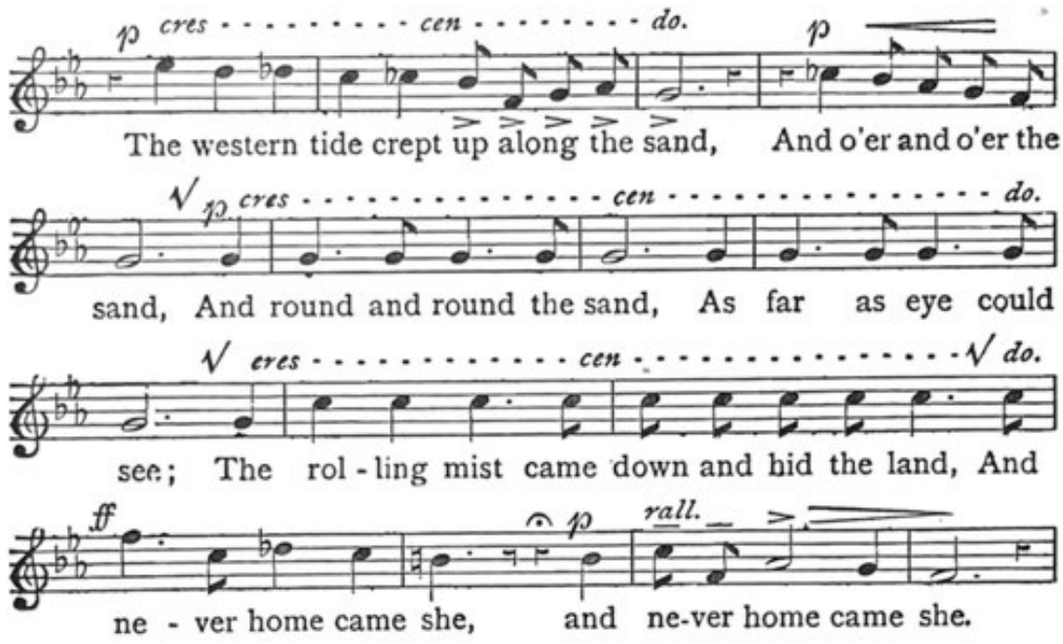
western wind was wild and dank with foam" should begin *piano* with a quick *crescendo* up to a *forte* on the word "dank," every syllable being given its full weight and then a *diminuendo* on the word "foam," to prepare the way for a new atmosphere on the first touch of sadness in the song, "and all alone went she," which should be sung *piano* and a little slower, and then the words repeated *pianissimo* and a little slower still, both these being beautifully phrased.



The original time should be resumed on the stroke of the last word "she," and it is worth while here to recommend that the accompanist should play this figure at the same pace every time it comes (even at the end of the song), excepting the one that I shall refer to in the next paragraph.

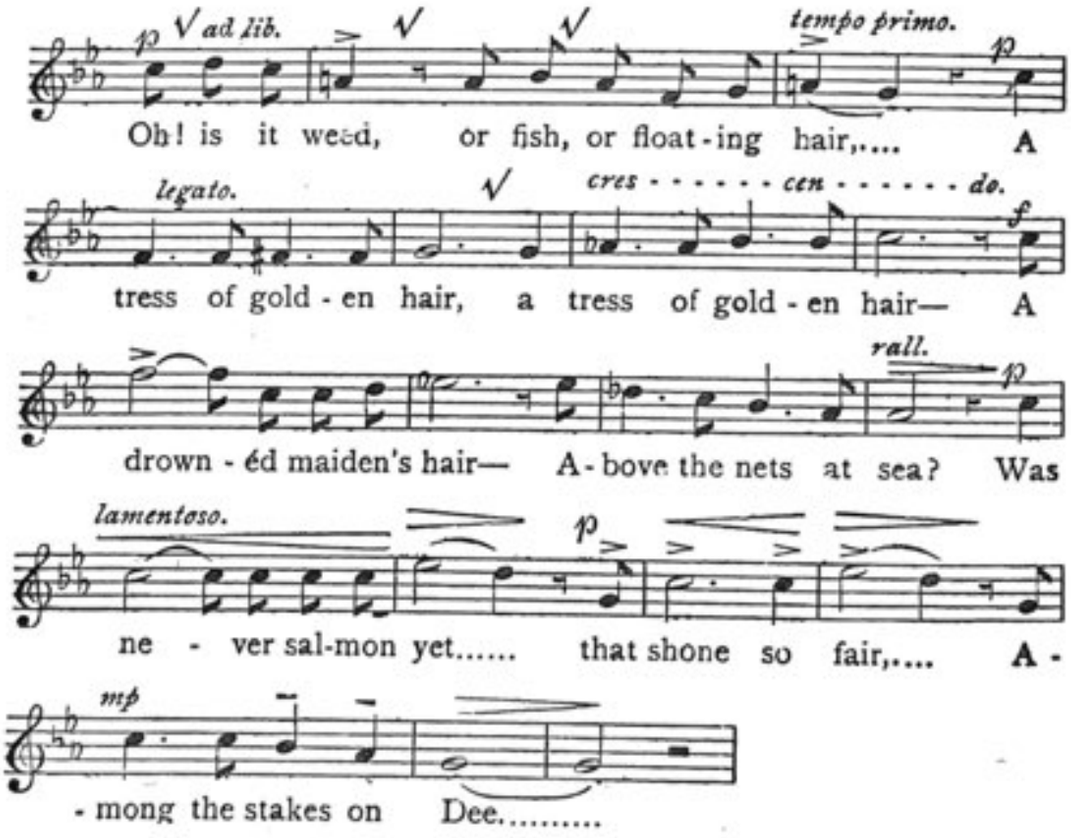
We shall go right ahead now in strict time, "crept up along the sand," "round and round," "o'er and o'er the sand," "the rolling mist came down and hid the land," gradually, gradually, more and more dramatic, a long, long *crescendo* that carries the hearers with us all the way to the climax, "and never home came she," sung *fortissimo*; a sudden dead silence for a moment, and then the same words, repeated *piano* with a *diminuendo* and *rallentando* into the only slow interlude, played *pianissimo*. Be

careful to give the full value both in time and meaning to that word "home."



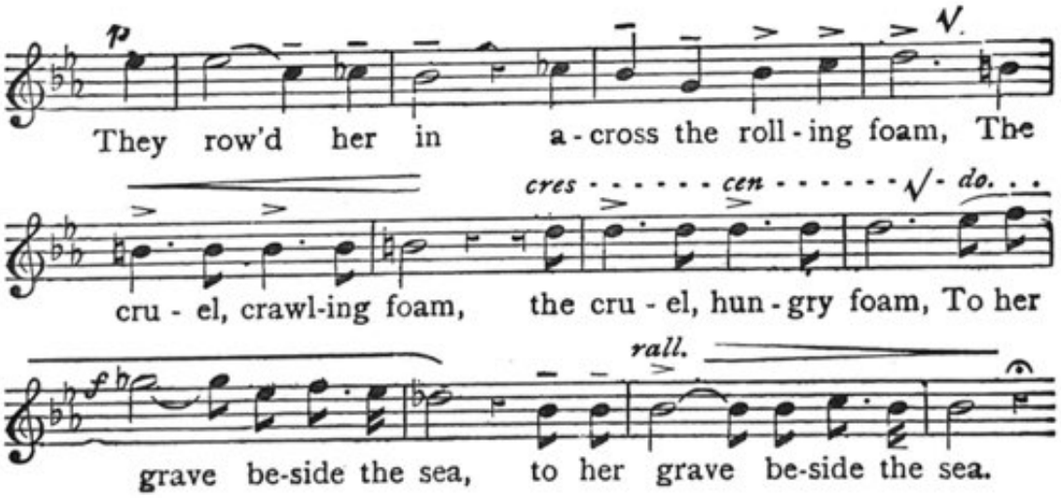
Now comes a verse that will test the powers of the interpretative artist. We must assume that during that slow interlude they are out searching for poor Mary, and, at the end of it, they see something in the water. At first they don't know what it is. They ask, "Oh! is it weed? Or fish?" and then they *know* what it is when they say "Or floating hair." So (having warned the accompanist what he is going to do) the artist will sing and punctuate all those words with the perfect freedom of a recitative, exactly as he would say them in the dramatic situation, not hesitating to pause a little after the word "weed" and after "fish" if he wants to, but the moment the word "hair" arrives we have found what we have been searching for and strict time must dominate the whole of the words, "A tress of golden hair, a drowned maiden's hair, above the nets at

sea." There will be a *crescendo* up to the word "drowned" and a *rallentando* and *diminuendo* on the word "sea" (but not till then), leading to a beautiful phrase, "Was never salmon yet," beginning *piano* with a perfect *crescendo* up to the word "yet," which will *diminuendo* to the next phrase, "that shone so fair," which will be sung with a similar *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, each word being accented. "Among the stakes on Dee" will be sung without expression, but the last note should be held over through the *rallentando*, and through the first two beats of the arpeggio accompaniment that follows.



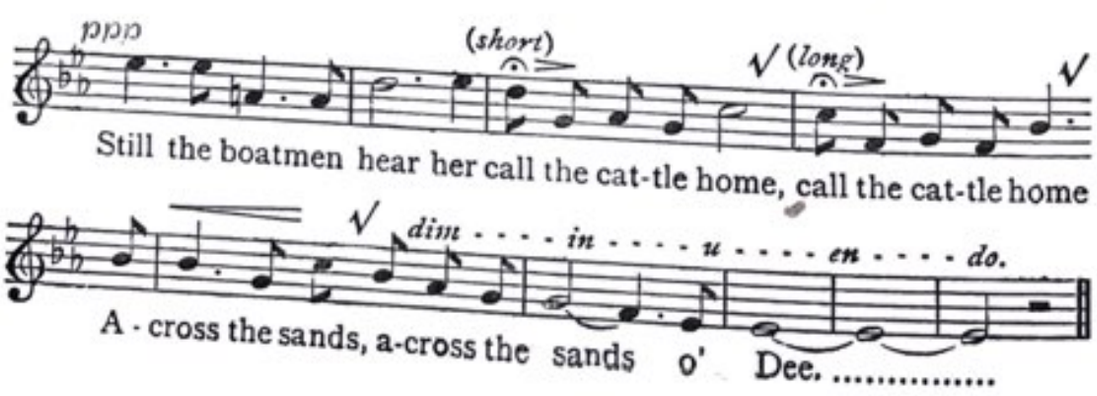
In the next movement we *must* have a firm rhythm. They are rowing, and you know what happens if you don't keep strict time in rowing, do you not? It

will begin *piano*, and will have a marked accent on each of the three syllables "rolling foam." You must make the most of your tone colour in "cruel," "crawling" and "hungry," and the whole of it is to be worked up with a long gradual *crescendo* to the fine broad dominating phrase, "To her grave beside the sea," which is sung *forte* and with dignity, and here it will be better to eliminate those grace notes in the word "beside." They sound frivolous, and are, I think, a mistake on the part of the composer. In the repetition of the last words, you will make a *rallentando* and *diminuendo* from the word "grave" (omitting the grace notes as before) literally down to nothing and then a prolonged pause on a dead silence both for the voice and the piano. This silence is one of the most effective moments in the whole of the song.



The last verse, although set to practically the same melody as the opening verse, is entirely different in character from anything that has gone before. It must be sung really *pianissimo* but not slowly. The softer and the faster it is sung (of course in modera-

tion) and the stricter the time, the better it will sound. Any dragging will spoil it. This last verse is a great test for the singer. If he is a good artist he will be able to hold his audience in the hollow of his hand. His voice must sound far away in the distance, though it must not go out of hearing, and his diction must be perfect. In this last verse the word "call" occurs five times. The first three should be sung in strict time, the fourth should carry a short pause and the fifth quite a long one, each of these two words being strongly accented. A beautiful *diminuendo* in each case will mark the mysteriousness of the situation, and it will be of help to the interpreter if he looks upon these two "calls," and especially the last of them, as the actual call of the ghost of the drowned girl. Then, just before the close of the song, we want a little (a very little) phrasing on the words "Across the sands, across the sands" in order to avoid any possibility of monotony. But of course it must be real *pianissimo* phrasing, and must be so little obvious that the atmosphere is maintained. The last word of the song should be held exactly ten beats, neither more nor less, and should die away literally to nothing while the accompanist plays the closing symphony at the original pace and *pianissimo* to the very end.



I think we are justified in altering the note values in the bar before the last word " Dee," so that the end of the song will be sung in the way I have written it above.

Of course, there are a hundred different ways of interpreting such a song as this. Do not imagine for a moment that I am suggesting that this is the only way, or even the best way, of doing it. But it is *one* way.

I do not think I need analyse any other example of the dramatic song. Such rules as I have laid down will be quite sufficient to act as a guide to an intelligent singer. Of course, if the singer is not intelligent, he cannot interpret such a song as this.

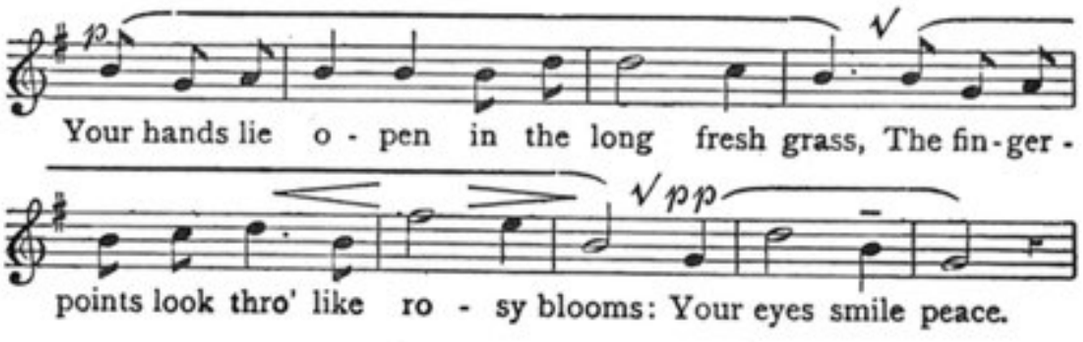
Now let us consider one of a different type altogether—Vaughan Williams' " Silent Noon," from the cycle " The House of Life," as regards both words and music one of the most beautiful songs ever written. It is a masterpiece of word painting and word values, and the pictures it paints form one long string of gems from start to finish.

You must thoroughly realize the situation and create your atmosphere from the very beginning. That atmosphere is one of shimmering heat. You are singing very gently to a beautiful girl with lovely hands and smiling peaceful eyes, who is lying on her back in the long fresh grass looking up at the sky and watching the great billowing clouds scattering and amassing overhead, causing the pasture alternately to gleam and gloom. The colours are changing nearly every bar of the song, but you must never forget that all is quiet. It is noon and it is silent.

So you will begin *piano* (not *mf* as directed) and not slower than you must.

"Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass,
The finger-points look through like rosy blooms,
Your eyes smile peace."

Each line should be sung in one long sostenuto phrase, the second being a very little louder than the first up to the word "rosy" and then a *diminuendo* to the third line, which will be sung *pianissimo* with a slight resting on the word "smile," time resuming on the following word "peace."



"The pasture gleams and glooms 'neath billowing skies
That scatter and amass."

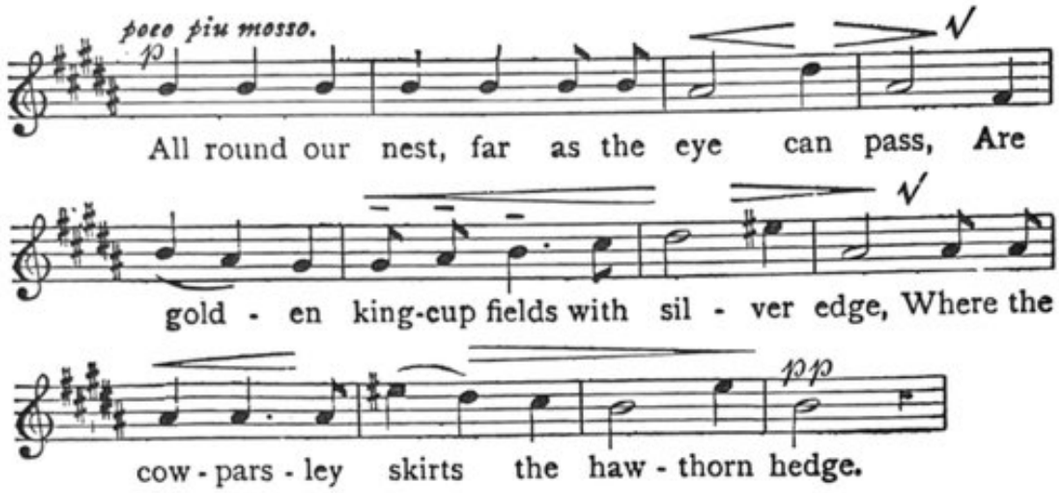
This passage will begin *piano*, and quite gradually *crescendo* the whole way through, to a *forte* on the word "amass."

Then comes a new figure in the accompaniment, such as I cannot recall in any other song. The words are quietly descriptive of the surroundings.

"All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,
Are golden king-cup fields with silver edge,
Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn hedge."

This should be sung quite simply, the tone brightening for the golden king-cups and the silver

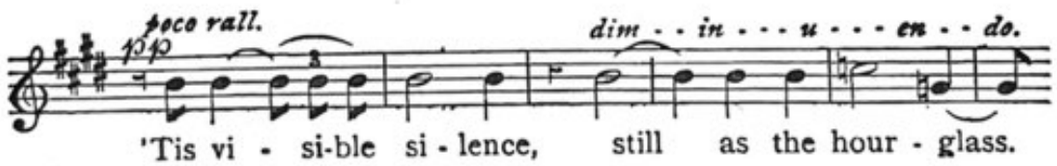
edge. If you have these pictures in your mind you will get the necessary colour.



Then we have a wonderful moment.

"'Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass."

And that is exactly what it must sound like, of course as soft as can possibly be, very sustained, and full of the wonder and beauty of the moment. It is a great opportunity for the real artist.



Then we have four beautiful bars of interlude (which seem to remind one of "Drink to me only with thine eyes"), leading to a fine verse which is written in alternatively recitative and strict time.

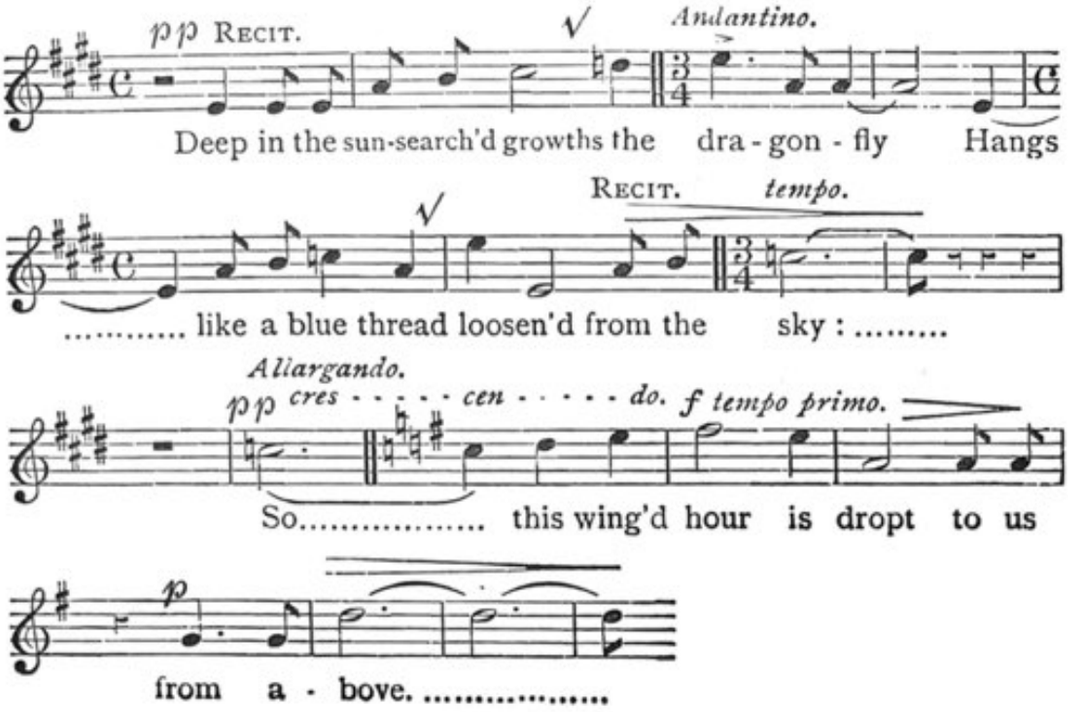
"Deep in the sun-searched growths the dragon-fly
Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky.
So this winged hour is dropped to us from above."

Think of the atmosphere of the moment. Burning noontide. Still as the hour-glass. Therefore

necessarily *pianissimo*. The words are of the utmost importance here, and very clear diction is imperative or the beauty of them will be lost. "Sun-searched growths" are very awkward words to sing. They are, however, *recitative*, and that will help, and you will find a hint or two that may be useful in this respect in my previous letter on Word Values (page 53).

Accent the word "dragon" and go ahead in strict time down to "blue thread," and then "loosened from the sky" will again be *recitative*. At the word "sky" strict time will resume in the accompaniment. There are two great bars ahead of us. "So this winged hour" will be taken up promptly on the first beat of the bar, *pianissimo* of course, and at once will begin a fine *molto crescendo* and *allargando*. Don't hurry this. Take as long as you like, and give four long beats through the *crescendo* on the word "so" and take breath after it. You will want it for the phrase that's coming. You will be quite *forte* by the time you reach "this winged hour," which words will all be strongly accented and must be sung with a fine flowing tone, and as though it is the moment we have been waiting for all our lives. From the word "hour" the original *tempo* of the song will be resumed.

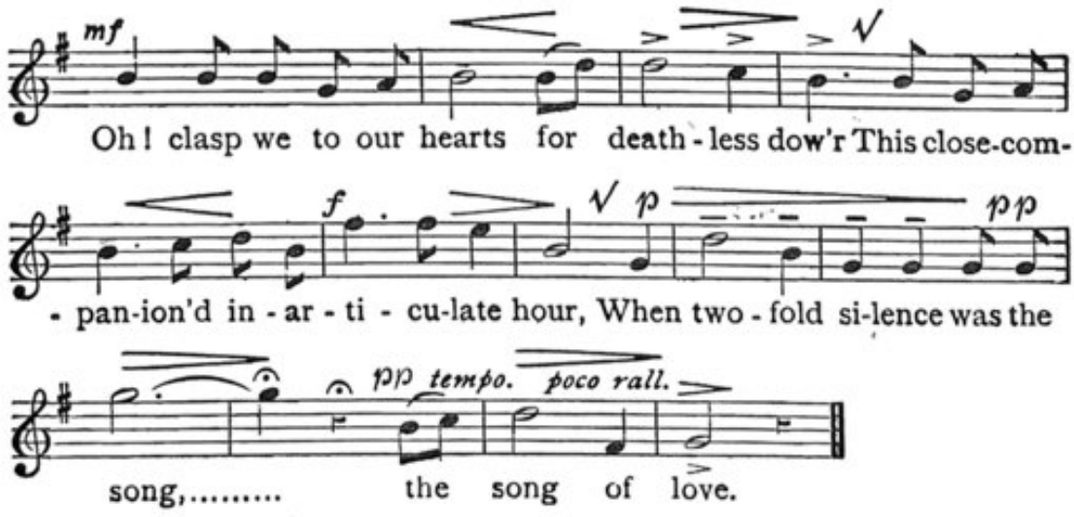
Careful diction is necessary with the words "dropt to us," and see that you do not accent or hold the word "us," but sing it exactly as you would speak it, and then your very best tone on the second syllable of "above," a lovely vowel and a tone that grows in beauty all the time you hold it. I should advise the breaths to be taken where I have marked them.



In the last verse a fine full sostenuto tone must be used (without being in the least noisy) and the most made of the splendid words :

" Oh ! clasp we to our hearts for deathless dower,
This close-companioned inarticulate hour,
When two-fold silence was the song of love."

Begin a perfectly graduated *diminuendo* with the word " hour," which will culminate in the word " silence," this, as well as the whole of the rest of the song, being sung *pianissimo*, with great intensity and with as little *rallentando* as you may find necessary.



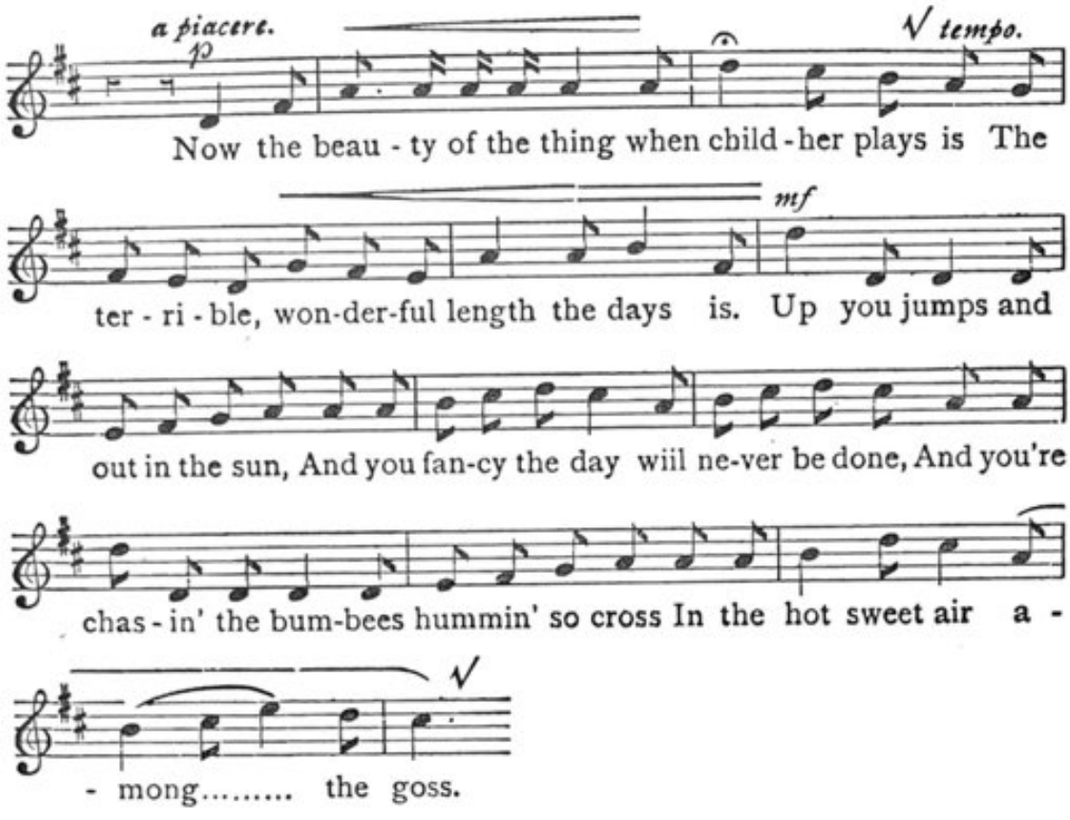
It is a really great song, and only a fine artist can do it justice.

To turn in quite another direction, you will find that some songs almost interpret themselves, needing little assistance on the part of the singer. These are mostly quick songs and the words and the rhythm will carry them through. An instance of this kind is the jolly old English song, "When I was a Bachelor." Anyone who attempts to do anything with that, except speak the words and run along with perfect rhythm as fast as he can go from beginning to end, will spoil it. It will just sing itself. A well-known singer told me once that he had tried to sing this song, and had practised all the tricks he knew on it, but couldn't make it "go." In saying *that* he had told me why! If he had left the thing to do itself it would have "gone" all right.

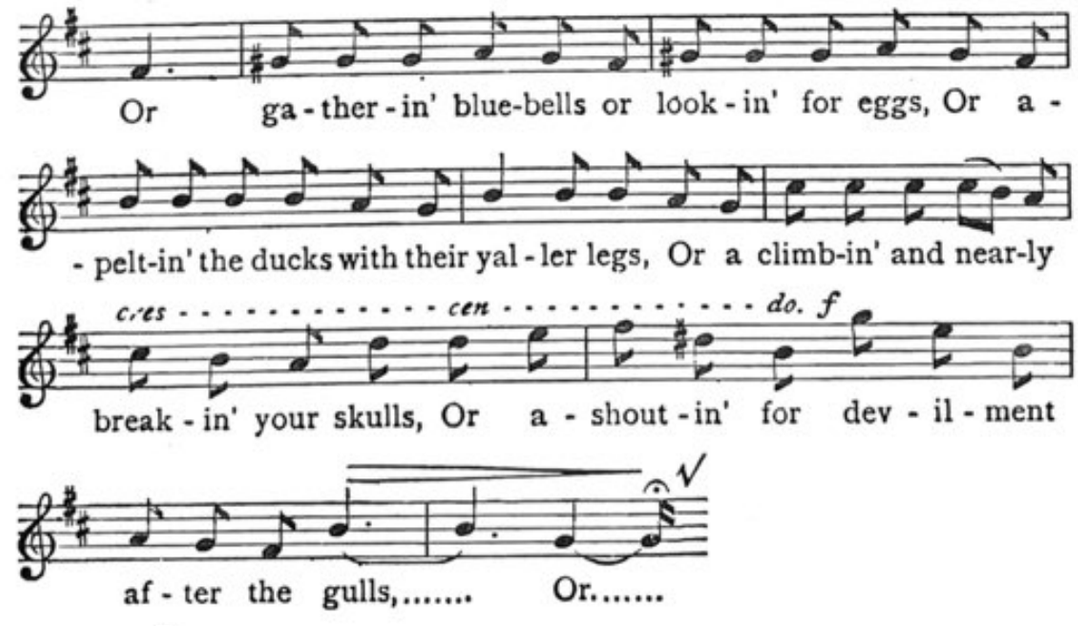
A modern example of this kind of song is Walford Davies' setting of T. E. Brown's charming words, "When childher plays." It is a fascinating romp right down to the last verse.

It starts with what is practically a little recitative, "Now the beauty of the thing when childher plays," and here is the best place to take breath. You must take a good one too, for you must sing all the following words before you will have another chance.

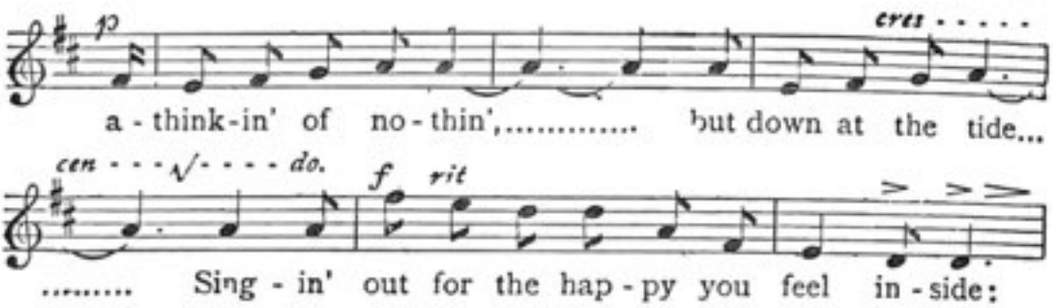
"is
The terrible, wonderful length the days is,
Up you jumps and out in the sun,
And you fancy the day will never be done,
And you're chasin' the bum-bees hummin' so cross
In the hot sweet air among the goss."



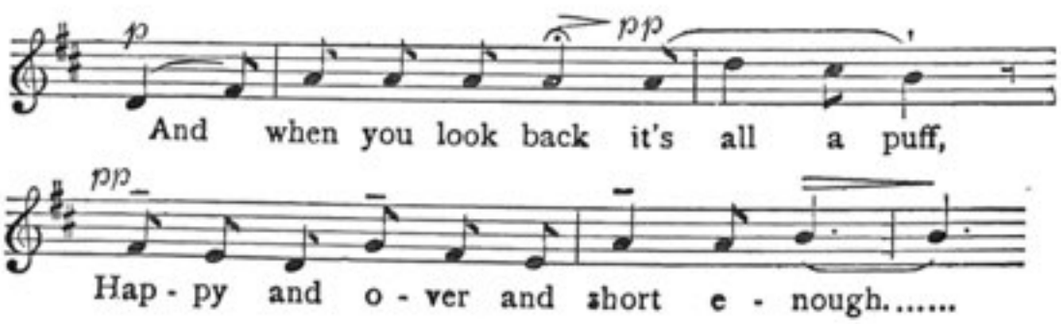
Then, after shortening the word "goss" for the purpose, another good breath and on we romp again, never having stopped the rhythm to the smallest extent.



In the above, if you *must* take breath, it will be best to do it after the word " skulls " (but it should all be done in one breath if possible), of course warning your accompanist. The pause and *diminuendo* on " or " (after which you will take breath) will lead us to *piano*, and you must sing the next line softly though without slackening the speed, with a quick *crescendo* in the word " tide " leading to a *forte* on " singin' out for the happy you feel inside," which line must sound as if you are simply bubbling over with happiness.



Then, after four bars interlude, we have something quite different and the rest of the song is retrospective in character and should be sung gently and with no more slackening of the time than is absolutely necessary. " When you look back " and " Happy and over " will be sung as much like speaking as possible and quite freely, though not at all slowly.



It is a perfectly delightful song, but I advise no

one to sing it who has not unusually good breath control.

The interpretation of oratorio and recitative I shall speak of in another letter. I think I have given you a sufficiency of suggestions to enable you to put your pupils on the rails as regards the methods to be adopted in preparing songs before presenting them to the public.

I would suggest in conclusion that they should always study the classics from the composers' original editions and not from those that have been edited by anyone else ; that they should always sing from memory ; that they should never hesitate to transpose a song into the key that suits them the best ; that they should never ask an accompanist to do this for them at sight, but should have the song perfectly copied in the required key ; and that they should never fail to rehearse before singing in public.

XII

ORATORIO AND RECITATIVE

MY DEAR ANTHONY,

Both the performance and appreciation of oratorio are peculiarly adapted to our national temperament, and would seem to be so essentially English in character that it strikes one as being a part of an almost exclusive heritage, for it is very rarely indeed that one hears any but an Englishman who is capable of giving expression to the real spirit of this particular branch of our art. It demands a higher standard and a purer style than any other, and calls for perfect diction and impeccable English.

It is beloved by all classes of people throughout the kingdom perhaps more than any other form of music, and it affords a unique opportunity for bringing the art of singing into our homes, by reason of the fact that many thousands of people who are not sufficiently gifted to attain proficiency in solo singing are fully qualified to assist in the choir and take their part in the glorious choruses that abound in oratorio.

Opera and concert are a power for educating, entertaining and amusing the people, but oratorio, in addition to all these functions, fulfils a mission which is beyond the sphere of any other form of

music, in that it carries the Divine message straight to the hearts of the hearers. Therefore singers of oratorio should never forget that they are not only performers but messengers.

Occasionally there are to be met with situations of the most dramatic character, though these must not be dealt with in the same manner as they would be treated on the stage. Oratorio has a drama peculiarly its own.

In studying any particular work the singer should not begin on his own part, but should read through the libretto in its entirety and realize fully what position that part occupies in the whole scheme of the work and in the story that is to be unfolded. It often devolves very largely upon the soloists (as well as the conductor) to link up this story, so that it is unified and made continuous and unbroken in its presentation. This is especially so in *Elijah*.

In the scene between the prophet and the priests of Baal, all pauses between the numbers that go to make up this most dramatic episode should be dispensed with as far as possible, in order to insure perfect continuity. Any marked break will quite spoil the effectiveness of the situation, and the same rule will apply later on in the scene between Elijah and " the Youth." And the same in the " Jezebel " music.

Earlier in the work, in the duet for Elijah and the Widow, there are a number of places where both singers will be sorely tempted to break the continuance of the story for the sake of a vocal effect. This temptation must be resisted in every case, excepting where a *rallentando* is marked. These

rallentandos are obviously necessary where they appear, but in no other case should they be interpolated. On many occasions I have heard this beautiful duet quite spoilt through the singers, as one may say, breaking it up into small pieces instead of tying it all up into one parcel. Even at the end there is no necessity for a *rallentando*. It is much better to let it go right on into the chorus that follows, a beautiful *diminuendo* taking the place of an unnecessary *rallentando*. The singers will find every opportunity that is necessary for their " effects " in the several places where the *arioso* is varied by *recitative*.

I suppose Handel stands easily first in the mind of the public as the most popular writer of Oratorio, and that not only for his wonderful choruses; and I imagine that if one were asked what is the most popular piece of music that was ever written, one would have to answer—" The Hallelujah Chorus." I can think of no other. But if Handel had never written a single chorus, he would still rank as one of the very greatest solo writers that ever lived.

I think one of the reasons of his popularity is that he always " comes at " his hearers, and never " goes away " from them. The wonderful broad phrases of his sostenuto arias, his exquisite pathos and those wonderful long curly runs; how they all take hold of one, so that one never tires of hearing them.

In that connection of " coming at " the audience, consider for a moment such numbers in *The Messiah* as " Every valley," " For he is like a refiner's fire," and " Why do the nations." Look

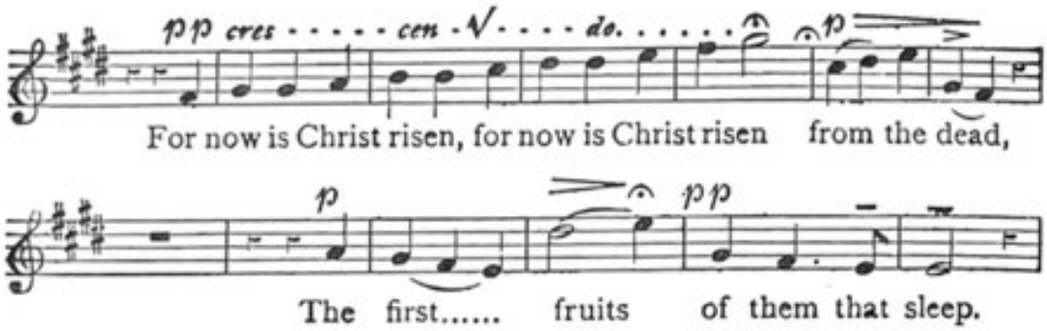
at the score, and notice how these long runs grow into the orchestral passages that follow them.

You will usually find that Handel marks the accompaniment *piano* when the vocal part appears and *forte* when it stops. All these long runs should be started moderately softly and should be sung without accent. You will quite spoil the runs in such an aria as "Every valley" if you accent the first semi-quaver of all those groups that make up the phrases. No, have a long sweeping *crescendo* instead that goes right through to the end of the run and finishes really *forte* as the orchestra begins. That rule will apply to practically every long fast run that he ever wrote (and, as you know, he wrote hundreds of them), and if you follow that rule you will find that the aria will grow and grow, and keep on growing, as it proceeds, and never let us down.

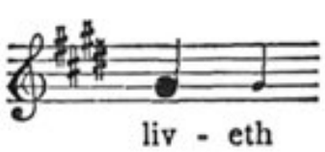
His broad flowing melodies need perfect phrasing, as indeed do all oratorio arias, and they are most grateful things to sing. "But who may abide," "He was despised," "I know that my Redeemer liveth," are examples of this, and in the latter aria, can you imagine a greater opportunity for an artist than that wonderful passage towards the end, "For now is Christ risen," beginning *pianissimo* and with a perfectly graduated *crescendo* that, regardless of different notes or words, builds the whole thing up to a glorious climax on the word "risen"? There is nothing more uplifting in music than this, and then the moment's silence for both voice and orchestra before the mystery of the closing words.

Those closing words are usually sung as I have

written them below, and I think they are better so than as they appear in some scores, but care should be taken not to accent the word "of," but to attack it very softly.



While I am on the subject of this aria, I should like to draw your attention to the custom that has crept in of singing the word "liveth" in the opening phrase (and in the similar figure wherever it occurs) on A and G♯, where Handel wrote two G♯s. I know, of course, that singers are following tradition in doing this, but I have never liked it, and on referring to one of the facsimile manuscripts (I think what is called the "Buckingham Palace Manuscript") I find that Handel originally wrote the two notes (A and G♯) and afterwards altered them in the following way, writing an *enormous* G♯ over the A, thus :



This alteration he made in the same way each of the four times the phrase occurs. Once it comes, as you know, on D♯, and he did it there too, so I think it is obvious that he wanted the word sung on the same note each time, or why did he do that? It

is not a *very* important thing, I know, but it is worth referring to. What really matters is that the singer should carry the deepest conviction in the singing of the phrase every time it comes.

Among Mendelssohn's oratorio arias will be found many that call for beautiful broad sostenuto singing, but perhaps there is none that affords such an opportunity for voice colour as "The sorrows of death," from the *Hymn of Praise*. In the opening we have the atmosphere of the sorrow and terror of death, and then almost at once comes the hope and confidence of the divine message, "Come, arise from the dead, and awake, thou that sleepest; I bring thee salvation."

There is an intensely dramatic situation in the middle. "We called through the darkness" must sound far away in the distance. "Watchman, will the night soon pass?" must all be sung *pianissimo* the first time it comes, and then, after that long chord on the orchestra has died down to nothing, it is to be repeated beginning *pianissimo* but *crescendoing* to *fortissimo* and ending with the most abrupt and sudden stop. Then there will be a distinct pause before we go on in strict time with "The watchman only said." *What* the watchman says will be sung with a dull monotonous voice for four bars leading to a *crescendo*, which will begin with "Ask ye, enquire ye," and go right through to the *forte* chords on the orchestra, the last of which will die away as before, and you will repeat the same methods, only with still greater intensity, to a tremendous climax, "Will the night soon pass?" sung twice, really *fortissimo*. The last time those words come they will be sung

ad lib. with strong accents and a long pause and *diminuendo* on both the words " soon " and " pass."

Then will come a long silence and the soprano will sing with great purity of tone, but *piano*, the dramatic passage, " The night is departing," taking care, the first time the word " departing " comes, to hold three long beats on the syllable " part " (which is seldom done), and ringing out a glorious *crescendo* on the repetition of that word to a real *forte* as the orchestra enters at once on the magnificent chorus that follows.

I cannot call to mind an aria that, so much as this one, affords such an opportunity for varied treatment, or that makes such a demand on the powers of the artist, not only as regards tone colour and purity of style, but as regards dramatic insight and interpretation. It is splendid both to sing and to hear.

I am not going to analyse all the oratorios for you, but I would strongly advise you to impress upon any of your pupils who are making a special study of this branch, the necessity of connecting up the story of each particular work as far as is possible, and to adopt the very highest standard of singing of which they are capable, and to this end I hope the methods I have advocated in my former letters on sostenuto, phrasing and word values may be of some assistance both to you and them.

In the study of recitative you will find some difficulty in getting students to acquire the freedom necessary for the perfect performance of this delightful side of singing. Many singers who are quite successful in *arioso*, fail lamentably when they attempt *recitative*. I do not think this need be so

if it is approached in the right way. You will very frequently observe that singers will just "get through" a recitative, as if it were of little or no importance, and as if anything will do for such a small and insignificant thing. Such singers are all at sea when they have to deliver the part of a narrator, such as occurs in Bach's St. Matthew Passion or even the more ordinary recitatives, such as appear in *The Messiah* or *Elijah*. All these can be made things of rare beauty, and are a test of the real artist far more than the singing of an aria.

One often meets with a prevailing idea that all sense of rhythm can be cast to the winds, and that the singer can make the notes any length he likes, when he has to sing a recitative, with the result that the whole thing is shapeless and muddled, besides making it most difficult for the conductor or pianist to accompany him.

Of course recitatives vary greatly in character, and necessitate different methods of treatment, but the intelligence of the artist should always be equal to the task of guiding him aright, and there is always plenty of free play for that in *recitative*.

All unnecessary rests should be eliminated. These little rests are continually to be met with, and often seem to exist for no apparent reason. They must not be observed when they unnecessarily interfere with the continuity of the words. They were in many cases essential to the original foreign text, and have been retained in the score when it was translated.

Recitative being practically always written in common time, it is easy to see that many quite long

rests are occasionally put in merely to fill up the bars. These must be made entirely subservient to the continuity of the words, and, therefore, may sometimes be ignored altogether, and sometimes filled up by the lengthening of the note that precedes them, provided the character of the word that is being sung on that note will admit of it. The singer must use his intelligence in the exercise of this discretion, as well as in the use of the appoggiatura, which is usually inserted to emphasize an important word, or to mark a change of key.

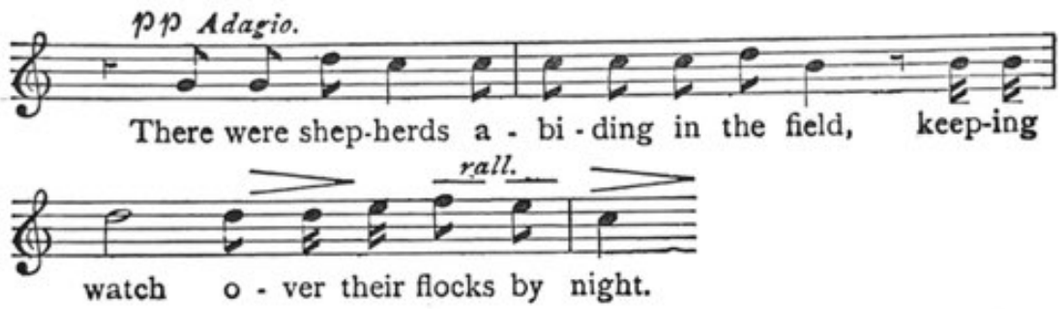
A very good rule to observe in the singing of recitative is to give the long notes their full value, shorten the short ones, and fill up or shorten the rests. This rule will of course very often be broken. But the thing that must never be lost sight of is that recitative singing is reciting on notes, and that, therefore, the words must be sung with precisely the same accents as would be used in ordinary speech.

The Messiah contains some of the very best examples. The group beginning with " There were shepherds " are a series of four beautiful pictures blending one into the other, and yet each is different in atmosphere and colour. I can recall no better opportunity for an interpretative artist.

Let us analyse them.

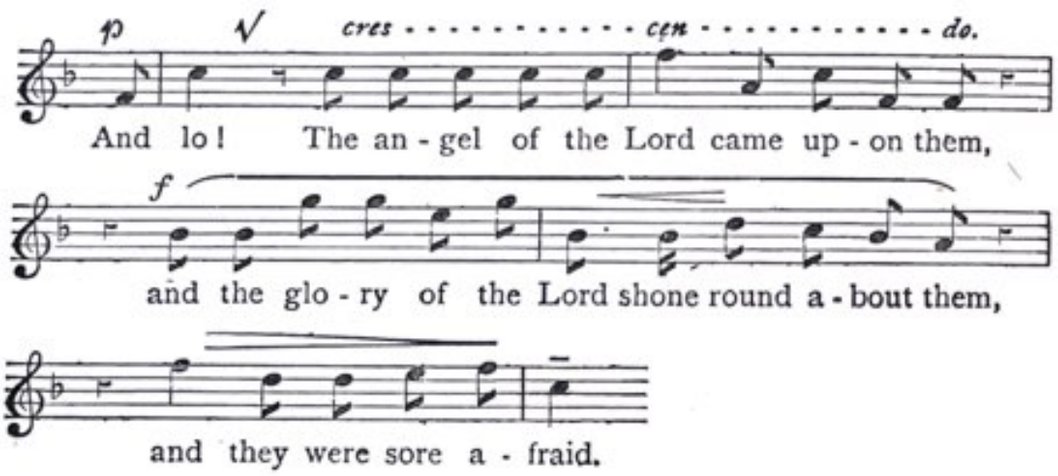
No. 14. It is a quiet night. Everything is dead still. The shepherds are watching—not running about. Therefore the whole of the first part of this double number should be sung *pianissimo* with the utmost purity of tone and with a real legato. Let it be sung in two breaths if possible. If absolutely necessary, a breath may be taken after the word

" watch," but it is better without it. Resist the temptation to *crescendo* up to the word " flocks," and just let the voice float up to the F and hold *all* the notes their full value, especially on the word " by," which is apt to be shortened, as indeed is usually done. Provided the tone is beautiful and it is sung really *pianissimo*, the stricter the time is kept the better will be the effect. There will, however, be a *rallentando* on the words " Over their flocks by night."



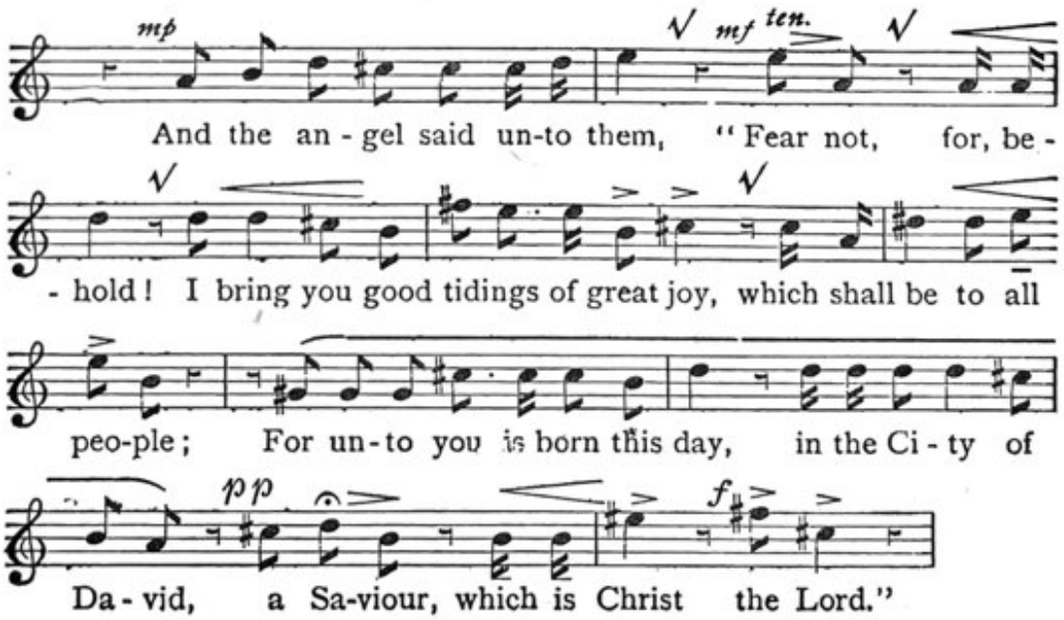
Then in the second part of this No. 14 a new atmosphere comes into play. With the advent of the Angel will come an element almost of surprise (for we may assume that the shepherds had never seen an angel before), not abruptly, but gradually throughout the whole of the first phrase. A quick breath after " And lo ! " and then the broad legato phrase " The Angel of the Lord came upon them," starting *piano* and *crescendoing* right through to the end of the sentence. Many singers sing the closing syllables " on them " on the notes C and F, but I should never do it myself, as it gives undue prominence to the second syllable of " upon." If you spoke the sentence you would emphasize the word " came." So in my opinion it is better to

sing it as it is written, but in this instance I do not think it is of great importance. "And the glory of the Lord shone round about them" should be sung *forte* (not *fortissimo*) with a rich tone full of glory. You will of course omit the unnecessary rest after the word "Lord." Then do not be melodramatic with "And they were sore afraid," but let the fear come into the voice gradually as you make a *diminuendo* from *forte* to *piano* right through the phrase.

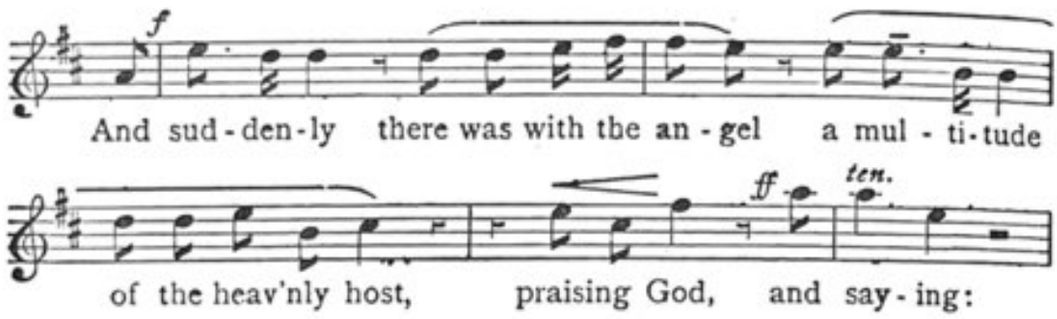


In No. 15, the words "And the angel said unto them" should be sung precisely as you would say them and with practically no expression at all. Sing the word "angel" on D and C♯ (and ignore the semiquaver rest after it; it is quite unnecessary). These are comparatively unimportant words, and must not be over-emphasized, but the words that follow have rung through the ages, and matter very much indeed. A little pause (only a little) on the word "Fear" and then "For behold" (breath) "I bring you good tidings of great joy."

This should be sung in one breath with a bright joyful tone, again ignoring the unnecessary rest and giving due regard to word values. As it is written you will find that an awkward accent comes on the word "of," which is, of course, impossible; you must readjust the note values so that you sing "*good* tidings of *great* joy" exactly as you would *say* it. "Tidings" will be sung on F♯ and E. "Which shall be to all people" also will be sung in one breath, again omitting that unnecessary little rest, and singing "people" on E and B. "For unto you is born this day in the City of David" (the last word on B and A) will be declaimed, but not at all loudly, with a *diminuendo* on the word "David" to prepare the way for a lovely piano note on "Saviour," which word you will sing as if you love it, and pause on it with a *diminuendo* as if you are loth to leave it. Then at once, though perfectly gradually, a *crescendo* in "which is Christ" to "the Lord" which will be sung *forte* and strongly accented.



Then in No. 16 you will throw the gates wide open for *all* the angels to come through, and sing and sing, and it must be every note of it glorious. The word "angel" will be sung on F♯ and E, and tradition may certainly be followed by declaiming the last word "saying" on A and E.



You will see that all these recitatives are in sequence and really form one fourfold number, so please, Mr. Conductor, do not have a pause at the close of either section, but go right through into the chorus, "Glory to God," without any break.

Now let us take another example and analyse "Ye people, rend your hearts," from *Elijah*. The opening is not a love-song, whatever the throaty tenor may think. It is a rebuke, and it should be boldly declaimed as such.

In this, as in all recitative, the student should group his words and punctuate exactly as in speaking. Above everything he should sing *English*. He must take upon himself the mantle of Obadiah and deliver the message as if it is his own, and not as if he is telling the people what somebody else has written about somebody else. For the moment it is *his* message, and as such he must deliver it. Then he will carry conviction with him.

If he *recited* the opening words, he would observe that comma after the word "people." Therefore he should do it in singing. It is quite obvious that the Lord is angry with His people right down to the words "forsake your idols," which should be delivered with great scorn for those stupid iron and wooden images. Then and not till then comes the pleading note, and the anger passes, giving place to the call for repentance and the hope of pardon. "For he is slow to anger, and merciful and kind and gracious" must be lyrically and beautifully sung, and will lead after a most effective *diminuendo* into the aria "If with all your hearts" which follows.

The "Jezebel" music, later on in the same work, is a splendid opportunity for the contralto. She can be as dramatic as ever she can be, and she doesn't often have such a chance as this. I have heard it sung as if Mistress Jezebel were at a polite tea-party and asking over a jam sandwich, "Have you heard the latest about Mr. Elijah? They do say, etc." No, Jezebel was a beast and she was out for blood. Every single word must be full of spite and hatred, and every phrase must grow in intensity with a *crescendo* to the very end of each of them, so don't begin any phrase too loudly, but keep yourself in reserve, and work up each separate phrase more and more as you proceed. Rely on your diction too, and dig out every word, *especially* the small syllables and short notes. This latter method is a tremendous help in ultra-dramatic singing.

Some parts of this number will be sung with the freedom of time necessary to ordinary recitative

singing, but a great deal of it will be in absolutely strict time, especially those parts which immediately precede the various entries of the orchestra, and those parts which have an independent moving accompaniment, such, for instance, as "And why hath he spoken" (which is *recitative*) and "In the name of the Lord" (which will be in strict time). This will enable the conductor (or accompanist) to march with you instead of following after.

I do not think I need analyse any other examples. I hope I have said enough to be of service to you in the instruction of your pupils in this fascinating branch of our art.

The principal things to impress upon them are the following :—

1. That the singing of recitative is speaking on notes.
2. The necessity for pure English and good diction.
3. The grouping and punctuation of the words as far as possible the same as in speech.
4. The shortening or elimination of all unnecessary rests.
5. The use of the appoggiatura to mark the important words.
6. The bending of the time with some regard to the length of the notes.

XIII

CHOICE OF SONGS

MY DEAR ANTHONY,

As promised, I went to Queen's Hall on Wednesday to hear your pupil sing.

She sang extremely well, especially in her first group of songs, all of which were beautiful works, and no exception could be taken to their inclusion in any programme.

I wish I could say the same of her last group. There were two songs in this that had no right to a place in any high-class concert. I shall never be able to understand why an artist of exceptional merit (and your pupil is most certainly in that category) should deliberately go out of her way to spoil a justly acquired reputation as an interpreter of beautiful songs, by singing a wishy-washy effusion of the most inexpensive character, only worthy of the suburban back drawing-room.

I can only assume that your pupil studied these songs with you, and in that case you are to blame perhaps more than she.

You must not think me brutal in writing as I do upon this subject, for it is of the utmost importance that a singer, who has any hopes of taking a high position in the profession, should never sing a bad song.

I will tell you a true story. Some time ago I was singing at a concert in one of our biggest provincial cities, the cast including some of the very finest of our English artists. The baritone had a lordly voice, and was such a fine singer, too, that there was every hope and every prospect of his climbing to the very top of the ladder. There was no earthly reason why he should not. We had a splendid audience of over three thousand drawn from all classes of the people.

Our baritone came early in the first part of the programme. He sang an operatic aria simply splendidly. He was recalled again and again, the audience being so carried away that they shouted and waved handkerchiefs and programmes at him. I have seldom seen a greater triumph. Of course an *encore* was inevitable, and what must he do, of all things in the world, but sing a love-sick pot-boiler of the cheapest possible kind. Do you see what he had done? He had completely nullified his success and had lost the respect of every lover of good music in the audience. What a chance he had missed. You see, he had selected a not very good new sea-song for his item in the second part, towards the end of the programme, and he sang another light song as an *encore* for that, so that his record for the evening resulted in three poor songs and one good one.

What he should have done was to sing the very finest song in his repertoire as an *encore* to the operatic aria, and after his second item a good English ballad, which everyone loves, and of which there are hundreds to choose from. As it was, he

had tickled the palates of the less intelligent (musically) of the audience, at the expense of those real music-lovers, who were the only ones whom it was worth his while to satisfy, not only from the point of view of eclecticism, but also of self-respect and —pocket. I only mention this latter, because a fact which is liable to be overlooked is that the best concert managers are not likely to pay high fees for the singing of rubbish that can be sung by singers of third-class calibre. Why should they?

My experience is that they are only too willing and anxious to encourage and pay well for the best songs sung in the best way. These cheap songs cannot be sung in the best way. They simply won't stand it. The better they are sung the worse they sound. Just think what the result would be if a really great artist were to take one of these lovey-dovey effusions and sing it in his very best recital manner. Why, it would simply be laughable. No, they sound best as they are usually sung, with plenty of gush that does duty for pathos, and lots of warm-treacle-dressing that is supposed to be passion.

All these cheap things sound alike. They say a thousand times over what is not worth saying once. If you sing a dozen of them on end, you will find that they are all the same thing over and over again, like a dinner consisting of twelve courses of jam tart.

No, my dear Anthony, it won't do. These songs should have no place in the repertoire of the class of singer to which your pupil undoubtedly belongs.

Don't forget also that the words should be impeccable as well as the music. You will usually find, though, especially with our modern writers, that fine words and good music go together as a matter of course. Poor words are not worth either setting or singing.

Consider what hundreds and hundreds of fine works there are to choose from, and that without looking abroad. Look at the scores and scores of beautiful Old English, Scotch and Irish songs that only need searching for, and really hardly need even that trouble to be taken nowadays.

Look at the works of our present-day song writers, of whom I could name at least twenty, all prolific writers, and not a bad song among the lot of them.

Then, to go abroad, look at the wealth of lovely old Italian music (always vocal and grateful to the singer) and the numberless interesting and charming old French chansons. One could make up a dozen complete recital programmes with ease, and have no difficulty in choosing; the trouble rather would be to know what to leave out. And the wonderful part of the whole business is that every class of audience likes them.

I have a great belief in the taste and discrimination of our audiences. But how can they discriminate when at nineteen concerts out of twenty some of them hardly ever hear a really beautiful song? It stands to reason that, if a man never has any but his cheapest emotions stirred, his musical perceptions must be dulled to such an extent that he will hardly be able to appreciate the right thing when he gets it. I believe that the average man,

if you give him a chance, and a choice between a good and a bad song, will choose the good one, but, if he never hears one, how can he judge, and how can his taste possibly improve?

When ballads are required there are hundreds of really good ones of all periods to choose from.

I am sure we all agree that the musical taste of the masses needs improving, and it is up to the singers to do it as far as their branch of the art is concerned, and as it follows that they are to a great extent dependent on their teachers' guidance, so, in our turn, it is up to us to raise their standard.

What a splendid thing it would be if we teachers would all combine and agree never to teach any but good songs. Believe me, the others are not worth bothering our heads about. Musically they do not exist. Then we should enjoy our teaching all the more, and the students would get to love the best and hate the worst, the direct result being that the music at home, as well as in the concert-rooms, would be improved immeasurably.

XIV

PRACTICE

DEAR MISS MATTHEWS,

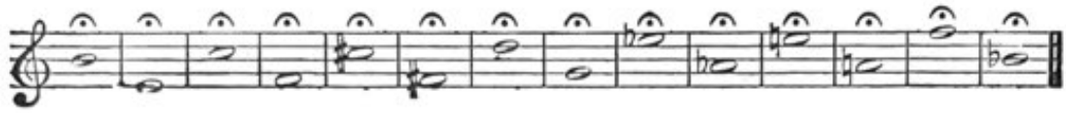
I am extremely sorry that you have had to return to your country home after so short a term of study, and, as promised, I am writing to set out in detail a course of practice for you, so that you may work at the development of your voice from a technical point of view, and perhaps come to me later on better prepared to study the æsthetic side of the art of singing.

You have already to a great extent mastered the correct method of breathing and tone production, and if you will take the utmost care never to depart for a moment from the rules we have agreed on, I can, I think, safely leave it to your intelligence to practise the exercises I am attaching to this letter, without any risk of your going wrong, and, indeed, you may find that your voice will steadily grow, both in volume and beauty. If, while you are in the act of singing any of them, you have the smallest doubt as to the correctness of your methods, stop at once and begin again. As soon as you have got your tone rightly placed you will be quite well aware of it, and you can go ahead. Remember, too, your attitude and your breathing, and I think all will be well.

So here is one complete little set of exercises for

you. It will take you about twenty minutes to get through them. You should practise them three times a day and not more.

Always begin with long sustained notes in the middle of the voice, and take them in the following order :



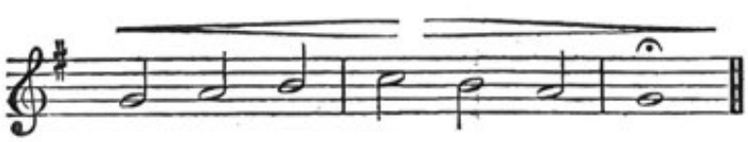
You will sing on the vowels *ee, eh, ah* and *oh* (in that order) at your discretion, of course bringing them all to the same place in the front of the mouth.

Sing the whole of them right through with a *crescendo* on each note beginning *piano* and finishing *forte* ; then go back and sing them with a *diminuendo* beginning *forte* and finishing *pianissimo.* Then yet again, with a *crescendo* and *diminuendo* on each note thus :

in the proportion of one third *crescendo* and two thirds *diminuendo.*

Take great care that the mouth remains comfortably open and the throat *fully* open the whole time, and do not let them close to the smallest extent during the *diminuendo.* They will if you let them, but you mustn't let them.

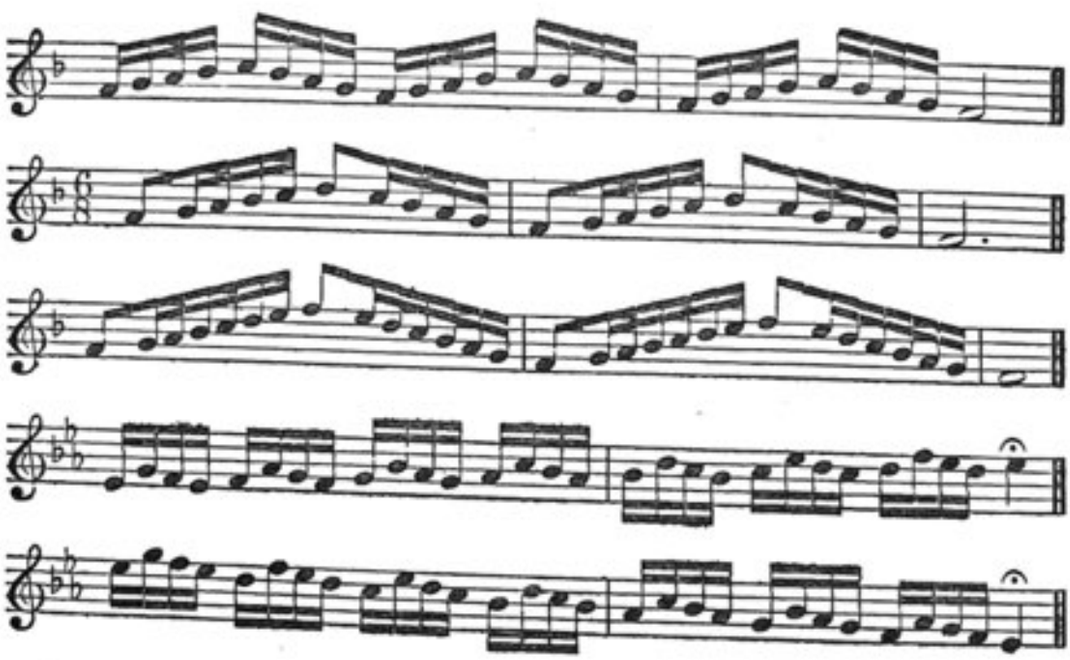
Then take the following phrase and make it a fine broad flowing thing, using at your discretion the same vowels as before.



You will sing it in the following keys and in this order :—G, E, A♭, F, A, F♯, B♭, G and so on.

You, being a mezzo-soprano, will, for the present, confine the foregoing exercises to the middle of the voice (say from the low E to the high F). Later on you will sing them quite easily up to the high G and A♭.

Then take these faster exercises in the order in which I have set them down, varying the vowels as before, and these florid passages can safely be taken up a little higher in the voice than the broad slow ones.



In practising fast runs, remember that they must be sung *legato*. That is of the first importance. Do not accent the first of each group of semiquavers; that would spoil the continuity of the phrase. Each exercise is to be made *one* beautiful thing, not lots of groups of four semiquavers each.

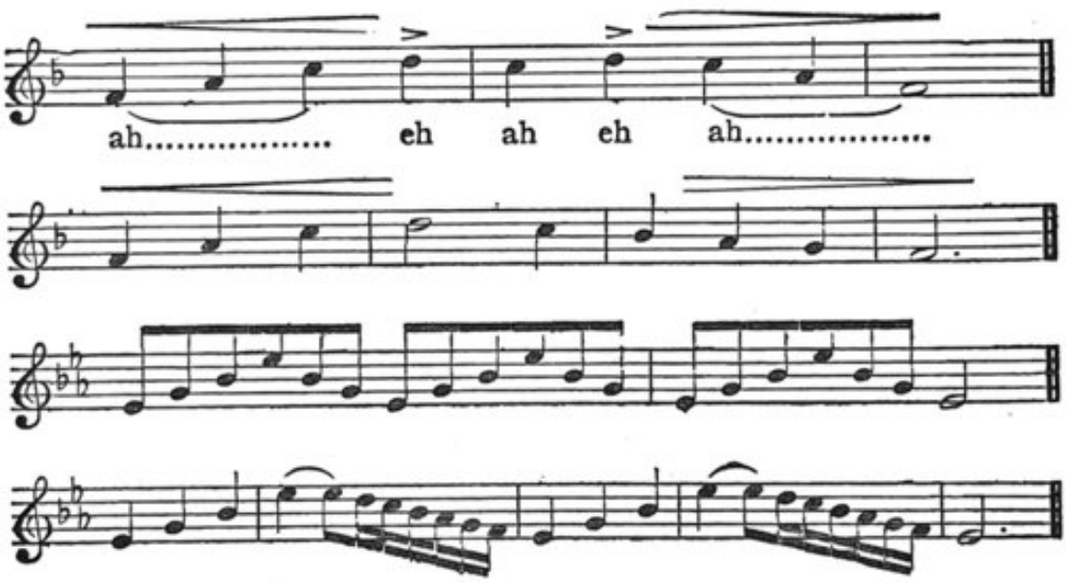
Use your discretion in phrasing them. Try them

all sorts of ways—with a *crescendo* right through—with a *diminuendo* right through—with *both*; but certainly phrase them. Let them flow on in a continuous stream of tone to the end, and whatever you do don't hurry and don't *be* hurried. However fast a run may be sung, it must never sound hurried.

The slower a fast run sounds the better it has been sung.

You should also practise chromatic scales.

I think the above will be sufficient for your purpose, but you may vary them by the use of some of the following:



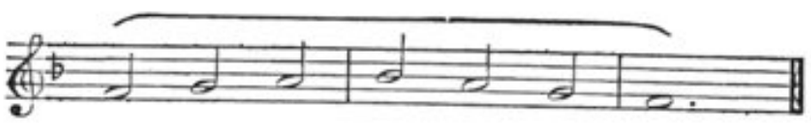
There are plenty of others I could give you, but you will find these quite enough to work on. I do not believe in the practice of a great number of elaborate and complicated exercises. If you can sing the above examples easily and perfectly, you will find that you will be equal to anything you are likely to encounter, even in the Bach cantatas.

When you have acquired the utmost control over your voice, that will be quite time enough to think

about songs. Do not be in a hurry to study these just at present.

Just as you are entitled to get all the happiness you legitimately can out of your life, so you must get all the pleasure you can out of your practice. When you are working at the above exercises, if you merely sing them over as a sort of duty or necessary means to an end, monotony will surely come into your work, you will get bored, and dullness will be the consequence. Do not look upon those exercises as mere notes or even as mere phrases. You must make them *mean* something.

When you sing that legato phrase



do not for an instant let the feeling that you are singing F, G, A and B♭ come into your schemes at all. Look upon it for the moment as the most beautiful piece of music that was ever written; try and make it so, and fill that music with all the different emotions of which you are capable. Make it mean in turn, joy, sorrow, love, hatred, tenderness, ferocity, and, indeed, all the moods which you will encounter in the entire range of poetry or literature.

Set no limits to the range of your imagination, but apply it not only to the slower but to the fast exercises, and you will find no monotony or boredom possible.

I am quite certain, from practical experience, that many singers lack the technique that is essential

to a good artist because, in the initial stages of their studies, they have been unable to make their practice interesting, and I am equally certain that, if some such plan as I have suggested were adopted, not only would that practice become an enjoyable thing, but it would actually be looked forward to with eagerness.

XV

CHOIR TRAINING, CHOIR-BOYS AND THE ADOLESCENT VOICE

MY DEAR ANTHONY,

I am interested to hear that you have accepted the post of choirmaster at St. Peter's.

You tell me that this is a voluntary choir and that, though there are one or two men in it who have received a certain amount of tuition, the majority of them are untrained. This places you in a much more difficult position than would be the case if it were a professional choir, who are supposed to be efficient before you take them in hand at all. You will have to teach them practically everything, but it will only be necessary for you to exercise tact and discretion in order to get the best out of them through sheer confidence in your musicianship, ability and comradeship.

Though, of course, most of their singing will be concerted, always encourage them to look at their work from an individual as well as a collective standpoint and get them to work together as artists, rather than as a mere block of voices. Also, you can show them by demonstration that each separate part can be made a thing of beauty.

Let me advise you not to spend the whole of the

weekly full rehearsal in practising the canticles and anthems, but to make a special point of seeing that the Psalms are done justice to. You, and your choir, will find it intensely interesting if you can work out a method, more or less your own, of rendering these wonderful things, with due regard *first* to the words and *next* to the chants. A good way is to get the whole side to *speak* the words of a verse together in a perfectly natural manner and then sing it to the chant with, as far as possible, the same speech values.

Do not hesitate to take the solemn psalms a little slowly and the joyous ones a little fast. Use a wise discretion in all of them, and most certainly alter the " pointing " wherever you think the speech values can be improved by so doing. By this means they can be sung much more like anthems than chants, and not only will your practices be made something more than a weekly grind, but your Sunday services will be lifted up to a much higher level.

The responses in the lesser Litany are usually sung much too loudly. They should always be begun softly and worked up gradually to " But only Thou, O Lord," the last one, of course, being sung *pianissimo*.

Now, as to your boys. I hope you will be able to give them a separate weekly practice all to themselves. If you teach them properly it is wonderful what a lot of work you can get out of them. Of course, you can't take such a long time over the training of a boy as you can over the usual singing student, for his career is necessarily a comparatively short one.

The great thing with a treble is not to allow him to take his chest voice up too high. It is a great temptation to a boy to sing against instead of with his colleagues, and he will discover that he can make a big noise in the middle of his voice by using his chest tones. This you must check at once. Be sure and take a little trouble on this subject with each boy individually. He will soon realize it and form good habits.

You will be quite safe in allowing them to use the chest voice about a tone higher than would be right in the case of the female voice (see page 23), but only very occasionally when a big effect is called for. It will need great discretion on your part, for, after all, you must get the little fellows to be *manly* in their singing, and an occasional chest tone is very useful to this end.

I distinctly remember that when I was a choir-boy I was conscious that I could sing the notes round the middle "G" in two entirely different ways. Of course, this was the fight between the head and the chest voice, but I had never had it explained to me, and had to choose for myself which I would use. Fortunately I chose the head; otherwise I am sure my voice would have suffered greatly.

I should suggest that you watch your boys' mouths when they sing. You will find that most of them will stick their lips out in an unnatural position.

Listen carefully and see that they use pure vowels. This they cannot do if their mouths are at all distorted. How often we hear an "Amen" sound like "Awmin"—entirely due to this fault.

And now I want to give you a piece of advice

to which I attach the greatest importance. In due time, of course, every boy's voice will break; it is a sign that he is going to grow up and be a man, and during that adolescent stage his vocal cords will be in a very delicate condition and ought under no circumstances to be subjected to any strain. Therefore do not let him stay on in the choir and sing alto, as is so often done. It is a very bad practice and will probably spoil his voice for the rest of his life. I know it is a great temptation to a choirmaster, as alto voices are rare, and here appears to be one ready-made for him. But you must resist that temptation and try and induce him to rest his voice entirely (as far as singing is concerned) until his man's voice has developed itself. This won't happen until he is probably somewhere near 18, so it means a good long wait. How many voices have I known to be spoilt or impaired through neglect of this rule.

The same thing applies to girls in the growing stage between the age of about 14 and 17. Their voices should never be used in their full power or compass during that time. If for any reason a girl of this age must be taught singing, it should be done with the utmost discretion; she should only be allowed to use her upper or lower notes very sparingly and should never be given songs of a dramatic or emotional character.

No one has a greater admiration than I for the really magnificent work that is being done by the competitive festivals of which so many are, happily, being held all over the kingdom, but there is one competition that I should like to see eliminated

from all of them, and that is the one for female voices between (usually) the age of 14 and 16.

It is bad in the last degree for any girl of that age to compete in such an event, and I sincerely hope that before long this particular competition will be discontinued.

XVI

THE PLATFORM

MY DEAR ANTHONY,

It may not perhaps come amiss if I lay before you some hints as to a few things that should not be done on the platform.

The attitude of the singer towards his audience is a very important matter, so, perhaps, a little list of manners and customs (desirable and undesirable) may be of some service, at any rate to any novice who may be about to tread the thorny path of the public performer. I have compiled it from a few mental notes made from time to time during a somewhat lengthy experience in that nerve-devastating capacity.

So I shall direct my words of (more or less) wisdom directly to the young singer, and shall begin by advising him never to be late in arriving at a concert. It is unfair to the management to cause them any anxiety as to the safe arrival of their artists.

If I were a manager, and an artist once came too late to take his proper place in the programme, I should never engage him again. And, apart altogether from that aspect of the case, it is of the utmost importance that the singer should get thoroughly accustomed to the more or less vitiated

atmosphere of the concert-room before he sings in it.

Having arrived, therefore, in good time, don't suck lozenges and don't drink anything (not even water) during the progress of the concert. If you have had plenty of liquid a couple of hours beforehand you will not feel thirsty before it is finished. Above all, don't touch a drop of wine or spirits. Such a practice is merely a bad habit. It does not steady the nerves or help in any way; on the contrary, it will thicken the voice, start the flow of mucus and make you want to clear your throat all the time you are singing. It is a wretched habit. Don't fall into it. At many concerts it is the custom to have a bottle of port on the table in the artists' room. It is a well-meant kindness on the part of the management, but it would be far better for everyone concerned if it were discontinued, or at any rate not produced until the concert is over.

Do not talk more than is absolutely necessary during the sometimes long-protracted waits before and between your items, and do not spend the whole, or indeed any, of that time in trying your voice. If you do, you will probably come to the conclusion that you are in very bad form; in addition to this, it cannot possibly do you the smallest good, and is very distracting to the other artists. All that is necessary in that direction should be done before you leave home.

Have your copies ready for the accompanist some minutes before they will be required. He will have no time to spare between the items, and it is no part of his duty to sort your music for you. An accompanist, with whom I have more than a nodding

acquaintance, has occasionally had to run many miles on and off a very wide platform, up and down stairs into the bowels of the earth to an underground black-hole, in search (sometimes in vain) of songs which should have been ready to the hand of the singer.

You will not keep the audience waiting an unconscionable time when the awful moment for your appearance arrives. This privilege is reserved for prima donnas, for the " has beens " (of whom I am one) and for those above the age of 65. Neither will you rush on with unseemly haste. Do not approach your ordeal with an apologetic air, as though saying, " Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very sorry for all this, but I will not keep you long," nor must you show any sign of anxiety or nervousness. These things are very infectious, and, if you look anxious or nervous, you may be quite sure that your audience will feel so too. You must walk on with the utmost confidence, but no " swank," and you will remember that, without being in the least degree bumptious, you are, while you are singing, the most important person in the room. When you have finished you may be quite the reverse.

On taking up your position on the platform (which should be where the pianist can see you), you should avoid the temptation to recognize friends (real or imaginary) among the audience, as if you were saying, " Ah ! there you are. I see you." You will have enough to do without exchanging silent greetings. Rather spend those precious moments before you begin, in taking one or two imperceptible deep breaths and preparing yourself and your audience

for the business in hand, and, while you are doing this, I should advise you to include in your plans the determination that every syllable you sing shall be distinctly heard in the remotest part of the room.

Sometimes the audience have books of words. The province of these books is to give them some outline of the meaning of the song they are about to hear, not that they should have to be carefully studied in order to be enabled to understand the singer's words. From the latter view-point, books of words ought to be entirely unnecessary, and if a singer cannot make every single syllable heard by everyone in his audience, believe me he is not the master of his technique, and is therefore not a complete artist.

At the first recital given by a really great singer somewhere about the sixties, it is related that the artist found a large parcel in the retiring room. On inquiring of his manager what it was, and being informed that it contained books of words, he pitched the whole thing out of the window with the remark, "Quite unnecessary. *I'll* see to that."

On the subject of distinct enunciation, it is well to remind you of what I have said elsewhere, that when you are singing *pianissimo* your diction must be all the more clear and your throat must never close to the smallest extent. On the contrary, you should have the feeling that the softer you sing the wider your throat is. Keep it open, not *notwithstanding* you are singing *pianissimo*, but just *because* of it. This rule will be of immense help to you.

The moment he has taken up his position on the

platform, the individuality and personal magnetism of the artist will come into play, and will give confidence and interest to both him and his audience, and will create the necessary atmosphere for the song that is to be interpreted. The singer with a strong personality will have his audience in close sympathetic touch with him before he has sung a note.

If in the course of your song the pianist does anything you do not expect, you must never show the least sign of being disconcerted ; above all, you must not turn your head and look at him. If he is wrong you must make the best of it ; there is absolutely nothing else to be done, and you must *go with him*. It is the only way out. But take no notice at the time. It is bad form. Kick him afterwards by all means. If his reading happens to be a little different from yours, you must not stick doggedly to your own ; you must compromise ; and don't forget that he has something to say as well as you.

If he plays an interlude too fast or too slowly, don't give him away by blurting on at what you consider to be the correct speed, but take *your* time gradually from *his* and put it right in the course of the next few notes.

When you have a moving part in the melody against his chords, of course he will go with you, but when he has the movement and you the sustained notes, of course you must go with him. It is a duet and you must give and take.

When the high notes come along, don't mount up on your toes to meet them. You can reach them

quite well from where you are. When the song is over don't run off and leave the accompanist to play the closing bars all alone, but wait until his last chord has died away before you make the smallest movement. Those last bars are a part of the song, and indeed are sometimes one of the most beautiful pieces of music in it, and should not be spoilt by an act of thoughtlessness on the part of the singer.

Never sing an encore until you have, at least twice, or even three or more times, bowed your acknowledgment of the applause that is given you, and not even then unless it is quite certain that practically everybody in the audience wishes it. Do not forget that it is just within the bounds of possibility that they may be desirous of hearing the next artist. An encore song should always be quite short and in contrast with the one for which it is given. Any tendency to rush on and sing an encore for which there is but little demand is bad form, besides which, if persisted in by all the artists, as is sometimes the case, it unduly prolongs the concert and is certain to spoil the concluding items.

Programmes are usually quite long enough in all conscience. Santley told me that on one occasion he sang at a Saturday afternoon concert at which Gounod was present. Happening to meet him on the Monday following, and chancing to mention some song that had been sung, Gounod asked him, "What! is that concert really over yet?"

Always thank your accompanist. Nineteen times out of twenty he will have deserved it. Accompanists are not always given the credit they are entitled to. They are the best friends of the artists.

They carry the success or failure of the entire concert between their ten fingers, and while it is in their power, if they choose, to spoil, they can be, and are, of inestimable help in inspiring the artist. At one time or another they have saved all of us from disaster, and I, for one, gratefully acknowledge my own indebtedness to them.

The best accompanists are always only too willing to rehearse. It is only the second-rater who feels himself above it. Avail yourself of the opportunity whenever it is possible.

The first few times you sing with an orchestra you will find that the greatest care will be necessary in order to keep in tune. So be very watchful in this respect. Have you ever heard the story of the continental soprano who found it quite impossible to remain in the right key for two consecutive bars at a rehearsal which Von Bülow was conducting? At length, unable to stand it any longer, he tapped his desk and turning to the lady said politely, "Madam, will you kindly give the orchestra your A?"

As you will have studied your part with the piano, you will find sometimes that the accompaniment will sound amazingly different when played by an orchestra, and, however familiar you may be with your part of the work, portions of it may be found disconcerting. You will be wise, in that case, if, at the rehearsal, you make a pencil note in your copy at the places where you find yourself inconvenienced, and further familiarize yourself with those particular passages before the actual performance at the concert. A pencil cross as a danger signal will be quite sufficient for your purpose.

Remember, in singing with an orchestra, that it is *tone* rather than mere volume that will make your voice stand out distinctively above the instruments. However great the temptation may be, do not *force* and never try to shout down an orchestra. It will be an entirely useless attempt. Our orchestral players are the finest in the world. They are all artists, *and they will find you out.* If you are a good artist they will help you to the utmost of their power. If you are not, they won't care what happens to you, and I don't blame them. "The band always knows!"

Often you will have to go down into the provinces to sing in some oratorio or cantata. Usually you will find an amateur orchestra that is strengthened on the day of the performance by the inclusion of some bandsmen from the local military centre. The conductor, in nine cases out of ten, has all his work to do to hold his mixed team and his chorus together. He does not want to be bothered by any vagaries on the part of his imported soloists. He is entitled to expect that they will be thoroughly competent and fully conversant with their respective parts.

If, when fulfilling such an engagement as this, you find that his reading of the work does not agree with your own, or that his *tempi* differ to a marked degree from what you have expected (and this will often be the case), you must, as far as you can, adapt yourself to his conditions. You must remember that he has, to the best of his ability, trained that choir and orchestra for many, many weeks, and has got them as perfect as he can get them on those lines, and he

does not expect a little singer to come down from London to upset his entire apple-cart. It isn't fair, and that's all about it. You must fall in with his schemes as far as you can, and help, not hinder, him in his work.

Occasionally awful things happen, partly through lack of sufficient time for an efficient final rehearsal ; sometimes through carelessness ; sometimes through mistakes in the band parts.

I remember one occasion on which this latter cause was responsible for a terrible muddle at a concert performance of Gounod's *Faust* in which I was taking part. There was not sufficient time for a complete final rehearsal, and, among other numbers, the song " Even bravest heart may swell " was taken for granted. When it came to the performance it was discovered, though not until the song was actually in progress, that some of the band parts were in the key of C, some in D, and some in E♭. And they played it ! I need not enlarge on what poor Valentine (and incidentally the audience) went through during that awful five minutes, and I only mention this little incident in order to impress on you the fact that you must be prepared for any emergency and never knuckle under. On the occasion in question the baritone stuck to his guns like a Briton, singing now in one key and now in another (it was a regular bunch of keys), thus saving the situation by averting what would otherwise have been a lamentable catastrophe, and finally getting home triumphant with colours flying.

After the concert is over, don't be in a hurry to get out into the cold open air unless you have a train to

catch. Give yourself time to cool off, then wrap up warmly, but *never coddle your throat*; leave that open *always* to all the winds that blow both in summer and winter, and you will never catch cold that way.

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