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THE REV. DR. E. H. FELLOWES, C.H., M.V.O.,
PRESIDENT,
IN THE CHAIR.

THE TEACHING OF SINGING IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND.

BY MOLLIE SANDS.

INTRODUCTORY.

To regard the teaching of singing in eighteenth century England as a self-sufficient subject of research would be to lack all sense of proportion or historical perspective. It is only an aspect of the vast subject of *bel canto*, whose origins probably go back to the very dawn of ecclesiastical music. W. J. Henderson in his *Early History of Singing* goes so far as to say that the entire system of florid singing can be found in embryo in the records of Church singing from the time of Gregory onwards. This system survived with modifications into the nineteenth century, and is not dead yet, although its dirge is frequently sung. But it came to its zenith in the eighteenth century, and then declined, with the decline of the Italian opera. Its home was Italy, yet it may profitably be studied in England, since the very fact that it was a foreign importation makes it stand out in bolder relief. And England was the artists' Eldorado in those days ; the great performers and teachers came here on long or short visits, as they have gone in recent years to the United States, to make money. Many of them settled in this country. Much of what I shall have to say applies not only to the eighteenth century, but to the seventeenth, nineteenth and even the twentieth, and to other countries besides England. Eighteenth century England is a microcosm.

But there is another point. Although the story of English singing-teaching in the eighteenth century is in large part the story of those transplanted *bel canto* methods, it is not entirely so. The best English singers trained in Italian methods could hold their own with the best Italian singers—witness Cecilia Davies, Braham and Mrs. Billington—but they retained certain native characteristics. (One of Braham's assets is said to have been his sense of

the difference between the English and the Italian styles, and he was master of both.) Moreover, it is no exaggeration to speak of an English school of singing. In spite of the deliberate destruction of the Civil War, of the foreign influences of the Restoration, and of the laxity of the eighteen century, a thin thread of tradition did link our Church music with the great days. Many distinguished singers owed their training to the Chapel Royal, or some cathedral choir—John Beard, the first great Handelian tenor, for instance, or James Bartleman, in a later age. That English school had the defects of its virtues, just as the *bel canto* had; where the two were combined or corrected each other, the best results were obtained.

The Results at which Teachers aimed, and the Market they had to supply.

What, and how, a teacher teaches must largely depend upon the kind of music his pupils will be expected to sing when they go out into the world, and the general state of public taste. In fairness to them he must ask himself what is marketable, and prepare them for that market.

Throughout the eighteenth century all over Europe Italian opera was the most spectacular goal of vocal ambition. It was a vocal *lingua franca,* so to speak. But side by side with it in each country was what one might call a vernacular, which never died out, and which was particularly healthy in England. It is worth while spending a few minutes on a comparison between the two.

The English were as usual averse from too much theory, and mistrustful of the expert and his technique; they put their faith in the natural, the forthright, and even the improvised. A writer in the *Musical Quarterly* for 1818, examining the differences between the Italian and English schools, remarks that " No two English singers produce their tone alike, nor indeed hardly any two notes of the scale. Those of the English who come nearest to pure tone have either been taught by Italians or by the Italian method." He goes on to describe pure tone as " the very first foundation of good singing," and to define it as " that which comes from the chest free from any change in the throat, mouth or head." He instances the tenor Braham and the bass Lacy, both pupils of Rauzzini, the Italian teacher, and says " When we hear them, we feel by a sort of sympathy whence the tone originally proceeds, that their rule and their execution is the same." Of Lacy's tone, he further says that it " never departs from the original principles of its

production; it is capable of allowing the singer to blend the most perfect articulation of words either with its largest volume, or its most attenuated reduction; and, finally, none of these principles are disturbed by the most rapid execution." That passage sums up for most of us what we mean by good singing. That was and *is* Italian *bel canto* at its best.

Yet this preoccupation with the instrumental side, with purity of tone and brilliance of execution did sometimes lead to exaggerations, to which English good taste and sense of the ludicrous were wholesome correctives. At its best, *bel canto* by no means ignored the verbal element, and kept a balance between sound and sense (as we shall see later), but at its worst, sense was shamelessly sacrificed. To the practical English it is always important to know what a song was about, and for centuries they had succeeded in treating the *Blest Pair of Sirens* with fair impartiality. When the Italian style was first brought over at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century, they accepted it with wonder, laughed at its exaggerations and continued to patronise it, but they also demanded songs in their own language, so written and sung that the words could be distinctly heard. Late in the eighteenth century the versatile Charles Dibdin was principal of what he called "a seminary to mature actors and actresses" at the Royal Circus, Blackfriars Bridge, and he boasted of the successes of his ex-pupils "merely because I took care they should be taught nothing more than correctness, expression and unaffected pronunciation of the words, the infallible and only way to perfect a singer." That is the English point of view at its most extreme, and it is worthy of note that among his ex-pupils he claims Mrs. Mountain, who was also at one time a pupil of Rauzzini, and had thus the best of two worlds.

The English Style.

In the course of the century this English singing received four great impetuses: (1) the success of *The Beggar's Opera* in 1728, and its imitators; (2) the rise of the Pleasure Gardens, musically active from the thirties and forties onwards; (3) the Handelian oratorio from the late thirties; (4) the so-called English opera, by composers such as Arnold, Shield, Storace and Dibdin towards the end of the century.

The rapture with which *The Beggar's Opera* was greeted was spectacular proof that what was known as "the English

Ballad style" was neither dead in public affection nor entirely forgotten by singers. Henceforward teachers in England had to keep in mind that their pupils must know how to put across with good diction and expression ballads both arch and artless, as well as florid arias. It is true that many of the ballad opera singers were of the untaught or semi-taught class, and specialised in that type of singing only—Lavinia Fenton, the first Polly Peachum, for example, at the beginning of the century, and Dorothy Jordan at the end of it—but many practised both styles.

The concerts at the Pleasure Gardens created an even bigger demand for singing in English, and we find the same singers performing at the Gardens and at the Opera.[1]

The Handelian oratorio made demands of a more serious kind. On the technical side it presupposed a mastery of the florid style (a fact modern singers are apt to forget when they complain that Handel is so difficult), and on the interpretative side it called for good English diction, and dignity and simplicity of delivery. The dramatic *feeling* necessary may have come naturally to opera singers, but the expression of that feeling had to be through the medium of vocal colour and clear enunciation alone. English singers quickly adapted themselves to this style, especially those men who had been bred up in the Chapel Royal or in cathedral choirs. Most of the English-born teachers of singing were organists, and connected with some church or cathedral choir. In another essay in *The Musical Quarterly* for 1818[2] the author asks "What foreign singer, Mara excepted, could ever convey to an English audience the sublimity, the force or the pathos of Handel ?", and it seems certain that whatever their shortcomings, such church-trained singers as John Beard, James Bartleman, or Harrison brought to oratorio qualities which those trained in *bel canto* alone lacked. Nor were the women excluded from such influences, for these teachers taught both sexes. Handelian oratorio indeed called for a new combination of old qualities.

The English operas at the end of the century provided plenty of florid arias for the display of Italian technique (often lifted straight from some Italian opera), but they also required of singers to be able to sing a *pseudo*-ballad with what was known as "affecting simplicity" and clear diction.

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[1] Mrs. Arne (Cecilia Young), Miss Charlotte Brent and Mrs. Weichsel, for instance, were singers with a first-rate Italian technique.

[2] *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, vol. I, 1818.

Such then were the demands made upon professional singers. The requirements of the amateur market cannot have been very different, since the wealthy young ladies who took singing lessons naturally expected their teachers to teach them the airs they had heard at the theatre, the oratorio or the Pleasure Garden.

All-round Qualifications of Teachers.

The eighteenth century singing-master, foreign or English, was more often than not responsible for the all-round musical education of his pupil-apprentice. The apprenticeship system, then fairly general for would-be professional singers, made this much easier. Pupils frequently "lived in." Corri "lived and boarded" with Porpora for five years, "attended with great expense to my parents," he says. The majority of these teachers were not only singers of experience, but composers, conductors and instrumentalists as well. People often talk of the great singers of the past as if they were capable only of singing a few stock arias with superficial brilliance. This may have been true of the divas of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but in the eighteenth century singers were expected to reach the same standard of technical ability and musicianship as the instrumentalists. Most of them played an instrument to professional standard, and many composed music. It may not have been very good music, but how many singers to-day are capable of even harmonising a simple tune? Mrs. Billington had published two sets of pianoforte sonatas and made her debut as a pianist before the age of twelve; Sophia Corri played the harp as well as the pianoforte; Mrs. Barthelemon and Harriet Abrams composed innumerable songs; Maria Hester Parke played the piano in public at the age of eight; John Braham and Michael Kelly were prolific composers and "arrangers" for the theatres. And so on. As I shall show presently, any singer worthy the name was expected to improvise ornaments and cadences, which in itself implies a certain musical grounding.

Much, then, was expected of an eighteenth century singing-master, but to compensate he had one advantage which a modern teacher might well envy him—*Time*. Quick results were neither expected nor desired. Pupils settled down to their training or their apprenticeship with no sense of hurry, no cramming. There was leisure to develop the voice slowly. Tosi mentions with surprise that "there are scholars of so quick Parts that in a few

Years become most Excellent Singers," but such scholars were the exception rather than the rule. Teachers took fewer pupils, and spent more time on them.

SOME FAMOUS TEACHERS.

Pietro Francesco Tosi, 1647–1727.

Of the foreign teachers who influenced English singing by teaching and writing, the first in time and possibly the first in interest also was Pietro Francesco Tosi. He was born in Bologna in 1647, settled in this country in 1693 as a teacher, and died here in 1727. His traditions went back to the great seventeenth century period, and they are embodied, so far as the English public is concerned, in the translation made by Galliard of his great book on singing, published in 1742 under the title of *Observations on the Florid Song.*[3]

Observations on the Florid Song is extremely good reading, and contains much wisdom as well as much knowledge. One feels in personal contact with a human being and an artist singularly liberal and poised, free from the limitations of outlook which we might have expected his own epoch and his own musical idiom to have placed upon him. Tosi, through the mouth of Galliard or in the original Italian, has something to teach all of us who care for the art of singing.

Listen to him on teachers :—

> It may seem to many, that every perfect Singer must also be a perfect Instructor, but it is not so ; for his Qualifications (though never so great) are insufficient if he cannot communicate his Sentiments with Ease, and in a Method adapted to the Ability of the Scholar ; if he has not some Notion of Composition, and a manner of instructing which may seem rather an Entertainment than a Lesson ; with the happy Talent to shew the Ability of the Singer to Advantage, and conceal his Imperfections.

Further :—

> Let the Master create some Emulation in a Scholar that is negligent, inciting him to study the Lesson of his Companion . . . if instead of one Lesson he hears two, and the Competition does not discourage him, he may perhaps come to learn his Companion's Lesson first, and then his own . . . Let him encourage the Scholar if he improve ; let him mortify him, without beating, for Indolence ; let him be more rigorous for negligences ; nor let the Scholar ever end a Lesson without having profited Something . . . Supposing, then, that the Scholar is earnestly desirous of becoming a Master in so agreeable a profession, and being

3 *Opinioni de Cantori Antichi, e Moderni o sieno osservazioni sopra il Canto Figurato* (Bologna, 1723).

fully instructed in these tiresome Rudiments, besides many others that may have slipt my weak memory; after a strict Care of his Morals, he should give the rest of his attention to the Study of singing in perfection, that by this Means he may be so happy as to join the most noble qualities of the Soul to the Excellencies of his Art . . . The best Singer in the world continues to study, and persists in it as much to maintain his Reputation, as he did to acquire it . . . Let him accustom the Scholar to sing often in the presence of Persons of Distinction, whether from Birth, Quality or Eminence in the Profession, that by gradually losing his Fear he may acquire an Assurance, but not a Boldness."

In his concluding passage he thus engagingly addresses the reader :—

Finally, O ye young Singers, hearken to me for your Profit and Advantage. The Abuses, the Defects and the Errors divulg'd by me in these Observations (which in the Justice ought not to be charg'd on the Modern Stile) were once almost all Faults I myself was guilty of; and in the Flower of my Youth, when I thought myself to be a Great Man, it was not easy for me to discover them. But, in a more mature Age, the slow Undeceit comes too late. I know I have sung ill, and would I have not writ worse! but since I have suffered by my Ignorance let it at least serve for a Warning to amend those who wish to sing well.

Francesco Geminiani, 1687–17?.

The next foreign teacher of importance to leave some kind of written testament is Geminiani, who was born at Lucca in 1667, and came to England in 1714, where he enjoyed the patronage of Baron Kilmansegg. He visited Ireland where he eventually died. Although pre-eminent as a violinist, he was also a distinguished teacher of singing; his most famous pupil was Cecilia Young, later Dr. Arne's wife, one of the greatest singers of the age.[4]

Geminiani's introduction to *A Treatise of Good Taste in the Art of Musick* (1742) deals with both playing and singing, and it is often difficult to tell which he is alluding to; but one thing stands out from his writings and from anecdotes about him: He had a high conception of the art of singing, and regarded the florid style as only the means to an end, an indispensable means certainly but not the end itself. He complains that "he who sings or plays thinks of nothing so much as to make continually some favourite Passages or Graces, believing that by this Means he shall be thought to be a good Performer," and his criticism on some well-known singer was: "Your Execution is exceedingly great, but you have not in the least affected me; my *ears* were entertained, but my *heart* was at rest."

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[4] Burney speaks of her with the highest praise, and says he learnt much by accompanying her.

Giusto Ferdinando Tenducci, born c. 1736–18?.

Signor Tenducci played a considerable part as a performer in English musical life, and in 1785 he published some *Instructions to his Scholars*. As a vocal tutor it is unremarkable, but in the Preface he too speaks of the necessity of making " the Song accord with the Sense, and the variations of the voice with the fluctuations of passion, without which music is but harmonious triffling (*sic*) and unmeaning noise."

Venanzio Rauzzini, 1747–1810.

We now come to two Italians, almost exact contemporaries, who were friends and fellow-students as boys in Rome, and who both settled in England and had a lasting influence on English singing: Venanzio Rauzzini and Domenico Corri. Each was responsible for training a large number of distinguished pupils, who in their turn passed on what they had learnt to a new generation. There are probably even now some vocal descendants of Rauzzini and Corri. Mr. Levien tells me, for instance, that Nathan was a pupil of Corri, and we can almost touch the hand of Nathan. Corri left lineal descendants who still carry on the traditions of a great musical name. Corri and Rauzzini were born roughly a hundred years after Tosi, but they drew their wisdom from the same source.

Rauzzini was born in Rome, of gentle parentage, and as a boy studied with the same teachers as Corri. He was noted not only as a singer, actor and musician of outstanding ability, but as a man of general culture. In Vienna he was a friend of Metastasio, in Bath a friend of Herschel. He had very great success as an opera singer (Burney speaks of him with high praise), but apparently he suffered from nerves, and soon after his first appearance in England[5] he retired to Bath, where he taught and organised the concerts from 1780–1810. Among his pupils were Braham, Mrs. Billington, Nancy Storace, and Incledon. He was preceptor, composer and conductor in one.

Rauzzini left no book behind him, and perhaps he was wise, although one would give much to have a record of his teaching. The singing of his pupils was his vocal testament.

Domenico Corri, 1746–1825.

Corri was also a versatile musician. He tells us he began to learn the violin and sol-fa at the age of six, and at the

[5] In *Alessandro nell'Indie*, written for him by his friend Corri.

age of ten was in the band of " the principal theatres " of his native city, Rome. At about sixteen he began to study the harpsichord under Ursicchio and Lustrini, with Clementi and Rauzzini as fellow-students. Then he went to Naples and studied singing with Porpora for five years, until the death of that great *bel canto* teacher. In 1771, he and his wife (a talented amateur singer, admired by Burney) left Italy to take up a joint appointment as conductor and singer to the Musical Society of Edinburgh. They remained there for eighteen years, and later settled in London.

The valuable writings he left behind him probably sum up not merely his personal views, but those of the great school to which he and Rauzzini belonged. His *Singer's Preceptor*, published 1810, was the fruit of his long experience as a teacher of voice, and his *Select Airs*, published about 1780, has a great deal to tell us about the interpretative side. A Paper[6] given before this Association in 1880–81 Session hails Corri as " a neglected musical benefactor, the inventor of a written accompaniment," on the strength of these three volumes of *Select Airs*. It is from a somewhat different point of view that I shall speak of them presently.

J. C. Bach, 1735–82, and Signora Galli (d. 1804).

In spite of his German birth, Johann Christian Bach must be included among the Italian singing-teachers in this country, since the school he studied and taught was undoubtedly Italian. He was always interested in singers and singing ; when he had to compose an opera for a particular cast, he would travel any distance in order to hear the singers, so that he might write music suited to their voices. In his teaching in London he collaborated with his wife, Signora Galli. Among his famous pupils were Miss Cantelo, later wife of the tenor Harrison, and Mrs. Weichsel, mother of Mrs. Billington.

Cimador, Manzuoli, Mortellari, Lanza, etc.

I have by no means exhausted the list of distinguished Italian teachers. There was Cimador, the composer, who was teaching in London in the 'nineties and with whom Sophia Corri-Dussek had lessons ; there was Mortellari, with whom Billington studied during her first brilliant season before she went to Sacchini in Paris ; there was Manzuoli, a famous castráto ; there was Gesualdo Lanza . . . but I think I have cited enough names.

[6] *Proceedings*, vol. VII, p. 19.

The English Teachers.

Dr. Arne, Thomas Linley the elder, Dr. Arnold, Dr. Cook, Jonathan Battishill, etc.

The most famous English-born teachers were Dr. Arne, Thomas Linley, Dr. Arnold, Dr. Cooke, Jonathan Battishill, and Corfe of Salisbury. All of them were composers, in greater or less degree, and all of them (except Arne, a Catholic) were inheritors in some form of the English Church tradition. Arnold, Cooke, Corfe and Battishill were, of course, intimately connected with church music, and Linley, though himself a man of the theatre, had been trained by Chilcote of Bath.

But even the English Church School, if I may so call it, drew some inspiration from *bel canto* sources, as is shown by the many quotations from Tosi given in a curious little book by Anselm Bayly, Subdean of the Chapel Royal, published in 1771, called *A Practical Treatise on Singing and Playing with Just Expression and Real Elegance.* (London, 1771.)

I have said something about these men before coming to their methods, because I wanted to show that they were men of all-round musical culture and integrity, and entitled to our respect. I now want to come down to some more technical details. One cannot learn singing from books, and ten minutes' lesson with Rauzzini or Corri would be worth weeks of study of Tutors or contemporary criticisms of singers. But by piecing various bits of evidence together one can arrive at a composite picture of the teaching of the period, which is only second-best, but may perhaps have some interest.

To give a list of all the Vocal Tutors, Methods and critiques I have looked at would be tedious. The most informative Methods are those by Corri[7] and J. Jousse.[8] The latter may or may not have been a good teacher—he was a Frenchman who came to this country as a refugee at the time of the French Revolution—but his book does sum up a good many of the vocal tenets of the period, and he is less vague than most writers. Then there are valuable pointers in the various articles on singers and singing in *The Musical Quarterly*, to which I have already referred.

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[7] *The Singer's Preceptor*, by Domenico Corri (London, 1810).

[8] *Introduction to the Art of Sol-faing and Singing*, by J. Jousse (London, date ?).

TECHNIQUE AND INTERPRETATION.

Nowadays it is customary to divide the study of singing into Technique and Interpretation, but it is often hard to know where one ends and the other begins. As Dawson Freer so admirably puts it in his *Interpretation in Song*: " Technique should be the sound body by means of which the indwelling soul expresses itself." To keep a balance between the claims of the body and the spirit is the real crux of the art of singing. There is probably no art which requires such perfect poise on the part of the individual, such a highly developed sense of proportion, so many qualities both physical and mental, no art which symbolises so well the eternal striving of man. It is as hard to be a good singer as it is to be a good Christian. The ideal may never be attained in this life, but no preoccupation with the material obstacles in the way must be allowed to obscure that ideal. It is only when the vision is temporarily lost sight of that technique and interpretation seem to be at variance with each other.

In the eighteenth century, technique tended to have the upper hand. In our own time, so-called interpretation too often takes precedence of sound technique, and some singers think it is enough to be able to *feel*, in order to express. The eighteenth century bias was instrumental, just as the twentieth century bias is literary. But we must remember that much that now seems to us a mere display of technical skill, because it conveys no *word* picture, had for our ancestors an expressive value. And so in this section I shall not always distinguish between the two.

First Lessons ; Messa di Voce ; Solfeggio.

The fundamental exercises for teaching attack and developing the voice have not changed for hundreds of years. The familiar little " five-finger exercises " were used at least at the beginning of the sixteenth century by teachers like Caccini, Bovicello and Conforto. The *accenti*, as these were called, seem to have been practised fairly slowly at first in the middle of the voice, and carefully extended fanwise in either direction. They were followed by short *diminuzioni*, really extended *accenti*, which again resemble the progressive exercises in flexibility given by any good teacher to-day.

Corri, in his *Preceptor*, says he believes in beginning with the smallest intervals, in proceeding by step not by leap, in the early lessons, which he tells us is contrary to the usual practice. He lays stress on getting the intonation of the

semitones correct; then he proceeds to the gamut, first the major, then the minor mode; and then to larger intervals. The first lesson he gives is a *messa di voce* on single notes.

Under the name of *esclamazio,* a form of *messa di voce* had been an established part of vocal training in the previous century. Caccini taught it immediately after the *accentus,* and regarded it not merely as an indispensable ornament, but as an important aid to vocal development, and a means of blending the registers. Complaints were frequently made that it was overdone by performers, and indeed one can scarcely imagine anything more tiresome than its use on every note of a slow cantabile passage. Jousse describes it as the only exercise for the acquisition of "a Voice truly in tune, clear in its sound, and mellow in its inflections, therefore the Scholar should practise it as often as possible, resting now and then when he is tired. Tenducci gives it as one of his twenty-one rules: "To sing the Scale or Gamut frequently; allowing to each sound one Breve or two Semibreves, which must be sung in the same Breath . . . and . . . *messa di voce.*"

These first exercises were usually given on the Italian *Ah.* (Corri tells us Porpora believed in the open *Ah*; Thomas Billington says that it proceeds "from the only grand source, the chest.") Later, other vowels were introduced, beginning with open ones, and then consonants in the form of *solfeggio.*

Masters differ as to the proportion of time to be given to work on vowels and sol-fa syllables. *Solfeggio* has a double role, as a vocal exercise and as a training in sight-reading and intonation. Corri does not believe in introducing consonants too soon, nor does he think so highly as some of *solfeggio* as a part of musical education. He believes in learning intonation by intervals, rather than by syllables.

> The practice of solfeggio is, I allow, a useful study so far as relates to the study of articulation . . . but not until the scholar has attained correct and perfect intonation; if an interval cannot be executed with precision by uttering the letter A, no greater assistance will be derived from sounding the syllables *Do* and *Re.*

Jousse, on the other hand, laments the neglect of sol-fa in England, and says "the English will never arrive at a great degree of proficiency in Vocal Music unless they pay more attention to that part of the science." The musical education in the Italian conservatories, he says, "always begins by learning the intonation of the seven notes in various positions, and sol-faing Vocal exercises . . ."

Articulation and Diction.

It is not surprising to find English teachers laying emphasis on clear articulation. Busby (*Concert Room and*

Orchestra Anecdotes of Music and Musicians, 1825) says that "of all the English singing-masters of the last century, no one was so attentive to that first of vocal excellencies, articulation, as Dr. Arne," and Henry Angelo tells us that he made his pupils read over their songs before attempting to sing them. Charles Dibdin considered that

> Those who get at the force and meaning of the words, and pronounce them as they sing, with the same sensibility of expression they would in speaking, possess an accomplishment in singing beyond what all the art in the world can convey; and such, even when they venture upon cantabiles and cadences, will have better, because more natural execution, than those who fancy they have reached perfection in singing by stretching and torturing their voices into mere instruments.

Yet it is a mistake to conclude that the best *bel canto* singing ignored the importance of words. Tosi considers that "if the words are not heard so as to be understood, there will be no great Difference between a human Voice and a Hautboy . . . the words only give the Preference to a Singer above an instrumental Performer." Corri considers that "words are the prime object," and gives as his Second Requisite to good singing "To ascertain the Character of the Poetry, whether Sacred, Heroic, Plaintive, Joyful, Comic, etc., and accordingly endeavour to assimilate your imagination to those ideas." (The First Requisite was the formation of the voice, and the study of the technical exercises set forth in the preceding pages). He then proceeds to divide words into five different classes. For instance, there are "Words Sacred, such as God, Jehovah, Lord, Redeemer, Holy, Mercy, etc." "These should be sung with a chaste dignified simplicity; every note taken with softness, observing the Crescendo and Diminuendo with moderation, not to the full extent of the Voice, and free from all Graces and Ornaments." The Second Class are "Words of grandeur as Valour, Victory, Fame, Glory, Honour, Triumph, etc. These Words are to be sung with a full firm tone of Voice, taking the Note strong at once, and dying it away as the Rules of Diminuendo direct; sometimes the introduction of the anticipation Grace may produce good effect, but be cautious in the use thereof." In the Fourth Class are "Words of Sentiment as Love, Tender, Amiable, Dear, Fair, Charming, etc. On these Words . . . the whole Scope of the Voice may be exerted to its full extent, for on such Words only, Singers may with Propriety display their Fancy, Taste and Knowledge, by the introduction of Ornaments, Cadences, Graces, etc., etc."

Tosi complains of "singers who are scarce got out of their first lessons who study to sing with Affectation, as if

ashamed to open their mouths ; others, on the contrary, stretching theirs too much" so that it is "impossible to comprehend whether they have said Balla or Bella, Sesso or Sasso, Mare or More."

Registers.

The subject of registers always brings out the worst passions of singing-teachers, but the remarks of our eighteenth century friends are so nebulous that each may interpret them his own way. All are agreed that certain changes take place both in the male and female voices at certain points in the scale, and that these changes must be rendered as imperceptible as possible. For instance, Jousse says that "the Pupil must in several ways pass from the natural to the feigned Voice, and *vice versa,*" but does not describe any one of the several ways. He speaks of "the part where the natural Voice ends to give way to the Falsetto" as *Il Ponticello.* His description of registers is merely a paraphrase of Tosi, who says of sopranos both male and female that "the Extent of the full natural Voice terminates generally upon the fourth space, which is C, or the fifth line which is D ; and there the feigned Voice becomes of Use as well in going up to the high notes, as returning to the natural Voice . . . Among women a soprano entirely *di petto* is sometimes heard." In a footnote Galliard informs us that *voce di petto* is "a full Voice which comes out from the Breast by Strength, and is the most sonorous and expressive . . . *Voce di testa* comes more from the throat than the Breast, and is capable of more volubility. Falsetto is a feigned Voice."

Corri discreetly leaves registers alone.

Florid Singing.

We now come to what Tosi called the *Bravura,* as opposed to the *Pathetic* and what we usually call *coloratura,* or florid singing. The raw material of this type of singing has not changed much in the last two centuries, but the use to which it is put and the point of view from which it is studied have radically changed. Exercises for agility, the shake and a limited number of ornaments are still taught, if sometimes rather perfunctorily, both because classical music sometimes demands their introduction and because some teachers consider they have an intrinsic value as exercises. But, with the exception of light sopranos, singers mostly regard *bravura* passages as disagreeable necessities. Handel and his like wrote that sort of thing just to make life more difficult. Agility and ornaments are

studied as a matter of duty; it would never occur to a singer to introduce them uninvited.

In the eighteenth century the acquisition of these accomplishments was only the first step; the second was their judicious use. It was essential to know how to combine the various graces, and introduce them into compositions at suitable places, and how to improvise (or seem to improvise) cadenzas. " Moreover," says Tosi, " a singer must be able to improvise, his Skill must inspire him with a Variety of Graces of his own unpremeditately, knowing that a Professor of Eminence cannot if he would continually repeat an Air with the self-same Passages and Graces." Tosi jeers at those composers who write out their appoggiatura and other graces, a new-fangled habit in Italy at the time he wrote his book, and one which he considered an insult to a singer's intelligence. A well-trained singer " when he is come out of his first Lessons . . . will laugh at those Composers that mark them, with a Design either to be thought Modern, or to show that they understand the Art of Singing better than the Singers . . . Eternal Shame who first introduced these foreign puerilities to our Nation . . . Oh injurious Insult to you modern Singers, who submit to Instruction fit for Children ! " He condescendingly admits that out of " Indulgence to the Sex, many female Singers have the Graces set down in writing for them," but good singers should not follow such degenerate examples. "Whoever accustoms himself to have Things put in his Mouth, will have no Invention, and become a Slave to his Memory."

It is to be noted that Tosi, Geminiani, Corri and all the *bel canto* teachers who have left their views in writing condemn those who overdo such ornamentation, and only recommend what is indispensable to a musicianly performance. Corri, for instance, regards it as an " impropriety " to begin "Angels ever bright and fair " with a shake on the An, and "after the shake run a division of a thousand notes, torturing the audience with suspence what word it is, till at length, with exhausted breath, comes forth "-gels," which was apparently the fashion in his time. The same procedure was usual with " Comfort ye, my people." He points out that the *da capo* " allows the singer every latitude of ornament consistent with the rules of harmony," and that " the repetition of words by the composer was no doubt intended for that display of ornament, which on their first utterance even common sense forbids." The abuse of ornaments he describes as something new-

fangled, *i.e.*, prevalent at the end of the eighteenth century presumably, and says that Farinelli, Caffarelli, Ghizziello, Pacchierotti and others of the first eminence sang compositions with little ornament. (" Little ornament" must be understood in an eighteenth century sense.)

In his *Select Airs* he sets out in full the graces, expression marks and breathing places introduced by certain famous singers into certain famous arias. Tosi would have regarded this as " an injurious Insult to the Singer's Intelligence " and " a foreign puerility," but we who have become accustomed to having everything put into our mouths by the composer, must be grateful for such an aid to reconstructing the performances of those days.

Here I should like to digress for a moment. In the controversies which wage intermittently around the interpretation of music of the classical period, two issues are often confused : (1) How such music was actually sung in the age in which it was written; (2) How it should be sung to-day. On the first issue, the authorities I have just quoted can be appealed to, supplemented by a study of Dolmetsch's *Interpretation of Music in the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries.* On the second issue, however, they should be listened to with caution. Attempts to reproduce exactly the conditions in which eighteenth century music was performed often end in being merely precious without being strictly accurate. Some details will inevitably be wrong : the accoustics of our buildings are different, the playing of our instrumentalists is different (for which we must thank Heaven, in most cases), their instruments are different, even the ears of our audiences are differently attuned. I am not defending glaring anachronisms or " arrangements." But nothing could be farther from the true spirit of the eighteenth century—an age which worshipped good taste, moderation and judgment in all things—than performances of Ye Olde Musicke type. If a singer wants to know exactly how Signor Tenducci sang, let us say, *Water Parted from the Sea,* let him consult Corri's *Select Airs.* If he wants to sing *Water Parted* himself, he had best consult his own good taste. In so doing he will be nearer the *spirit* of Dr. Arne and his times than he will ever get by a study of its *letter.*

THE ORNAMENTS THEMSELVES.

What were the indispensable graces and ornaments ? Geminiani recommends to both singers and instrumentalists " the study and practice of 14 ornaments, namely : A plain

Shake; A Turn'd Shake; a superior Appoggiatura; an inferior Appoggiatura; Holding the Note; Staccato; Swelling the Sound; Diminishing the Sound; Piano; Forte; Anticipation; Separation; a Beat; a Close Shake." On the Beat he has the following information; "This is proper to express several Passions; as for example, if it be perform'd with Strength, and continued long, it expresses Fury, Anger, Resolution, etc. But if you play it quite soft, and swell the Note, it may then denote Horror, Fear, Grief, Lamentation, etc. By making it short and swelling the Note gently, it may express Affection and Pleasure." As I mentioned before, Geminiani is addressing both those who play and those who sing, but the principle is the same, and his description of the different shades of feeling which can be expressed by different renderings of the Beat is illuminating, showing that what to us is meaningless ornament had for him emotional significance.

The Anticipation is only another name for *portamento*, which Corri considers "the perfection of vocal music." Jousse describes it as

> not only very elegant but very useful first to ascertain with more precision the intonation of an Interval, next to preserve the shades and connection of the sounds which compose a Melody. It is chiefly necessary when a difficult interval happens or some harsh discord, as it prepares the Auditor for the following Note and softens the shock which the Ear might experience.

Akin to the Anticipation or *portamento* was the Dragg so spelt), which Tosi considers suitable to be introduced into a Siciliano, and Jousse says that "in the pathetic nothing is better calculated to touch the heart than this Grace when introduced with judgment and performed with taste and precision." It is used in slow movements "to blend the sound of some notes at a great distance from each other; the sound begins on the high Note and is dragged gently down to the lower Note with inequality of motion." It seems to be this inequality of motion which distinguishes it from a downward *portamento*. Jousse writes it out as follows:—

Written *Sung*

Written *Sung*

All these old masters have much to say of the shake, and its different varieties, with which I will not weary you. Tosi says the Scholar must practise it on "all the vowels and on all the Notes he possesses . . . where in Process of Time he may learn the Close Shake, the Beat, and the Forming them with Quickness in the midst of the volubility of Graces and Divisions." Jousse says the vowels E and U should not be used for such practice. The shake should not be introduced on "holding notes," where the *messa di voce* is preferable, he says.

Of divisions, volate, mordents, etc., I need say nothing, but before we leave this subject of the interpretation of eighteenth century music, I should like to quote Corri on the *rubato*: ". . . whilst a singer is, in some measure, singing *ad libitum*, the orchestra, which accompanies him, keeps the time firmly and regularly." This "grace or licence is to be used with moderation and discretion, in order to avoid confusion," and it is very important that "the laws of harmony be preserved." Only a very experienced artist, who can already sing in perfect time, should venture on this species of eighteenth century "Swing."

In the cadenzas, of course, the singer had the biggest opportunity for the display of all these laboriously learnt graces. Both Jousse and Corri give many examples of cadenzas for practice, but a great singer would improvise his own.

Breathing.

I have left to the last what most modern singing-methods put first: breathing, for the simple reason that as far as I can make out breathing was not taught in the *bel canto* period, or at least not in the modern sense. The singers of those days must have had some breath-control; this is proved by their *messa di voce*, their long divisions and their shakes. But they do not seem to have acquired this control by studying the movements of the ribs, the diaphragm and the abdominal muscles, or by such breathing exercises as are used now. How did they acquire this control, and what have the great teachers to say about it? Very little. Here is Tosi: "Let him [*i.e.* the teacher] shew him in all sorts of Compositions the proper Place to take Breath, and without Fatigue; because there are some Singers who give Pain to the Hearer, as if they had an Asthma, taking Breath every Moment with Difficulty, as if they were breathing their last." He has something to say on posture: "He should always make the Scholar sing standing, that

the Voice may have all its Organisation free." Corri says his first exercise, that all-important *messa di voce* on a single tone, is to "acquire the art of taking breath, and how to retain it, by which is effected the swelling and dying of the voice." "Take as much breath as you can, draw it with suspiration, as if sighing, use it with economy," he advises; and he gives *volate* "to learn to take breath quickly." Jousse goes so far as to say that "On the strength of the lungs depends the power of the Voice, when naturally weak, they may be strengthened by moderate exercise, and a sober, regular life; any intemperance impairs them and consequently the Voice. One of the greatest difficulties in singing consists in the proper management of the breath; . . . if the air is impelled with more force than necessary, the Glottis becomes contracted like the Reed of an Hautboy pressed too much by the lips of a bad Performer; fear or constraint produce the same effect on that organ and injure its flexibility; if the breath is taken with too much hurry, the Voice becomes unsteady and fluttering." Thomas Billington says that "where one note is sustained three or four bars" the breath should be taken through a nearly closed mouth. Early in the nineteenth century the Rev. Charles Smyth, who knew so many famous teachers, tells us that "A singer should never begin a passage with his lungs empty; but always fill his chest moderately full of wind before he begins singing; and whenever he has an opportunity, imbibe as much breath as he can; and keep his chest *expanded.* You may have observed that professional singers of great eminence *pout themselves out,* as it were like pigeons."

That is all I can find out about the *bel canto* theories on breathing, and it amounts to very little. It is just possible that these old teachers possessed some esoteric knowledge which they only transmitted verbally to a chosen few. But unless we accept this somewhat fanciful hypothesis, we can only conclude that they relied on progressive vocal exercises for developing the breathing capacity, especially on the *messa di voce* and on rapid passages, and that their pupils' breath control developed gradually, in proportion to the gradually increasing demands made upon it. At least one eminent teacher of the present day[9] is in agreement with this way of looking at the problem, and allows me to quote him as saying that "breathing for singing is best taught by exercises in conjunction with the voice, especially

[9] Mr. Spencer Clay.

progressive agility exercises and the *messa di voce.*" But judging by most books on singing and by examination syllabuses, he is in the minority.

Conclusion.

In order to throw in relief both the likenesses and the differences between eighteenth and twentieth century singing-teaching, I have been looking at the syllabuses of the A.R.C.M. and the L.R.A.M. for the Diploma of singing-teacher. However much one may affect to despise examinations, they do at any rate set a standard, and the requirements of the two Royal Schools of Music may presumably be taken as a norm. Domenico Corri himself would have welcomed the examinations for singing teachers, in order to weed out the quacks : " . . . it would be, in my opinion, a regulation of great utility, if, as in other professions, there was a public ordeal of strict examination, which all who teach music must first pass through." Let us see how he and other eighteenth century friends would pass through such public ordeals as are now ordained.

The Royal College asks its candidates both to read and to transpose at sight an easy accompaniment at the piano. The Royal Academy asks its candidates to sing a simple air at sight. Tosi, Geminiani, Rauzzini, Corri and the rest should pass this with flying colours. Nor should the paper-work cause them many headaches ; to men of their generation a figured bass was child's play. They should also sail through the actual performance of " a portion of a florid movement, a portion of a *cantabile* movement and a recitative," although I fear the examiners might be startled by some brilliant improvisations at the cadence, some unexpected appoggiatura, an occasional " dragg," and perhaps even a display of rubato—for all of which marks for inaccuracy might be deducted. When it comes to answering questions on " breathing, registers, classification and compass of voices," and " technical studies best adapted to ensure sustained power, flexibility, correctness of attack and intonation," they should do pretty well, although they might lose marks on breathing. When it comes to Interpretation, and Technique and Expression, Geminiani might cause the Board some surprise by informing them that a Beat is proper to express several Passions. On " the characteristics and interpretation of recitative " they would become so expansive that the examiners would pass on hastily to " the organs employed in singing."

And here, alas, our poor friends would meet their Waterloo. It is fairly clear they knew how to sing, and even how to teach, when they were upon this earth, but their notions of physiology were of the haziest, since they all lived and died before the discovery of the laryngoscope. Corri might scrape through, because his friend and pupil the eccentric Dr. William Kitchiner provided him with a description of the larynx. Dr. Arnold once observed that "the anatomy of the voice would, perhaps, never be clearly explained till some physician should study the subject who was also a good musician" (quoted in Corri: *Singer's Preceptor*). Since his day, music and science have become more interested in each other.

Eighteenth century singing-teaching was based on empiricism, whereas ours at any rate seeks to base itself on science. We cannot set the clock back if we would. To lament that we have no singers and no teachers nowadays is as foolish as it would be to despise the great men of the eighteenth century because they lacked our scientific knowledge. Even in those good old days of *bel canto* we find nearly every writer deploring the decline of singing.

May I quote Tosi once more, and for the last time? "Whoever studies, let him look for what is most excellent, and let him look for it wherever it is, without troubling himself whether it be in the Stile of fifteen or twenty years ago, or in that of these Days . . ."

DISCUSSION.

THE CHAIRMAN: Miss Sands has read us a delightful paper, and it was beautifully read. I will ask Mr. Levien to open the discussion.

MR. MEWBURN LEVIEN: Mr. Gladstone once said of an opponent, "Everything he asserts I deny, and everything he denies I assert." But it is quite the other way with me to-day. I agree with almost every syllable that Miss Sands has said. Modern books do not teach what the old people taught. Take the question of the mouth. We have with us the great-grand-daughter of Isaac Nathan, a pupil of Corri, who lived five years in Corri's house. He says that many untrained people think that the wider the mouth is opened the better; and they open it wide enough to admit a friend. In a celebrated dictionary, the author says the distance between the teeth ought to be at least an inch. Santley's book says wide enough to admit the tip of one finger. A picture of a mouth in an old book gives the five

lines of the staff as the distance, say half an inch. There is a great difference between half an inch and at least one inch.

In breathing the old people never pushed their abdomens out, nor dreamt of lying down for breathing exercises. Singers are told now to lie down to practise breathing.

There is the vexed question of the *coup de glotte*. If there is one thing certain in this vale of vocal tears it is that the old singers started with the *coup de glotte*—the glottic attack. In 1610, Monteverde wrote that a singer he had heard had not a correct stroke of the throat. Garcia in his *Art of Singing* recommends the stroke of the throat in five different connections. But I can tell you of two celebrated books in which that method is condemned: they say the proper way is to get simultaneous approximation of the vocal cords and push of the breath. Santley says that in the throat there is a valve which must be closed and the breath brought up to it for a release to take place. That was the glottic attack which the old singers all used. They then kept a very narrow aperture in the throat so that the breath could not escape too much. That was their great secret of breath control which nearly all the books to-day condemn. Isaac Nathan in his wonderful book *Musurgia Vocalis* wrote a sentence which has to be sung with all kinds of different emotions. No criticism of the old singing is more often made than that people did not sing with expression; it is a mistake to think that the old Italian singers concentrated exclusively on florid singing. I agree about ornaments. The old *arias* want properly editing so that we can have some ornaments which suit our taste. Some ornamentation is called for: the notes the old composer wrote down were never only what he expected to hear.

The CHAIRMAN: Will Dr. Cathcart say something?

Mr. MEWBURN LEVIEN: He was a pupil of Scafati of Naples.

Dr. CATHCART: Ladies and gentlemen, up to the year 1858 singers breathed naturally. That is to say they breathed by the method they instinctively used for getting in most breath. But in 1858 a French laryngologist called Mandl, whose name will go down in laryngology as the inventor of a throat paint, said that you should always breathe by the diaphragm. There are two centres of the breathing. One is in the *medulla*; that is automatic. The other is from the brain, the *cerebrum*, and is under the control of the will.

If you wish to practise singing do not practise inspiration to begin with. If you have to sing many notes you naturally take a deep breath. But you should always breathe through the nose. Here is a medical reason for that. If one side of the nose is obstructed that side of the vocal cords will not act so well. The false vocal cords were discovered by Wylie, and he taught that in the throat there were two mechanisms : the true vocal cords came together and prevented the breath from going in, and the false vocal cords came together and prevented the breath from going out. Man and animals with false vocal cords can hold their breath, and strike with their fore-paws, and can vomit. Such are the horse, lion, tiger, kangaroo, cat and dog, and the monkey. The animals without false vocal cords cannot hold their breath and they cannot sing. If you had no false vocal cords you would sing like a donkey and cough like a cow.

The LECTURER : I am particularly glad to hear a man of science defending the people of a pre-scientific age. Round the room are a few pictures I have selected from my collection. One of Rauzzini holding his exercises for the voice and some of his famous pupils, Braham and Mrs. Billington, and others. There are also copies of Corri's books to which I referred. I have opened this one at *Water Parted from the Sea*. It is an extraordinarily good example of the singing of those days. It was taken down by Corri, and as far as we know, shows how it was sung by Tenducci, its first singer.