M. Marchesi
Vocal Method, Op. 31
Part 1

PREFACE

THE *Theoretical and Practical Vocal Method* that I now publish is an educational work which commences with the vocal alphabet, that is to say, with elementary exercises, and contains also a series of *Elementary and Progressive Vocalises* for the formation of the mechanism of the voice.

I would again set forth the principle that I have already laid down in prefaces to different works that I have published, which is, that in order to obtain a speedy and satisfactory result, pupils should never be burdened with more than one difficulty at a time, and they should be assisted in overcoming obstacles by having them presented in a natural and progressive order. It is with this object in view that I have written special Exercises and Vocalises for each particular difficulty.

It is essential that the mechanism of the voice should be trained to execute all possible rhythmical and musical forms before passing to the æsthetical part of the art of singing.

May this work, which I look upon as my last of the kind, add to the important results that I have obtained from forty-two years' application of my system.

MATHILDE MARCHESI

CONTENTS

FIRST PART

Elementary and Progressive Exercises for the Development of the Voice

PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

ATTITUDE OF THE SINGER

THE attitude of the pupil, in singing, should be as natural and easy as possible. The body should be kept upright, the head erect, the shoulders well thrown back, without effort, and the chest free. In order to give perfect freedom to the vocal organs while singing, all the muscles surrounding those parts should be completely relaxed.

THE MOUTH

As the vocal tube extends to the lips, the beauty of a voice may be quite spoiled by a faulty position of the mouth.

The smiling mouth, for example, favored by many singing-teachers past and present, is absurd, and quite contrary to the laws of acoustics. Smiling causes the mouth to assume the position required for pronouncing the Italian E (prounced *ay*.) This vowel makes the vocal tube square, and gives the voice a too open tone, called by the Italians *voce sgangherata* and by the French *voix blanche*. Therefore, the mouth should be opened naturally, by letting the chin fall, as in pronouncing "ah" (not too broad), and it must be kept immovable in this position for the entire duration of the sound.

In opening the mouth, only the lower jaw moves, the upper one being fixed; hence the necessity for lowering the chin. The muscles of the jaw possess great contractile power, and will not, at first, remain relaxed during the whole length of the sound; but with practice they will eventually gain the necessary elasticity. When this elasticity is once acquired, it will enable the chin to articulate the consonants distinctly and rapidly in singing.

RESPIRATION

Respiration consists of *Inspiration*, during which the air passes through the glottis, the trachea or windpipe, and the bronchial tubes to enter the lungs; and of *Expiration*, during which the air is breathed out again through the same channels.

In the normal state, these two movements succeed one another in a regular and rhythmical manner and *without any intervention of the will, as during sleep*. Consequently, all premeditated action for facilitating or regulating these functions in a special manner is fatally injurious, because it opposes and impairs the freedom of the normal movements of the vocal organs and of the muscles which govern them. In addition to the outward movement of the ribs, the chest (thorax, a bony, conical cage, slightly flattened) can expand, in *Inspiration*, at its base, summit and sides. So there are *three* respiratory movements, or three kinds of breathing, namely:—

Diaphragmatic or *Abdominal;*
Clavicular;
Lateral or Intercostal.

The lungs, formed of a spongy, elastic tissue, perforated in every part by thousands of little tubes destined to receive the air, are concave and largest at their base, and separated from the abdominal cavity by a convex muscular partition, called the Diaphragm, upon which they rest. At the moment of *Inspiration* this partition descends, causing the base of the lungs to expand.

Normal respiration, or the natural breathing of a healthy person, is *diaphragmatic* or *abdominal.* By this method of respiration the lungs are expanded at the base, and consequently receive the greatest quantity of air. By the other methods, which are bad, the lungs are only partly filled; whence the necessity for more frequent breathing and the impossibility of singing long phrases in a single breath.

The use of the corset by females causes *lateral* breathing, because it compresses the abdominal walls. Ladies who would become singers are, therefore, strongly advised to avoid clothes which, by interfering with the freedom of the waist, prevent the inflation of the lungs at the base.

ATTACK (COUP DE GLOTTE)

After the lungs are filled, it is necessary, for the production of a tone, that the pupil should hermetically close the glottis so that its extreme edges, called the *Vocal Cords*, may be set vibrating by the air which bursts through at the moment of *Expiration*. The *Coup de Glotte* requires, then, a sudden and energetic approximation of the lips of the *glottis*, an instant before *Expiration* commences.

This organic action, which forms the *Attack* or *Emission* of the voice, is brought about by preparing the glottis and mouth for the production of a vowel. As stated above, the best vowel for use for the formation and development of the voice is the Italian vowel A (*ah*), attacking it naturally and without effort or affectation.

It should be understood that the *Coup de Glotte* is a natural movement of the vocal organs, and that the pupil has only to bring under the control of the will this spontaneous action which has been developing since the first cry at the moment of birth. It is, in fact, the possession of this same natural faculty that enables us to form unconsciously all the vowels in speaking.

The closing of the glottis is, then, a natural and spontaneous organic action. But, in speaking, this action is intermittent, the opening of the lips of the glottis being followed by their contraction with an equal rapidity. The pupil need do no more than endeavor to keep the glottis contracted after its lips have been brought together. That is to say, when once the note has been attacked, it is necessary to practice holding the glottis contracted as long as the teacher considers it expedient for the development of the elasticity of the vocal organs; a development which practice will increase daily. We repeat, then, that if the pupil would acquire a good attack, the glottis must be closed an instant before *Expiration* commences; in other words, it should be prepared.

If the column of air issuing from the lungs finds the glottis open, and, in consequence of there being no obstacle in its way, no body is set vibrating, then the result is *Aphony* (no sound). If the *Vocal Cords* are not firmly and evenly closed throughout their entire extent at the instant that the air commences to escape from the lungs, the lips of the glottis being unable to contract fully during *Expiration,* the tone will be weak and hoarse, and the intonation uncertain, because the *Vocal Cords* will not vibrate throughout their entire extent, and the vibrations cannot be isochronous (equal). Moreover, because the air escapes in puffs and the lungs empty rapidly, the tone is of short duration, and the pupil's respiration is short and unsteady, as the supply of breath has to be renewed so frequently.

To sum up, the firmer and more complete the approximation of the lips of the glottis, the more resistance they will offer to the air which escapes from the lungs, and the less air it will take to set the *Vocal Cords* vibrating. The slower the *Expiration*, the longer the tone will last. The equal and continuous pressure of the air against the vibrating body produces *isochronous* (equal) vibrations, and maintains equality of tone throughout its entire duration.