THE VOICE.—SECOND PAPER.

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At the opening of this our first lesson in voice culture let us pause for a moment to learn the positions of the important organs that assist us in producing tone, and also to study the formation of the different parts employed, that we may thoroughly understand the function of each active organ when we attempt to locate our tones.

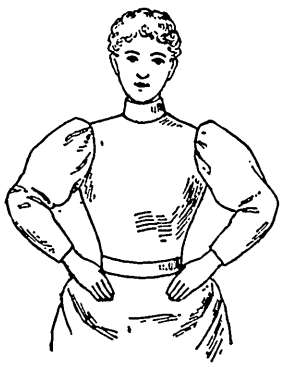

FIGURE NO. 1.

First, there is the diaphragm, the muscular partition, situated at about the center of the body, which separates the lungs from the abdomen; and just below the diaphragm, enclosing the abdomen, there are the strong abdominal muscles. These muscles and the diaphragm provide the motive power of the voice, and are of the same vital importance in the production of tone as the bellows of a pipe-organ are in the sounding of notes. Above the diaphragm and resting on the sloping sides are the lungs, which somewhat resemble a pear in shape. They are composed of innumerable small air-cells, from which, of course, the air is supplied for the production of tone. The thorax or chest is a dome-like chamber extending from the neck to the diaphragm, and in it are situated the heart and lungs. It forms the lowest resonator of the voice and is controlled by its movable base, the diaphragm. The actual voice box and middle resonator, the larynx, is situated in the middle and fore part of the throat. These are the organs used in the production of voice, and the mouth forms the upper resonator, while the tongue, teeth and lips shape the articulate sounds which make up words.

Having ascertained the positions of the different vocal organs, we will now proceed to learn the correct location of tone. As mentioned in the introductory paper, most of us, in the untrained use of the voice, employ only the organs situated in the chest and throat, wholly neglecting to bring the diaphragm and abdominal muscles into operation. Like a person playing the organ without working the bellows, we exhaust the air in the lungs without adding adequately to the supply, except through the unnatural strain brought to bear upon the upper organs, which results in the thin, high-pitched, harsh, husky and "breathy" tones that are so offensive to the ear and oftentimes cause actual disease. A voice so used is certain to be totally lacking in volume of sound and carrying power, defects that are often painfully apparent in the amateur speaker, because only half the vocal organs are exercised, and that the weaker half, since, as mentioned above, the diaphragm and abdominal muscles provide the strong motive power, without which the voice must be deficient in strength, resonance and quality.

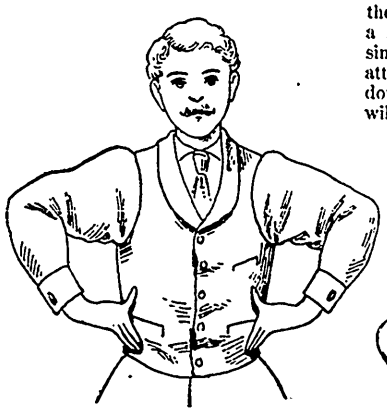

FIGURE NO. 2.

But, it may be asked, if all these organs are necessary to the production of tone, and the voice is a natural attribute, why do we not involuntarily use it properly? We can only echo "Why?" and add that it is probably because we need training to do anything well, since it is human nature to do wrong until we are taught to do right. We require pruning and training, just as trees, shrubs and plants must receive intelligent and assiduous attention from the gardener to bring them to symmetrical perfection. There is no doubt that we acquire many bad habits of voice and articulation through imitation; and, besides, when the physique is weak, we do not make the physical effort necessary to produce resonant tones. There are many other theories which might be advanced to account for incorrect speaking, but the fact remains that we seldom use the voice correctly unless trained to do so.

FIGURE NO. 1 A.

LOCATION OF TONE.

To begin with, be seated upon an ordinary, flat-seated, four-legged chair. This posture is advised at first in learning to locate the tones, because the action of the strong muscles is much more perceptible when one is seated than when standing. Sit naturally and easily erect, with the chest predominating, but not in the least strained; relax the shoulders, poise the head easily at the apex of the spine, and rest each hand upon the forward part of the hip just below the waist-line, with the fingers pressed upon the abdominal muscles, as pictured at figure No. 1. Now give a slight cough, not strong enough to irritate the throat, but simply one spasmodic action; and note the upward expansive attack of the abdominal muscles against the fingers. This will doubtless be the first comprehensive recognition that the learner will have had of the possession of such a mechanism as the abdominal muscles. When we laugh naturally and unrestrainedly, or when we sob, cough, sneeze or hiccough, we unconsciously make use of the abdominal muscles and the diaphragm. Perhaps the only circumstance that occasionally causes one to notice the muscular action in one of these convulsive efforts is the decided tightening of the clothing resulting sometimes in the bursting of a band or button-hole or the loss of a button in the region of the waist.

FIGURE NO. 2 A.

Repeat the slight cough three or four times, carefully noting the mechanical action which takes place. The abdominal muscles move upward and outward at each side, while there should be a flattening or depression of the abdomen