

Practical Department.

ELOCUTIONARY STUDIES.

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The study of a composition for oral delivery demands intellectual and physical qualifications. The first involves a thorough comprehension of every thought in the passage, and a vivid and true conception of the spirit and character of the entire subject. The second demands a trained voice and ear. It is essentially and exclusively physical, and without its functions the highest development of the first qualification will fail in making the voice the interpreter of thought and passion. The common mistake that teachers and authors make in their views on the subject is that if you understand what you read you can read it well; and the fact that university educated men, with the highest learned titles, are often the very worst readers and speakers, ought to silence the false doctrine for ever. The trained voice and ear are indispensable, and though all human beings are amply gifted with these physical qualifications in infancy, the utter absence of training in education and the influence of surrounding bad habits, make the acquisition of skill and excellence in this department most difficult. Inexperienced teachers supply fanciful theories in abundance. They lay down rules for expression; but the rules are worthless, are unintelligible when the pupil has no control over the voice, nor ear to distinguish its modulations. If the pupils of our schools never received a single rule for reading, vocal drill would accomplish almost all that was necessary when guided and pervaded by common sense and the exercise of imagination.

As I purpose submitting a series of papers as aids to elocutionary study, I therefore urge on my readers the immense importance of this voice and ear culture. Much of what I advance must be theory. I cannot give the vocal example in a printed article. But when the student has full mastery over the organs or delivery, then the elocutionary study is edifying, entertaining, and delightful. Then intellect and imagination can guide and govern and exalt expression, and make uttered speech represent artist, poet, and historian, realizing, interpreting, and in very truth creating in life-like forms of power and beauty, what mind has conceived and garbed in silent words.

I select for our first study *Parrhasius*, because it is essentially dramatic, picturesque, and imaginative, and, being in the Fifth Reader, available in our schools.* The opening scenes are admirably and dramatically depicted. The reader with a very slight effort of imagination can conceive and realize to himself the "gray-haired captive chained to a pillar;" his weariness and silent grief, the insolence and scorn of heartless spectators. This must be realized to the mind and read in tones modulated in harmony with each picture as it rises in the mental vision and pervaded by the spirit which sympathises with suffering and hates injustice. Yet in the mere narrative there must be the dramatic power. The very spirit with which the "Jew taunted him," "the buyers struck him," and "the soldiers smote him with threats of torture," must be conveyed by tones of voice expressive of these actions, yet softened by glimpses of that sympathy with his wrong which pervades the poem and must therefore control the reading.

But I must pass these pictures and that of *Parrhasius* gazing upon his grief, animated only by an artistic sentiment and ambition. Let us stand at the side of the painter in his studio, and the description of his appearance prepares the way for the delivery of the first outbreak of passion.

* EXPLANATION OF MARKS.—Emphasise italicised words and give stronger emphasis to words in small capitals; (') rising inflection; (v) falling inflection; (|) pause; (—) longer pause.

"His fine, earnest eye

Flashed | with a passionate fire."

The words "His fine, earnest eye" must be read in animated tones growing in power and finding their climax on "flashed," which is the leading word, and will have a better effect if thrown out quick and powerfully and with falling inflection.

"The quick curl

Of his thin nostril and his quivering lip

Were | like the winged god's | breathing from his flight."

This passage must be read in the same animated style, and the simile, as it illustrates the "quick curl of his nostril" and the "quivering lip," although it is superior to and elevates the literal passage, can only be a truthful illustration by being read faster and with more vivacity than the literal. The nature and not the value of the simile suggests the law of its delivery.

Now impersonation commences. The reader must now assume all the dramatic qualities necessary to realize natural expression. He must endeavour to conceive all the conditions of the scene and the feelings of the speaker. A brief pause after the delivery of the narrative passage will give effect to the words of *Parrhasius*; and in that pause the reader must endeavour to be the painter and give the command with "the quick curl of his nostril and quivering lip." Yet self-possession must never be forgotten. The reader becomes an actor, and the true actor under the most powerful feelings never forgets himself. He is at once the actor and the creation of the poet. Here then, while animated by the passionate fire of ambition, he reflects that he is in the presence of slaves, and must sustain the dignity of the master. Hence the fire is rather in his eye and countenance quivering with expressive emotion than in the voice. He affects a momentary calmness; but gradually the voice swells with fervid, but not loud and noisy, excitement as he finishes the first stanza.

"Bring me the captive—now,

My hand feels skilful and the shadows | lift

From my waked spirit | airily and swift;

And I could paint the now (suppressed excitement)

Upon the bended heavens; around me play |

Colors of such divinity | to-day."

Ha! bind him on his back!"

This command is not given boisterously, but with the calmness that an anatomist would give his instructions when a subject for dissection was brought before him, and the outstretched arm descending and the hand prone would complete the picture. But the calmness passes into excitement, as the victim probably struggles, and the one overmastering desire to depict extreme agony under torture gives suppressed energy to the hurried commands that follow.

"Look! as Prometheus in my picture here?"

A momentary glance at the picture, supposed to be opposite to the painter and the attendants, and the hand rapidly uplifted, and the index finger hurriedly pointed towards the picture would be the appropriate action.

"Quick! or he faints! stand with the cordial near."

Each of the italicised words must be uttered rapidly with the explosive oratorical stress and "cordial" slightly prolonged.

"Now bend him to the rack!"

Press down the poisoned links into his flesh,
And tear AGAPE | that healing wound afresh!"

Each of these commands is given with utter absence of feeling, pity or anger. It is the calmness of a cruelty of which the painter must be supposed to be utterly unconscious. Yet the suppressed energy of the impersonation should fill the hearer with horror, which becomes almost intolerable on the word "agape."

In the next stanza the painter is rapidly sketching the agonies of his victim, and carried away by enthusiasm for art and the