

"What did you hear?"

"Oh, several fashionable ballads. Everything was excellent."

This to the reader may appear highly colored, but he will have little difficulty to note its effect, for the performer who will not study will never play; and how many are there who have learnt for years and cannot play three bars correctly, owing, not to any natural incapacity, but sheerly from not having practised proper lessons.

In offering a few practical hints on the voice, I would remark, the structure of the organ is so exquisitely delicate, that its intonation is liable to be injured by the slightest agitation of the spirits, or nervous excitement. The natural compass should be strictly adhered to, and we must avoid those forced harsh tones, which lead to its utter ruin. No mezzo soprano should be allowed to scream up to C., or high treble descend to A. I have heard many young ladies, who, through want of judgment, attempt scenes and cavatinas, that demanded the impassioned declamation of a Mullbran, or Pasta; it would be equally ridiculous for one, excellent in ballad, to attempt Rode's variations, to remind us of the perfect articulation of Mademoiselle Sontag.

The student should not repress an inclination to the study of singing from diffidence on the score of the voice; nor become impatient of practice, because the tone does not flow freely, or appear of a good quality, during the first attempts, since it may be acquired by artificial means. Daily practice will almost create a voice where none existed. If its quality be indifferent, feeling, and good taste, will amply compensate for the deficiency, and delight infinitely more than those powerful voices, which, in unskilful performers, are perfectly overwhelming and disagreeable.

Previous to commencing the *Soffa*, it is necessary to accomplish a good course of practice on the piano forte. In the practice of the *soffa*, begin piano, swelling out the voice and diminishing it again in as long notes as a judicious economy of the breath will allow: making the exactness of pitch and intonation the subject of the most vigilant attention. Be patient in practice, and perseverance in the rules of the art will soften imperfections and correct defects.

To acquire a purely vocal style, nothing can contribute so much as the study of good compositions. The songs of Hayden and Handel require a conception of the devotional feelings of the composers; a beautiful *crescendo* and *decrescendo*, and a perfect shake. In the works of Mozart, Cimarosa, Gluck, and Paisiello, we find an inexhaustible treasure of melody, whose crotchets and quavers, if there were a language refined enough, might easily be translated into words. In

addition to these, an abundance of exquisite melodies can be found in the hymns to the virgin and other parts of the catholic service, calculated to lead to great purity of taste; they are slow and graceful in the movement, and require that beauty of expression which indicates true feeling. With Donizzetti, Mercadante, Pacini, and others of that stamp, sing how you will, decorate, or take from—give their melodies an interminable succession of *roulades*, or do what you list—their music will sound none the worse—for we cannot spoil what is already bad, or turn into nonsense that which has no meaning.

Want of judgment or self appreciation is the main cause why private performances often displease; and those who follow the prevailing fashion in music, without considering their ability, generally excite a disadvantageous comparison. Whatever be the flexibility which practice bestows upon the voice, it is requisite that the inclination for displaying it should be regulated by the judgment. One of the most frequent but least tolerable offences in singing, is to break the continuity, and injure the sentiment of a fine air, by the unmeaning succession of notes, termed *roulade*. On the contrary, the performer should only select such movements, as will place the acquirements in a favourable light, and avoid any attempts at brilliant passages, or "show songs," until the *Solfeggi* will permit them to be accomplished distinctly and with ease. The pupil must as I said before, be greatly guided by the inclination. I would, however, recommend the choice of slow and expressive airs of the old school, as the means to acquire expression, and a purely vocal style. Eschew the greater part of modern English songs; they are replete with common melody, bad accent, and bad harmony. I do not here make a sweeping condemnation, but with regret I must write it, the good ones are few—the bad a legion.

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Let not seducing dreams leave us a prey to ambitious and disappointing desires at our awakening. It is in the sphere where Providence has placed us that we must search for the means of being useful; and if there are pleasures which belong only to opulence, there are others which can be best found in mediocrity. Perhaps, in giving ourselves riches, we shall realise but half the dream of virtue and contentment. "It seems to me," says Plato, "that gold and virtue were placed in the opposite scales of a balance: that we cannot throw an additional weight into one scale, without subtracting an equal amount from the other;"