[From the Saturday Review.]

VOICES.

Far before the eyes or the mouth or the habitual gesture, as a revelation of character, is the quality of the voice and the manner of using it. It is the first thing that strikes us in a new acquaintance, and it is one of the most unerring tests of breeding and education. There are voices which have a certain truthful ring about them—a certain something, unforced and spontaneous, that no training can give. Training can do much in the way of making a voice, but it can never compass more than a bad imitation of this quality; for the very fact of its being an imitation, however accurate, betrays itself like rouge on a woman's cheeks, or a wig, or dyed hair. On the other hand, there are voices which have the jar of falsehood in every tone, and that are as full of warning as the croak of the raven or the hiss of the serpent. There are in general the naturally hard voices which make themselves caressing, thinking by that to appear sympathetic; but the fundamental quality spikes through the overlay, and a person must be very dull indeed who cannot detect the presence in that slow, drawling, would-be affectionate voice, with its harsh undertone and sharp accent whenever it forgets itself. Dan, without being false or hypocritical, there are voices which puzzle as well as disappoint us, because so entirely its harmonious with the appearance of the speaker. For instance, there is that thin treble squeak we sometimes hear from the mouth of a well-grown portly man, when we expected the fine rolling utterance which would have been in unison with his outward seeming; and, on the other side of the scale, where we looking for a shrill head voice or a tender musical cadence, we get that hoarse chest voice with which young and pretty girls sometimes startle us. In fact, it is one of the characteristics of the modern girl of a certain type; just as the habitual use of slang is characteristic of her, or that peculiar rounding of the elbows and turning out of the wrists, which are gestures that, like the chest voice, instinctively belong to men only, and have to be learned and practised by women.

Nothing betrays so much as the voice, save perhaps the eyes, and they can be lowered, and so far their expression hidden. In moments of emotion or skill can hide the fact of disturbed feeling, though a strong will and the habit of self-control, can steady the voice when else it would be failing and tremulous. But not the strongest will, nor the largest amount of self-control, can keep it natural as well as steady. It is deadened, veiled, compressed, like a wild creature tightly bound and unnaturally still. One does that it for a time, at an effort, and that if the strain were relaxed for a moment the wild creature would burst loose in rage or despair, and the voice would break in out into the scream of passion or quiver away into the falter of pathos. And this very effort is so eloquent as if there had been no holding down at all, and the voice had been left to its own impulse unchecked. Again, in fun and humor, it is not the voice that is expressive, even more than the face? The twinkle of the eye, the hollow in the under lip, the dimples about the mouth, the play of the eyebrow, are all aids certainly; but the voice! The merry tone that comes into the utterance of one man, the surprised accents of another, the fascinating simplicity of a third, the philosophical acquiescence of a fourth when relating the most outrageous impossibilities—a voice and manner peculiarly Transatlantic, and indeed one of the Yankee forms of fun that we know all these varieties by heart? have we not veteran actors whose main point lies in one or other of these varieties? and what would be the dreliest absolute if sold in a voice which had neither play nor significance? Pathos too—who feels it, however beautifully expressed—if he as much may go, if uttered in a dead and wooden voice without sympathy? But the poorest attempts at pathos will strike home to the heart if given tenderly and harmoniously. And just as certain popular airs of mean association can be made into church music by slow time and stately modulation, so can dead-level literature be lifted into passion or softened into sentiment by the voice alone.

We all know the effect, irritating or soothing, which certain voices have over us; and we have all experienced that strange impulse of attraction or repulsion which comes from the sound of the voice alone. And generally, if not absolutely always, the impulse is a true one, and any modification which increased knowledge may produce is never quite satisfactory. Certain voices grate on our nerves and set our teeth on edge; and others are just as calming as these are irritating, quieting us like a composing draught, and setting vague images of beauty and pleasantness afloat in our brains. A good voice, calm in tone and musical in quality, is one of the essentials for a physician; the "bedside voice," which is nothing if it is not sympathetic by constitution. Not false, not made up, not sickly, but tender in itself, of a rather low pitch, well modulated, and distinctly harmonious in its notes, it is the very opposite of the orator's voice, which is artificial in its management and a made voice. Whatever its original quality may be, the orator's voice bears the unmistakable stamp of art and become artificially; as much it may be admirable—telling in a crowd, impressive in his address—but overwhelming and chilling at home, partly because it is always conscious and never self-forgetting. An orator's voice, with its careful intonation and accurate accent, would be as much out of place by a sick-bed as Court trains and brocaded silk for the nurse. There are certain men who do a good deal by a hearty, jovial, fox-hunting kind of voice—a voice I think thrown up for all that it is a chest voice—a voice with a certain undefined rollick and devil-may-care sound in it, and eloquent of a large volume of vitality and physical health. That, too, is a good property for a medical man. It gives the sick a certain pluck, and reminds them pleasantly of health and vigor; it may have a mesmeric kind of effect upon them—who knows?—and induce in them something of its own state, provided it is not overpowering. But a voice of this kind has a tendency to become insolent in its assertion of vigor, swagering and boisterous; and then it is too much for invalided nerves, just as mountain winds or sea breezes would be too much, and the scent of flowers or a hayfield oppressive. The clerical voice, again, is characteristic; that neat, careful, precise voice, neither wholly made nor yet quite natural; a voice which never strikes one as hearty or as having a really genuine utterance, but which yet is not unpleasant if one does not require too much spontaneity. The clerical voice, with its mixture of familiarity and oratory, as that of one used to talk to old women in private and to hold forth to a congregation in public, has distinct in its own way as the mathematician's handwriting; and any one can pick out blindfold the man from a knot of talkers, without waiting to see the square-cut collar and clean white tie. The legal voice is different again; but this is rather a variety of the orator's than a distinct species—a variety standing midway between that and the clerical, and affording more scope than either.

The voice is much more indicative of the state of the mind than many people know of or allow. Anger, fear, and the symptoms of failing brain power is in the indistinct or confused utterance; no idiot has a clear or melodious voice; the hasty man speaks in a peculiar vertical; and no person of prompt and decisive thought was ever known to hesitate or to stutter. A thick, loose, fluffy voice, too, does not belong to the crisp character of mind which does the best active work; and when we meet with a keen-witted man who drawls, and lets his words drip instead of brightness of tone in the sharp incisive way that would be natural to him, we may be sure there is a flaw somewhere, and that he is not what the Americans call "clear grit" and "whole-souled" all through. We all have our company voices, as we all have our company manners, and we get to know the company voices of our friends after a time, and to understand them as we understand their best dresses and state service. The person whose voice absolutely refuses to put itself into company tone startles us as much as if he came to a state dinner in a shooting-jacket. This is a differin thing from the indistinct and flattering voice, which is never laid aside while it has its object to gain, and which affects to be one thing when it means another. The company voice is only a little bit of finery, quite in its place if not carried into the home, but however, silly and men and women think they can impose on their house-mates by assumptions which cannot stand the test of domestic life. The lover's voice is of course *sui generis*; but there is another kind of voice which one hears sometimes that is quite as enchanting—the rich, full, melodious voice which irresistibly suggests sunshine and flowers, and heavy bunches of purple grapes, and a wealth of physical beauty at all four corners. Such a voice is Albony's; such a voice we can conceive Anacreon's to have been; with less lusciousness and more stateliness, such a voice was Walter Savage Landor's. His was not an English voice; it was too rich and accurate; and yet it was clear and apparently thoroughly unstudied. *Ars celare artem*, perhaps; there was no greater treat of its kind than to hear Landor read Milton or Homer. Though one of the essentials of a good voice is its clearness, there are certain lisps and catches which are very pretty, though never dignified; but most of them are exceedingly painful to the ear. It is the same with accents. A dash of brogue, the faintest suspicion of the Scotch twang, even a very little American accent—but very little, like red pepper to be sparingly used, as indeed we may say with the others—gives a certain piquancy to the voice. So does a Continental accent generally, few of us being able to distinguish the French accent from the German, the Polish from the Italian, or the Russian from the Spanish, but lumping them all together as "a foreign accent" broadly. Of all the European voices the French is perhaps the most unpleasant in its quality, and the Italian the most delightful. The Italian voice is a song in itself, and the sing-song voice of an English parish schoolboy, but an unmodulated bit of human nature. The French voice is thin, apt to become wiry and metallic; a head voice for the most part, and eminently unsympathetic; a narrow, irritable voice, that seems more fit for complaint than for love-making; and yet how laughing, how heartening it can make itself!—never with the Italian roundness, but *effément* in its own half petulant way, provoking, exciting, arousing. There are some voices that send you to sleep, and others that keep you awake, and you will pass for a Levantine, and there is a young man here can show you. That cost of years looks like English. We exchanged cards. The young man and I mounted donkeys, and in ten minutes we had left the Frank quarter and were winding our way through the narrow, crooked and dirty streets of a thoroughly Arab neighborhood. Suddenly my companion called a halt, and said one of the buildings we had just passed was sanctuary, and for a pen, and he would inquire if they had a stock at present. He came to me in a minute, and told me that if the dealer present any of his wares on sale, I must object that they were too old; that my wife wanted a gift young enough to be taken to take intelligent care of the children. This was his plan for us to get away without revealing the real nature of our business.

"Entering the court of the building, we were met by a dirty, but rather pretty girls to preconducted us upstairs for a look at his property. In our way we passed at one of the landings four or five young men and boys, who seemed no way remarkable except for blackness, dirtiness and scantiness of clothing. A little further on we were shown four young women. It would be hard to tell their ages, with much precision, but they were probably between eighteen and twenty-five. They were very black, were said to be from the Soudan, and evidently knew very little Arabic. They were manifestly savages; appared to be from different tribes, and probably in their ordinary costume. Except some slight covering for the head and some glass beads on their necks and wrists, each wore only a single ragged garment. Two were the radiantly good-looking described by Dr. Livingstone. We were offered the opportunity to inspect, by actual handling of their teeth, the firmness of their flesh, &c., but we declined.

"The Viceroy professes a wish to break up the slave trade, and says that he is mainly hindered by rascally foreigners; yet these foreigns which I have detailed are done in his own capital, in whose streets I have scores of times seen the carriages of his harem attended by eunuchs, and once, in riding by railroad from Cairo to this, I had for fellow-passenger in the same compartments an less than five eunuchs on their way to Alexandria to dress their mistresses for a grand ball given by his Highness."

French Peasant Life.

A correspondent of the *Pall Mall Gazette* says:

"I am living in a village some forty miles south from Paris, and eight from the nearest railway station. It is probably a fair average representative of those numberless villages which stud the French landscape, and in which dwell the cultivators of that cheshoard-looking country which offers such a contrast to our own broad fields and green hedgerows. Of the life and the agriculture, of the manners and ways of the inhabitants of that land, the ordinary traveller who rushes past it in his train not confines his feet to where his history of guides him, has commonly no conception. So perhaps it may not be without interest to your readers if I try to tell them what I see and learn of the people by living among them.

"There is a peculiarity in the population in this part of France, perhaps amounting in numbers to a fourth of the number of proprietors, who are merely hired laborers and are not also owners. But these have always before their eyes the hope and the possibility of becoming proprietors, and their number is so small that they are able to secure good wages, and of which they can afford to live well, and yet gradually to lay by something. Between this class, then, and the humblest of the peasant proprietors there is no great difference in the mode of life. Their morning meal is generally hasty soup and bread, at midday bread and wine, or a bit of sausage, and at night soup again. Two or three times a week they can meat. On this diet very hard work can be and is done. But this fare is not nearly because there is in operation the motive of saving, which affects equally laborers and small owners. The former save that they may become proprietors, the latter that they may enlarge their properties. Land is the passion of the French peasant. So great is the demand that thirty to forty years' purchase is commonly paid for small properties in this neighborhood. To acquire land, it is frequently the case that debt is incurred, and this necessarily causes, in some instances, difficulties ending in foreclosure and sale.

"The amount of land which is deemed sufficient to maintain a family in comfort varies from ten to ten acres, which enables them to keep two cows. But as much as seventy acres of light soil are cultivated by a single family, with the help of a pair of horses. Those who have not the means of keeping horses of their own hire them at the necessary season from a neighboring farm, or from another small proprietor who keeps them for letting out. The larger properties or farms have horse-power threshing machines; on the smaller the flail is used. But it is obvious that a travelling steam threshing-machine might be readily brought into operation, and perform this work more cheaply. Those who have not properties of their own to occupy their whole time, hire themselves out as day laborers. There are also a few who have no property of their own, and work for wages only. Half-a-crown is the ordinary day wages at the present time, the rate having recently risen considerably. Rents are also said to be constantly advancing.

"Of society, besides the artists who happen to be residents, but who are out of doors all day, it is true we have not much. But of an afternoon in the back yard, under a sort of trellis of vines which leads from the back door of the house to the cookery cupboard, which is called a kitchen, a little conversation party is often improvised, in which the hostess, looking from her seat on the cookery cupboard, which is called a kitchen, a little conversation party is often improvised, in which the hostess, looking up from her culinary operations, the host resting on a bench, and any chance visitor, peasant or stranger who drops in from the village, take their equal part. It is a life of extreme simplicity, and absence alike of false pride and false humility. The easy yet self-respecting equality which makes its charm is partly the result of the slighter barrier of social distinctions on the Continent than among us, but something is also doubtless due to the character of the host and his family. He himself is a man of some standing in the village, being owner of several houses, besides the auberge; he is extremely intelligent, and takes a lively interest in agriculture as well as in politics. His wife is frank-looking and frank-spoken; their daughter, a handsome girl of twenty, who plays the piano really well, waits also at the table d'hôte with a word always ready in answer to any banter or compliment that may be addressed to her by the guests, most of whom are old habitues; and the son, two years younger, divides his time between shooting and painting, having caught the artistic fever in the atmosphere that surrounds him."

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