

ART. VII.—*Barber on Elocution.*

*A Grammar of Elocution, containing the Principles of the Arts of Speaking and Reading ; illustrated by appropriate Exercises and Examples.* By JONATHAN BARBER. New-Haven. 1830.

For some years past, there appears to have been a growing conviction of the importance of discovering and exhibiting the principles of impressive delivery, in order to its more general attainment. This conviction has led to several publications in this country and England. Steele, Sheridan, Walker, and some others, have done much in aid of the object; not indeed by an actual development of the principles of a just, graceful and forcible elocution; but by useful hints, and by leading succeeding writers to perceive what deficiencies must be supplied, what redundancies curtailed, and what crude and misty conceptions elucidated. In these respects, Dr. Porter's 'Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery' is an improvement upon all the efforts of his predecessors. It has, however, these defects, to mention no others;—it does not analyze speech into its elements; and where its instructions are in the main correct, it is not sufficiently precise and definite, to satisfy him who seeks the exact limits of his author's meaning.

The most successful attempt to exhibit the true elements of speech, and to impart well defined and precise ideas on the subject, is the one made by Dr. James Rush, of Philadelphia, in 1827, in a work, entitled 'The Philosophy of the Human Voice.' The work named at the head of this article, modestly professes to be 'fruit gathered from this vine.' Dr. Rush has observed and recorded facts in relation to voice and speech, in a profound and original manner. Other writers have analyzed sentences into members and words; but he has analyzed speech itself; and has shown, not the integral elements of sentences, but the vocal elements of syllables, and even of letters. Preceding writers appear to have supposed, that the musical staff was useful only to measure the intervals in the voice of song; Dr. Rush has shown it to be also capable of measuring those in the voice of speech.

Dr. Rush's work, however, does not fill the vacancy, which was most obvious among the works on this subject; though, perhaps, but for that production, the vacancy, referred to would

not now have been filled. His work is, as it professes to be, on the philosophy of the human voice. It was not designed to be a manual, for the practical purposes of elementary instruction in the art of speaking; but it supplied the basis and principal materials for such a manual, which Dr. Barber has since published.

Dr. Barber has endeavored, as his preface informs us, to adapt the whole of his work to the purposes of teaching. From the work itself, indeed, we should judge that it was primarily intended as a manual, for the use of such persons as might come under the author's own personal instruction. It has, however, received so large a measure of his effort to render it, in its details, lucid to others, as to be highly valuable to the laborious and philosophical solitary student.

On the importance, and at the same time, the extreme rarity of a truly distinct articulation, Dr. Barber makes some just and discriminating observations. He exhibits the elements of articulation; which he divides into two classes,—vowel and consonant elements. Persevering practice upon these, till the organs, which produce them, effect the necessary changes of position with rapidity, precision, and energy, is considered by this author as indispensable. By 'elements' of articulation, he means, not vowels and consonants, of which syllables are formed; but vocal elements, audible sounds,—two or three of which are often found in a single syllable, of as many letters.

The importance which Dr. Barber attaches to a complete conquest over the difficulties of articulation, may be best learned by a short quotation from his work; and it derives additional weight from the fact, that he is himself a highly accomplished and popular lecturer on Elocution.

'Reading books on elocution, and receiving directions in lectures, have been already tried long enough; and tried in vain. Practice; practice upon a series of elementary tables of the primitive sounds of speech, and their varied combinations, is the only remedy. We therefore advise, that no pupil be ever permitted to proceed to reading or declamation, until distinctness of utterance is ensured by repeated exercises on elementary sounds.' p. 16.

To facilitate the practice on which Dr. Barber so strenuously insists, he has given two tables of elementary sounds;—one of vowel sounds, containing seventeen; the other of the sounds of consonants, containing twenty-nine. On these forty-

six elements alone, in their perfect utterance, depends that very important part of just and elegant elocution,—distinct and faultless articulation.

The vowel elements are considered in the following particulars; ‘their particular structure,’ ‘their explosive power,’ and ‘their capability of prolongation.’ What Dr. Barber terms the ‘explosive power of the vowel elements,’ is a subject which, *à priori*, we should have been likely to pronounce necessarily unintelligible upon paper, or without an oral illustration. But we take pleasure in acknowledging, that such a sentence would have been premature. It is unquestionably difficult to present on paper, such a view of a subject which is appreciable, in its full extent, only by the ear, as shall be intelligible to the mind, and to give such instructions for the generation of sounds, as shall enable him who reads to produce them; and Dr. Barber is entitled to the praise of having performed this difficult task. He has thus shown himself to be possessed of analytical and descriptive talents, which, being directed to the improvement of the work before us, will greatly enhance its value, when it shall pass to a second edition.

The recitation on consonant elements contains several useful tables; the most remarkable and valuable of which is one, which presents these elements in their various combinations; and opposite to each, in the same line, a word, in which the combination of elements, as exhibited, is found. It could scarcely be expected, that such a table should be absolutely perfect in its details. This in truth is not so: but careful observation will enable the author to bring it near perfection; and the next edition will probably exhibit it in a more complete state. This recitation terminates with a collection of sentences, for the purpose of exercise in articulation, in which most of the combinations in the table are found. These sentences may be styled the gymnasium of articulation.—The general considerations presented in the fourth recitation, which treats of voice, in its properties of quality, abruptness, force, time, and pitch, constitute definitions of these several properties, to which there is frequent necessity for recurrence, in the subsequent parts of the volume. Such a study, therefore, of this recitation, as will ensure perfect familiarity with the subject, is indispensable to him who would reap all the advantage attainable by its perusal. It would occupy more of our space than can be thus appropriated, if we should transcribe these

general considerations, which would be injured by an attempt to abridge them. We therefore refer the reader to the volume itself, with a single remark on 'quality of voice.' By 'quality of voice,' is meant that peculiarity by which individuals are recognised and distinguished, when we hear without seeing them; for each has not only his own degree of the several properties of voice, viz. depth, fulness, smoothness, sweetness, and strength, or their opposites, but his own peculiar modification of that degree; so that no two persons can naturally exhibit the same 'quality of voice.'

In his recitation on the slide of the voice, Dr. Barber has presented us with a practical demonstration of Dr. Rush's theory, that the slides of the voice in speech are as measurable by the musical staff, as in song. He does, we think, demonstrate to every attentive reader who will make the experiments he describes, that these slides are those of a tone, a third, a fifth, and an octave; and also, in what cases these several movements, or slides, are properly and expressively employed, whether ascending or descending.

Scarcely any of the uses of voice is more important to solemn and dignified delivery, than power over the quantity of vocal elements. Without such a power, indeed, it is impossible that a speaker should so deliver himself, whatever may be his subject, as to leave an impression of its solemnity and dignity on the minds of his hearers. There are, in the human voice, as its Creator has constituted it, certain symbols of the emotions of mind. If, therefore, solemnity, arising from the nature of the subject he is discussing, pervade the speaker's mind, the Author of our being has furnished the voice with the means of propagating through his audience the same solemnity. To produce this effect, however, these very means must be employed, and not others instead of them. Now one of the most important of these means, is lengthened quantity in vocal elements. If, therefore, in the words which these elements constitute, extended quantity be not employed, the speaker, however eloquent, would fail in producing the emotion which he desires to propagate.

The immortal German bard, Handel, well understood the power of quantity in vocal elements. An examination of his works will prove, that wherever the sentiment he desired to harmonize is solemn, he has employed words to convey it, the elements of which are capable of extended quantity; and

where the syllables possess this capacity, he has concurred with nature, by setting them to long, rather than short notes. One example may suffice to prove the truth of this remark. The sentiment of the song of the heavenly choir in 'To the Cherubim,' is singularly solemn, and the words are admirably adapted to convey the sentiment. A majority of the syllables admit of long drawn time ; and the composer has availed himself of this natural capacity of the syllables, and has adapted them to notes of lengthened duration. Many of the syllables are, in the voice of song, capable of indefinite extension ; and he has accordingly adapted them to notes or strains of considerable length. The movement of the song is rather slow, and in this slow movement, he never adapts a long syllable or element to a short note ; and sometimes extends such a syllable through two, three, and even five measures on a single element. And this is not accident, but the result of design, for he never dwells on a short syllable, throughout the song. There is doubtless as wide a difference between the laws, as between the voices of speech and song ; but this feature is common to both ;—that dignity and solemnity are expressed by grave movements, and these are made by extended duration on the individual syllables or notes which constitute them. It was a delicate instinct or rather inspiration of nature, which taught the composer to lengthen the notes to which long syllables were adapted, when he designed to express solemnity of sentiment ; and the same inspiration will teach the reader or speaker, under similar circumstances, to give long quantity to similar syllables. How destitute of solemnity must have been the character of the strain, had the words 'Holy, Holy, Holy,' been set in a rapid movement to semiquavers ! Yet not more so, than if, in reading them, the same words were uttered in that short quantity which is heard in the utterance of the imaginary sentence, 'Rapid inundation,' 'Holy, Holy, Holy.' Now what is it, which has deprived these words of all their solemnity ? It is simply divesting them of that symbol of this quality, with which our Creator has enabled us to clothe them, and dressing them in a garb adapted to the expression of another and an opposite sentiment. Short quantity and rapid enunciation, associated with such words, are obviously out of their proper place.

Yet let it not be supposed, that in order to grave and dignified delivery, all the open vowels are to be indefinitely

lengthened. This would be intolerable affectation, and would infallibly create disgust. We say there can be no impressive delivery, without power over quantity in open vowels; but to lengthen indefinitely all such vowels, would be such an abuse of the power as nature does not prompt, and therefore the ear would not endure. In this as in other things, 'wisdom is profitable to direct;' and here the value of Dr. Barber's work is perceived. It contains the precepts of this wisdom; it leads the speaker or reader to perceive the importance of acquiring this power over quantity, the means of acquiring it, the proper places for employing it, and the various kinds of sentiment, to the expression of which the several modifications of quantity are adapted; and may thus be no inconsiderable auxiliary in the formation and improvement of style. On this part of his subject, as on others, Dr. Barber has made successful efforts to produce a practical work. We have said, that the inspirations of nature will lead the reader or speaker to the proper use of quantity; but these inspirations are imparted only to distinguished genius. Must good speaking then be confined to such? The book before us is an answer to this question. In it, the connexion between the right use of extended quantity and just and impressive delivery is intelligibly exhibited, not merely to the favored child of genius, but to any man of sound common sense; such a man is shown where and how to employ it. With this book in his hand, and with patient and persevering effort and diligent study, unless prevented by absolute organic defects, he will attain a high degree of perfection in delivery.

The recitation on the 'measure of speech' is highly interesting and important. It is interesting, as it develops physiological facts relative to the structure of the organs of speech, which demonstrate the wisdom and goodness of the Author of our being; and it is important, inasmuch as by a knowledge of these facts, the art of public speaking may be practised to a great extent, through a long series of years and with great energy, not only without prejudice to health, but with an evident tendency to its preservation. No abridgement of this recitation can do justice to its author. We shall therefore not attempt one; but content ourselves with simply recommending to every speaker, who is concerned for the preservation of his health and the continuance of his usefulness, to give it more than one careful perusal. If this recommendation be received,

and public speakers will regard those physiological laws to which delivery is subject, we shall less frequently be pained by hearing, that men, on whose lips delighted multitudes hung, are withdrawn from their labors, or find an early tomb.

The recitation on emphasis comprises that portion of the work before us, which exhibits the combination of the several elements of just and elegant elocution, or the use of the orator's working tools. 'Nothing,' observes this writer, 'will demonstrate more clearly the importance of elementary investigation, than the fact, that all those powers of the voice which it has enabled us to record, are employed in emphasis, sometimes singly, but oftener in combination.' This recitation is accordingly devoted to an exhibition of the several kinds of emphasis, or, which is the same thing, to a collection of passages from writers of prose and poetry, in the reading or delivery of which, the recorded powers of voice are severally put in requisition.

This author commends himself to our esteem, by the good sense and candor, which are discoverable in the recitation on the analysis of written language. He does not pretend, that even a perfect acquaintance with all the rules he has given, can render every person who may become familiar with them a good reader or speaker; but insists, indirectly indeed, but with sufficient plainness, on the necessity of intellect in the pupil who would succeed. Elocution is the art of delineating by the voice the special relations of thought, which existed in the mind of an author; but no one can delineate, who cannot discover them. The discovery of these relations constitutes the intellectual portion of the art; and a thorough discovery of them, especially in writing of a superior order, requires very nice and rigid analysis. Dr. Barber gives no rules for this, because his own reflection, and his examination of the efforts made by others in this department, have shown him the uselessness of such labor. He rouses the energy of the student by assuring him, that analysis is necessary. He shows by a few examples how it may be effected, and leaves him to acquire for himself the art of analysis, by time and practice. 'This,' he observes, 'is all that is necessary for the intelligent, and the dull would be more troubled by multifarious rules and exceptions, than by the difficulties which they seek to avert. Let the elements of an art be fairly unfolded, and a few conspicuous instances of their practical application afforded, and moderate ingenuity will effect the

rest. The right use of elements in other instances is only a proper exercise of individual ability, and comes by a little practice.'

The recitation on 'improvement of the voice' demands most seriously the attention of public speakers. From inattention to this particular, many, whose intellectual stores furnish ample materials for delighting and instructing large assemblies, accomplish little more than to mortify and grieve them by the unsuccessful effort to be heard. The beginnings of their sentences are found to give unequivocal evidence, that 'thoughts that breathe' exist in the speaker's mind, but in the closing members of those periods, the symbols of those thoughts,—their words,—pervade not half the area they are designed to fill; and the wearied and impatient hearer abandons in despair the effort to catch them. This evil calls loudly for a remedy, and the recitation we are noticing affords it. We recommend to public speakers its perusal, and the adoption of the discipline which it prescribes.

The fifteenth recitation is on 'the application of vocal elements, in expressing emotion.' This, and the following one on 'the defects of delivery,' are valuable portions of the work; but they are such as call for little observation. They cannot be read without the conviction that they contain valuable information, and that the latter describes graphically the characteristic defects of nearly all the faulty speakers, within the circle of our acquaintance.

In the seventeenth and last recitation is found a series of questions, designed to aid in criticising a public speaker, which may be said to embody a synopsis of the work before us, or rather of the *beau ideal* of elocution. Every excellence and defect in delivery is brought under review in them; and he who stands approved after passing the ordeal of such an investigation, must be a very accomplished speaker.

In taking our leave of this work, we may be permitted to congratulate its author on the satisfactory manner in which he has performed a service hitherto unattempted, and by many persons deemed impossible,—that of presenting to the world a work on the important science of delivery, which is philosophical in its character, and intelligible and lucid in its details. For the philosophical character of the present work, the author acknowledges himself indebted to Dr. Rush; but the praise of having made a practical application of Dr. Rush's



theory to the art of elocution, is certainly his own. His work, however, as we have before intimated, is not a faultless production. We have mentioned some particulars in which it is susceptible of improvement, and we will venture to suggest another. It would be greatly improved, if it were less concise in the few last recitations. These recitations contain a sketch indeed of his meaning, and one which he can himself fill up to advantage in the lecture-room; but solitary students are not satisfied with a sketch. The picture should be at least filled up, if it be left without that warmth and life, with which the coloring of his pencil is capable of investing it; or, to change the figure, while we acknowledge the fitness of the several parts of the skeleton to each other, and admire the wisdom displayed in their combination and arrangement, we must contend, that a more attractive object of contemplation would have been presented, had it been clothed with flesh, even if it had wanted that breath of life, with which, if he chose, the author could inspire it.

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ART. VIII.—*Bryant's Poems.*

*Poems.* By WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT. New-York. Elam Bliss. 1832.

Though Mr. Bryant's poems have been admired, quoted, and circulated in the newspapers from Maine to Florida, for at least ten years, he has never collected them until now. A complete edition of them has long been expected and wished for. The productions of his pen have been always sought with avidity. Yet with modesty equal to his merit, he has distrusted the breath of popular applause, and has declined the place which properly belongs to him in the literature of the country. We are gratified to find, that he has at last complied with the demand, which the public had a right to make.

Bryant is not a first-rate poet; but he has great power, and is original in his way. In saying this, we do not mean to be understood, that he has struck out an entirely new path. Others before him have sung the beauties of creation, and the greatness of God; but no one ever observed external things more closely, or transferred his impressions to paper in more