

**FRENCH DICTION
FOR SINGERS AND
SPEAKERS**

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French Diction for Singers and Speakers by William Harkness Arnold

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WILLIAM HARKNESS ARNOLD

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BY

WILLIAM HARKNESS ARNOLD



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PREFACE.

THE study of French diction may be undertaken by anyone who desires to sing in French, or to understand French when sung or spoken; or as a preparation for the study of the French language at school or college.

Many singers, while realizing the importance, both artistic and financial, of good diction in French, have hesitated to sing French songs except in translation. It was quite natural to suppose that the study of French diction would be as difficult as that of English diction; but such is not the fact.

Almost every educated person who travels in Europe for the first time finds himself understanding French with great difficulty, if at all. The language he reads readily sounds to his ear like an unknown tongue. The reason is simple. His ear has never been opened to hear the French vowel-sounds on which the spoken language is based.

Realizing fully the difficulties of acquiring French diction by the methods hitherto employed, the author has studied to develop a system at once definite, accurate and easy. The labor of learning it has been minimized by dividing the work between eye and ear, and by stripping every topic of useless detail.

Advantage has been taken of the fact that French is an absolutely phonetic language, to formulate a system for its

pronunciation which proceeds swiftly and surely to mastery of the subject.

To aid the memory a simple system of marking has been devised, whereby the exact diction in song or speech may be indicated with certainty, either while listening to an artist singing or to a teacher reading the text aloud.

The spoken, written and singing exercises which occur on almost every page are only intended to serve as guides for the formation of many more.

The songs with diction marked, which are inserted in the book, are selected to combine, with the practice necessary for perfecting one's attainments in diction, the greatest amount of pleasure in singing. As in the case of the singing exercises scattered through the book, those who do not care to sing them should read them aloud.

The chapter on conversational French will show the value of this system of marking as an aid to speaking, as well as to singing French.

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FRENCH DICTION.

"From the known to the unknown."

FIRST LESSON.

The Alphabet.— The sounds of the French language are represented to the eye by means of an alphabet of twenty-six letters: *A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z*, supplemented by four characters: (ˆ) the circumflex accent, (̀) the grave accent, (´) the acute accent and (·) the cedilla.

Note.— The letter *W* is found only in words of foreign origin.

Vowels and Consonants.— Although the letters composing the French alphabet might be divided into several classes, it will be sufficient for the purposes of this book to divide them into only two classes: vowels and consonants.

The vowels are *A, E, I, O, U* and *Y*; the consonants are all the remaining letters.

The Circumflex.— The first of the four characters supplementing the French alphabet is called the circumflex accent (ˆ). Whenever used it is placed over the vowels: *A* (â), *E* (ê), *I* (î), *O* (ô) and *U* (û), changing the names of these vowels to *A circumflex* (â), *E circumflex* (ê), *I circumflex* (î), *O circumflex* (ô) and *U circumflex* (û).

The Grave.—The second of the four characters supplementing the French alphabet is called the grave accent (`), and is placed over either the vowels *A* (à) or *E* (è) in certain words, changing the names of these vowels to *A grave* (â) and *E grave* (ê) respectively.

The Acute.—The third of the four characters supplementing the French alphabet is called the acute accent (´), and is placed only over the vowel *E* (é) in certain words, changing the name of this vowel to *E acute* (ê).

The Cedilla.—The fourth, and last, of the characters supplementing the French alphabet is called the cedilla (¸) and is placed only under the consonant *C* (ç), in certain words, changing the name of this consonant to *C cedilla* (ç).

The Hyphen.—The hyphen and all the usual marks of punctuation are used in the same manner in French as in English.

Syllables.—In French, words are of one or more syllables. A definite rule can be given for the division into syllables of all French words. In English, no such rule could be established. The first part of the French rule is: Every syllable ends with a vowel (vowel-sound). To this part of the rule there are a few exceptions which will be noted in a subsequent paragraph. The second part of the rule for dividing French words into syllables may be stated thus: every syllable begins with a consonant. So fundamental is the principle that every syllable should begin with a consonant, that the final consonant of a word forms a syllable with the initial vowel of the following word, whenever the following word begins with a vowel. The complete