

THE ESSENTIALS OF ELOCUTION

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The Essentials of Elocution by Alfred Ayres

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ALFRED AYRES

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BY

ALFRED AYRES, *Author of "The Orator," "The Verralist,"*

"THE MENTOR," ETC.

Emblem

"Art is the perfection of nature."—SIR THOMAS BROWN.

"The perfection of art is to conceal art."—QUINTILIAN.



FUNK & WAGNALLS

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1886

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PREFACE.

THIS is the shortest treatise on the Art of Reading that has ever been written in the English language ; yet, short as it is, it is of more practical value than are all the others—which is not saying much in its praise, for all the others are of no practical value whatever.

The mode of procedure herein recommended, in order to become skilled in elocution, is wholly unlike anything that has hitherto found its way into print. Yet what is here is older than the oldest of the venerable "systems" that have come down to us from former generations, for what is here dates back to the time when men began to exchange ideas by means of a spoken language. Then, as ever, the sensible man—spoke in his own language or that of another—spoke naturally, and not as the elocution of the books, and of most teachers of the art, would have us speak, for that tends to make only bow-wowers and sing-songers.

ALFRED AYRES.

NEW YORK, March, 1886.

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THE
ESSENTIALS OF ELOCUTION.

ELOCUTION is the art of speaking language so as to make the thought it expresses clear and impressive.

This is best done by speaking the language as we should speak it if the thought were ours, and the language came to us as we give it utterance.

If the thought were ours, and we *extemporized* the language to express it, we should never fail to speak with "good accent and good discretion;" we should never fail to speak naturally and intelligently, and consequently impressively.

If this is true—and who will question it?—then the first, the most important

thing to be attended to by the reader is to make himself acquainted with the author's thought. If he does not do this, and do it thoroughly too, good reading is impossible—ay, though he may be the most learned of the learned in orotunds, sostenutos, whispers and half-whispers, monotones, basilar tones, and guttural tones, high pitches, middle pitches, low pitches, and all the rest of that old trumpery that has made many a noisy, stilted reader, but never an intelligent, agreeable one. He that understands and appreciates his author will *instinctively* know what tone to read him in; a knowledge of gutturals and basilar, of pitches and whispers, will help him not a whit. This complicated old machinery does not, never has, and never will make anything but mechanical readers—readers that, instead of being occupied with the thoughts of their authors, are occupied with the sound of their own voices, which is fatal

to the object the reader has in view—that of interesting his auditors.

Opening at random a treatise recently published entitled "Philosophic Elocution," I find in the chapter headed "Qualities of Voice" the following: "It [the aspirate] is an impure quality, akin to the guttural and whisper, coming as it were between them, and next in attenuated quality to the latter. It means, properly, 'sound emitted in rough breathings' or hissings, and is necessary as expressive of violent passion. It then becomes comparative excellence in the interpretation of *hate, aversion, fear, anger, frenzy, horror*, and the like passions. Where these rage *intensely* the aspirate added to the guttural, still further corrupting and vitiating the orotund or fundamental voice, gives thereto that *vicious, fiendish character* expressive of *dire revenge* and *destructiveness*, which are otherwise inexpressible. This quality

of voice may be created as follows: Raise the tongue at the root, high toward the palate, obstructing as much as possible the passage; contract and close the GLOTTIS still more than in guttural tones; make strong effort to obstruct the egress of air, while with strongest pressure of abdominal dorsal and pectoral muscles it is forced out through the closed glottis and obstructed passage. Thus, while uttering the words, there will be an escape of air which is not converted into speech, but, driven out with utmost force, accompanies it with *harsh* and *hissing sound*. This is the aspirate as used in the interpretation of the malignant passions."

It is strange that intelligent persons can be persuaded to believe that this kind of "philosophy" ever has assisted any one to become a reader! It is this kind of philosophy that has justly brought the professional elocutionist into great