SCIENCE.

THE VOWEL ELEMENTS IN SPEECH.—Mr. SAMUEL PORTER of Hartford, Conn., has a communication on this subject, in *The American Journal of Science and Art* occupying nearly 40 pages, in which he has successfully systematized that before known, and has presented certain new relations which seem to harmonize the apparently conflicting statements of other writers. The novelty in his system is that it assigns to different places, and thus ranges under separate groups, vowels which have been commonly viewed as differing merely in degree of openness. This is ingeniously illustrated by a diagram of palato-lingual positions. This table of simple vowel elements embraces, in nine groups, many modifications of vowels as heard in some of the modern languages. The following principles are the key to the system:

I. All the vowels are articulated primarily between the tongue and palate. Some of them, those usually called labials (*fold, cone, all, &c.*) are further modified by the action of the lips. All are thus palato-linguals simply, or else labio-palato-linguals, and the latter consists of a palato-lingual part, capable of being employed by itself, and of a labial part which is dependant on and superadded to the other.

II. The articulation is effected as between the tongue and the palate in the following manner: The organs are so disposed, and the muscles of the tongue with those also of the soft palate, so put into action as to make a firm tube or passage fitted for the reverberance of the sound which comes from the larynx. This passage so differs for all the vowels as to modify the sound in a particular manner for each—the cases excepted, of course, in which the same palato-lingual articulation makes two distinct vowels as used with or without the labial modification. The labial modification is effected by a firm contraction, and more or less protrusion of the lips together with a right tension of the cheeks, so as to cause a further reverberation of sound, and thus give the vowel a different character to the ear; the sound is reverberated through two passages or cavities instead of one.

III. The vowels—labial and non-labial—are assorted into groups according as the palato-lingual passage extends more or less forward. The passage is either just at the throat, or is extended and lengthened by joining the lateral margins of the tongue to the sides of the palate, till finally the tube, so formed, reaches quite forward under the dome of the hard palate, and nearly to the tip of the tongue. For the anterior groups the place is more precisely determined upon the palate than upon the tongue, owing to the extensile property of the latter.

IV. Each group thus determined embraces individual vowels, differing in *degree*, as more or less open or close. The differences are effected in the palato-lingual passage by approximating more or less to the palate the part of the tongue at the place of articulation, especially at the front terminus of the passage. The passage may at the same time be narrowed, more or less, as more or less of the margin of the tongue is put into contact with the borders of the palate. The labials will need no other or further criterion; for in their case the more or less openness of the lips will correspond to that between the tongue and palate.

Tone of Vowels.—The same author in a satisfactory manner treats certain disputed points concerning the relation of the vowels to tone or pitch. Have the vowels each what may be called in any sense their natural pitch? This, if so, can help little to a knowledge of their proper vowel characters, which remains the same under every variety of pitch. Is the peculiar character of each vowel to be explained as a certain combination of harmonic notes? This, if so, will not help much in our physiological inquiries till we have a better understanding of the mechanical conditions upon which such combinations depend in other cases. Prof. Max Müller, in reporting the discoveries of Hemholst on this point, tells us the vowel quality is to be explained as exactly analogous to the *timbre*, by which instruments, as the violin, flute, harp, &c., are distinguished one from another. But we have voices differing as do the instruments to which we liken them, yet each voice uttering all the vowels and giving to every one its peculiar character. We cannot, therefore, accept this as an adequate explanation.

There are two or three facts under this head which, if not already familiar, can be easily verified. *First:* If we utter in succession any two or more of the simple vowel elements, we shall find them naturally taking a different pitch, one from the other; and referring to the series of groups arranged according to the place of articulation as reaching more or less forward upon the tongue and palate, we find that, in passing from any vowel in the scale to one further forward and similar in degree of openness, the voice rises in pitch, while, proceeding in the other direction, it as naturally falls. The following is proposed as a physiological explanation of the fact. The movements of the tongue have an influence upon those of the larynx, through the intermediation of the hyoid bone, a movable fulcrum with which both organs are connected by muscle and ligament. The connection is such that a movement of the tongue will require a readjustment of the muscles of the larynx, to keep the latter organ in the same place and condition as before, and so observe the same pitch. Hence, through the two, successive vowels can be uttered on the same pitch, and it is much more easy and natural to vary the pitch. *Second:* Every singer knows that only with certain vowels can the extremely high notes be fairly reached, and only with certain others, again the lowest. The connection just mentioned between the tongue and the larynx will suffice to explain this also, though we would not affirm that there is no other cause concurrent therewith. *Third:* The vowels cannot be uttered on every pitch with equal purity of tone, and there would seem to be one certain key for each, on which the purest tone is heard—the purest musically, we mean, that is, the most free from discordant intermixture. The same cause above mentioned may have an agency in this case also, but the author thinks that here the effect may be due primarily to the form and dimensions of the vowel-tube.

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with especial reference to the
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