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THE LONDON BOARD SCHOOLS.

BY JULIA S. TUTWEILER.

I.—THE TONIC SOL-FA METHOD, AS USED IN THE LONDON PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

THE MONSTER CHILDREN'S CONCERT.

On that memorable day for me, in May, '76, when I saw 4,000 children keeping holiday, and receiving their prizes in the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, no part of the show interested me more than the singing. It was the first and only time in my life that I had heard an orchestra of 4,000 voices,—for, unfortunately, I have never lived in Boston. The exquisite precision and clearness of the notes could not have been surpassed had each child been one string in a vast instrument of music played by a Titan's hand. I do not know how large was the audience that listened to this concert, but I should say there were at least 20,000 persons present. The first concert ever given at the Crystal Palace by the Tonic Sol-fa Association was attended by 30,000 auditors. If a choir of trained musicians had attracted this vast assemblage, it would not have seemed strange; but these singers were emphatically the "children of the people." Their musical training had only been an incidental part of the common-school education they had been receiving. None of them were more than fourteen years of age, most of them were much younger; yet skilled musicians could find pleasure in listening to their music.

My curiosity was excited as to the mode by which such excellent results had been attained with such a small expenditure of time. After the concert and the giving of the prizes, when the singers had melted into the vast crowd which thronged the halls of that palace of Aladdin, I found myself at a table in one of the restaurants with several bright-looking London girls. I always take pains, when traveling abroad, to make acquaintances whenever it is possible, and I have in this manner learned many valuable and interesting facts. My friend and myself soon ascertained that these girls were pupil-teachers of the Board-schools,—pleased and happy at being intrusted with the responsibility of assisting for the day in the care of the pupils from their school.

I asked one of them to let me see the book from which the children had sung. When I opened it, the long array of letters, separated by dots and dashes, seemed as puzzling a set of hieroglyphics as one of the faces of Cleopatra's Needle, and I had to ask explanations. The pupil-teacher's clear and interesting answer was my first introduction to the Tonic Sol-fa. If I had ever busied myself with musical matters, I should have known of it long before; for it is a movement now more than thirty years old. I feel sure that in Boston even the *unmusical* know everything that can be known as to the Tonic Sol-fa Method; and that the *musical* have long ago made improvements upon it. But our journal is not the *Boston Journal of Education*, but the "NATIONAL," and I am sure there are in the Nation,—far away on the prairies of Illinois, and among the Sierras of the West,—many teachers who know as little now about the "Tonic Sol-fa" as I did in May, 1876; so for their sakes the initiated will have patience with me while I explain in rough outline this

METHOD OF TEACHING VOCAL MUSIC.

A thoughtful essayist once observed that even if a revolution should break out in Germany, there would never be a repetition there of the disgraceful scenes of brutality which have stained the history of France. He gave as a reason the fact that the whole people in Germany, from the highest to the lowest, are thoroughly *humanized* by their knowledge and practice of the art of music. Perhaps this writer may have been led too far by his enthusiasm; but Luther went still farther: "The devil," said this plainest of plain speakers, "The devil is afraid of music." Farther still, even to an apotheosis of his favorite art, a writer has gone who says: "Music is the soul of the fine arts. All the rest we leave with the body upon earth; but this one rises with the soul to its most supernatural heights,—its companion throughout eternity." It is strange to me that there are still so many schools in the United States, where with infinite pains and labor the youth of our land are taught languages which have been spoken, or are spoken, in limited areas for limited periods of time, while they are learning nothing of the one universal language, common alike to all ages and lands,—music!

An English nobleman, in a late letter on the subject of the temperance movement in his island, urges its leaders to pay more attention to the treatment of the causes of the disease of drunkenness, and less to its symptoms. He says that the same means which have gradually banished habitual inebriety from the life of the cultivated classes, would do the same for the lower. Men *must* have some relaxations agreeable enough to make them forget for awhile the pains of "this long malady which we call life." The opium of the Chinese, the hasheesh of the Hindoo, the adulterated rum of the English workman, the strichnine-whiskey of the Southern negro, are the first and lowest modes by which the "primitive man" seeks this forgetfulness of self. When higher sources of consolation are opened to men, and they are rendered capable of partaking of them,

they gradually surrender the lower of them of their own accord. The exceptions to this statement only serve to prove the rule. Every effort which tends to make any enjoyment above that of the brute more attainable for the masses, is a crusade against sensuality and its consequent degradation. Zachary Macaulay compared the habit of novel-reading to dram-drinking; but even were this so, to replace the latter by the former is a gain for humanity.

If it is really possible to teach everybody to sing, and to read music as readily as they read printed books, by using the usual notation, this end ought long ago to have been reached. But while there are some favored cities, and even countries, which have accomplished much, very much, toward this end, the fact remains that reading is a much more general accomplishment than singing. It is therefore worth while for all who feel an interest in the progress of human happiness to note carefully the claims of the system which is offered in place of,—or rather as auxiliary to,—the old notation. So now, after this long exordium, I come really to

THE TONIC SOL-FA METHOD.

First let us consider its history. In the year 1812 there was living at Norwich the daughter of an English clergyman, who was very active in all kinds of philanthropic work. A young Sunday-school teacher one day begged for some assistance in learning enough of music to be able to sing with the children whom he taught. Simple tunes were played over and over on the piano, while he endeavored to imitate with his voice the sounds. It soon occurred to Miss Glover,—the lady in question,—that if she pasted letters over the keys of the piano, and then wrote on paper the letters corresponding with those placed on the keys, the youth would be able to teach himself. So she chose the last twelve letters of the alphabet, and placed them over the white and black keys. But the question soon arose: "Why not place the old *Sol-fa* syllables beneath the pitch-notes, and slide them up and down following the key-note of each tune, following the genuine fashion of solmization?" The letters were therefore discarded except where they were necessary in the beginning of a tune to tell where its pitch lay. All that was left was a *Sol-fa* notation of music. The thought of music thus cleared from the mystery of flats and sharps was so fascinating that Miss Glover was led on with increasing interest. She began a series of experiments with the children of various charity schools. She had received a thorough musical education, and had obtained from Dr. Marsh the idea of a *family of keys*,—the principal major with its relative minor, and their offspring, the key of the dominant with its relative minor, and of the sub-dominant with its relative minor. On this idea her ladder of tune was founded. Her way of writing music was nothing more serious than the letters of this diagram, already familiarized to the mind's eye, written down in horizontal lines.

As in every important movement, so in this, a successor was found to take up and carry still further the work so modestly begun. Mr. Curmen, a gentleman who declares that he has "no natural advantages of ear nor voice," had with infinite pains learned a few tunes, and, with the assistance of a friend, was endeavoring to teach these to a class of about 200 children, whom he assembled twice a week. He succeeded in teaching the children by dint of much practice a few tunes, but could not impart to them any knowledge of theory, although, in order to obtain this end, he took lessons himself with indefatigable ardor.

MR. CURMEN'S EXPERIENCE.

He says: "I could neither pitch a well-known tune properly, nor by any means 'make out' from the notes the plainest psalm-tune or song which I had not heard before. I remember being often told that I did not mark correctly the 'half tones'; and I thought if these same 'half tones' were but marked plainly on the music before me, how gladly and earnestly I would strive to mark them with my voice. But, as it was, I was continually afraid of these 'half tones'; I knew they were on the staff somewhere before me, but I could not see them; they lay concealed, but dangerous to tread upon, like a snake in the grass. No sooner had I with great pains taught my ear an interval, than I found frequently the very next example of what seemed to be the same thing to be quite a different thing by half a tone. I longed for some plan by which these puzzling deceivers might be named and detected in all their shifting abodes on the staff.

"Some time after this a lady kindly lent me the book describing Miss Glover's system. 'Well,' said I, after a cursory glance, 'if the notation is puzzling, I am sure this is more puzzling by far,' and I laid the book aside. But having again occasion to teach children, I thought proper to give it a more thorough perusal, and was induced by it to study the science of music itself in the best works I could obtain, especially those of Dr. Calcutt and Mr. Graham. I soon found that the old method of teaching had deceived me with the skill of knowledge instead of giving me its kernel. The *thing*,—Music,—I perceived to be very different from its names and signs. I found it much more simple and easy in itself, and incomparably more beautiful, than the mere explanation of the signs of the old notation with which most elementary books are commonly filled.

"I now saw that Miss Glover's plan was to teach, first, the simple and beautiful thing,—music,—and to delay the introduction to the ordinary antiquated mode of writing it until the pupil had obtained a mastery of the thing itself. Her method was, beyond all controversy, more deeply established on the principles of science than any other; and by giving it a fair trial on myself and on a little child who lived in the same house, I became convinced that it was the most simple of all, the most easy to teach, and the most easy to learn. *The methods of teaching which are truest to the nature of the thing taught, and the least artificial, are always the most successful.* In the course of a fortnight I found myself,—*mirabile dictu*,—actually at the height of my previous ambition, being able to 'make out' a psalm-tune from the notes, and to pitch it myself! It was the untying of the tongue,—the opening of a new world of pleasure."

A VISIT TO MISS GLOVER'S SCHOOLS

to see in actual operation the method she has been quietly propagating for so many years, was Mr. Curmen's first thought after being thoroughly convinced of the worth of this new revelation. He recorded his impressions at the time, thirty-eight years ago, in a magazine article:

"As we entered the room the soft and regulated tone, and the sweet blending of the voice, such as take not the ear by force, but steal on the senses by some magic spell, assured us that music,—real music,—with all its subduing power, dwelt there. On the gallery were seated all the younger children, with heads erect, and shoulders back, singing with the *Sol-fa* syllables, and as they sung looking eagerly at an upright board that stood at a little distance from the foot of the gallery. On this board were printed, one above the other, the initial letters of the *Sol-fa* syllables, showing much shorter distances between *m* and *f*, and between *t* and *d*,—the third and fourth, and seventh and eighth of the scale,—than between the other notes. In this system *d* is always the key-note. This musical ladder, as it was called, corresponds with what is now called the modulator. By the side of the ladder stood a little monitor with a wand in her hand. As she pointed to the notes the children sang them. She held in charge with her other hand a little infant, the youngest of the school, who could scarcely stand; but who, nevertheless, could sing. The children are taught to sing in this way, looking at the exact intervals as depicted on the musical ladder. They are thus rendered perfectly familiar with an accurate pictorial representation of interval, and carry a musical ladder in the mind's eye wherever they go."

More advanced classes were visited, and the results of the training were found to be as wonderful as might have been expected from its elementary stage.

Miss Glover's method contained a very few singing-exercises. But these embraced all the intervals of the scale, and must be learned with great precision and accuracy. It is remarkable that this principle was employed in the Romish Church 800 years ago, in teaching the church-music. The pupil was first made to learn thoroughly one particular chant, so as to know all its intervals by heart, and was then carried on to learn others, always referring everything back to the first lessons."

Mr. Curmen now prepared some little simple lessons containing this method as improved and modified by himself. It was in 1841 that this little book, the first of a long series, appeared. The seed fell into kindly soil, germinated and grew. In 1851, ten years later, appeared the first number of a periodical devoted to the Tonic Sol-fa. It professed to be a "Magazine of Vocal Music for the People"; and published in the new notation, singing-lessons, exercises, glees, and even an oratorio-chorus. A new impulse was given to the movement; classes were started all over London, and even in distant cities.

In 1855 the movement had grown so large that at a meeting to which "all who are or have been pupils under the Tonic Sol-fa Method" were invited; four thousand pupils assembled, filling aisles, window-sills, vestry, and pulpit-stairs. Of this meeting Mr. Curmen wrote:

"How is it that this little band, without an influential name among them, has grown to such proportions? It is not merely that they possessed a method which can teach singing in half the usual time, and a notation which can supply music at half the usual cost; nor is it that new and popular music has been furnished, nor that the teachers have been diligent and self-sacrificing; but because a blessing from on high has rested on our labors, raising up for us many whole-hearted friends, and prospering our efforts. Let us therefore take courage to go on in our work with new energy and love."

It is only when the leaders of our educational reform are filled with zeal such as this,—fanaticism, if you will,—that great results are accomplished. Those who have thought long and deeply on the subject of popular education will not think the zeal of the propagator of this movement extravagant.

AMONG THE MAGAZINES.

The National Quarterly Review (April).

Problems Physical and Metaphysical.
The Elements of National Finance.
France: Her Nine Years of Probation.

British Quarterly Review (April).

Free Trade and Protection.
Christian Theology and the Modern Spirit.

Princeton Review (May).

University Work in America; by Prof. B. L. Gildersleeve.
The Idea of Cause; by Prof. F. Brown, Harvard College.