

Music in the Home at Christmas

By W. A. McIntyre, LL.D., Principal Winnipeg Normal School

THERE are many forces at work shaping the ideals of men and modifying their conduct. It is no exaggeration to name music as one of the greatest of these forces. When man is alone he sings to beguile the time; when he is with others he sings to cement companionship; when he is at peace he sings for very joy, and when he is at war he sings to inspire hope and courage. Should he dance he calls upon music to suggest the rhythm, should he worship he needs must use the universal language to express his highest thought.

The songs of home and country, songs of devotion, and loving friendship should be known by all. They give pleasure and provide recreation, and in a peculiar way prepare for service in the institutions of civilization. Music lifts the individual out of the commonplace, touches his feelings and inspires to noble action; it transforms society, uniting individuals, giving coherence to their organizations and permanent form to their loftiest aspirations.

Considering the home, it may be said that music lends a charm to its life and makes it attractive. It aids in government. It softens childish asperities, sweetens the temper and predisposes to obedience. Harmony is the soul of music, and where this reigns discord vanishes. Parents who love song are less likely to be snappish and less likely to stir up antagonisms than those who lack musical appreciation. Good music promotes cheerfulness and goodfellowship, and a mutual dependence of all who live together in a social community. It prepares not only for domestic duties but for good citizenship. In the homes of the poor, especially, it is a great blessing. There life is serious, and there is little to cheer and comfort. A merry child, singing the songs of the people, is an angel of beauty in any household. He gladdens the heart, cheers the hope and drowns the sorrows. He is the minister of sweetness and beauty. He dispenses the one great enjoyment which is not the sole prerogative of the wealthy.

Music in the home at Christmas time! That is when it is particularly fitting. Then it is that hearts are most responsive; then it is that the noblest aspirations and kindest intentions are paving the way for kindly action.

Among the songs of Christmas time that may fitly find recognition in the home are those which centre in the marvellous story of the Babe of Bethlehem. Who has not been touched by the sweet simplicity of such an air as Luther's hymn?

What family cannot join in such songs as, "When Shepherds Watched their flocks," "Hark! the Herald Angels sing," "Nazareth," or the old, old carols, "Good King Wenceslas," and "The First Noel"? These and others of their kind are the birthright of every child. Never do children seem so sweet as when singing the Christmas hymns; never do mothers seem so holy as when joining in the praises of the Manger Child. Never do the responsibilities of parenthood rest so completely upon fathers as when they listen to the simple Christmas melodies.

There are, however, other Christmas songs than these—songs of giving and receiving, songs of the fireside and the family reunion, newer songs with their catching rhythm, and old time songs with their simple and ever-popular melodies. There is this wonderful thing about the songs of Christmas—they unite not only youth and age, but the past and the present. No matter how the catches of the day hold us during the months of the year, at Christmas our hearts yearn for the old favorites—the songs our mothers sang, the songs of the Motherland and Home.

Nor is it all song. Christmas has its own instrumental creations. At no other season does one expect to hear a children's orchestra, and at no other time does one expect to hear such strains from the rich toned organ. Nor have the

masters of music produced anything more wonderful than the great oratorios in which voices and instruments blend. And the richest and most charming of these centres in the life of the Messiah. Probably it is true that the cantatas of Christmas are more numerous and more worthy than all others combined.

Well chosen songs and good instrumental accompaniment will not ensure good music. Only those who are prepared in heart and who are trained to make the best use of their talents, can secure effects that are desirable. Scrooge, the miser, thinking only of his books, his mortgages and his debtors could not produce anything better than a cackle. Scrooge, transformed by the ministry of the three spirits, caused his little world to overflow with mirth and laughter. It is at Christmas time that hearts are most responsive to the appeals of the best and noblest. Then love and smiles are the common language. Then the generous feelings seeking avenues for expression break forth in loving deeds and bursts of song. The melody within finds its counterpart in the melody of sound.

As we think of the Christmas season now approaching we can wish for nothing better than that in the homes of the land the gracious ministry of song will sweeten and purify both thought and expression to such a degree that peace and goodwill may prevail and all unrighteousness and ugliness be excluded.

We can easily picture the ideal family group at Christmas time. The children and the grandchildren have met at grandfather's old home. There is hand-shaking and hugging and laughing—yes, and weeping too. The old days are recalled, and stories of the boys and girls are recited as if it were only yesterday that they went about bareheaded and barefooted. Then comes the Christmas dinner—turkey and cranberry sauce, plum pudding and apple pie. Then the Christmas tree with presents for all. After this begins the story-telling and the games—games for the older folk and games for the children—yet the same games for all, for all are children on that night. Last of all comes the singing. First in order are the good old songs. Some of the boys have brought their violins, and one of the girls plays the organ. She is the envied of all. Mary will sing a solo. Peter and Martha, though blushing and self-conscious, will sing a duet which will be declared as heavenly and sublime. Grandpa may even be persuaded to give a verse of some old Gaelic air, and little baby Lucy will be too sweet for anything as she sings her nursery songs. Yet all of this but leads to the choruses in which everybody takes part. There is "Home, Sweet Home" and "Dixie Land," and "Afton Water," and then the time-honored hymns known in every countryside. Last will come the Christmas hymns, a fitting introduction to the worship which follows, and which concludes, as it should, with "Oh God Our Help in Ages Past."

As we think of such a reunion we can but feel that it is the music which gives it life, which removes all shyness and aloofness, which makes heart meet heart in fond affection. Yes, on such occasions little jealousies and rivalries so common in family circles, are forgotten, and love reigns supreme. And though war may be raging and death may be stalking through the land, the family circle will, for the time, forget it all in the feeling of thankfulness and joy that comes from happy reunion.

Thank God for Christmas! Thank God for song! Thank God, above all, for the songs of Christmas.

And the night shall be filled with music. And the cares that infest the day, Shall fold their tents like the Arabs, And as silently steal away.

—Longfellow.
If music be the food of love, play on; Give me excess of it, that surfeiting, The appetite may sicken and so die. That strain again! it had a dying fall: O it came to my ear like the sweet sound That breathes upon a bank of violets, Stealing and giving odour!

—Shakespeare.



Christmas without Music would be like June without Roses.

Oh! Daddy!—Think of It!—A WILLIAMS!

I HAD wished so much for a piano, a really good piano. But to think Christmas Day should bring with it—a WILLIAMS!

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