

THE TONIC SOL-FA VS. STAFF NOTATION.

To the Editor of the Journal:

Mr. Seward seems to have much more regard for the old staff notation than he had when we saw him at Albany. He gave the impression there that Tonic Sol-fa could do pretty much everything; he went so far in that direction that some of his friends said that they "hoped Mr. Seward would not claim that Beethoven symphonies, and music of a similar character, could be played from it." He now says:

"The Tonic Sol-fa may be supposed to approach that venerable member of the musical community, the Staff, with language something like the following: 'I have for you the most profound respect. You have come down to us from antiquity, and you hold in your embrace the musical treasures of the world. But you need an interpreter. A large proportion of the human race cannot understand you, and to them these precious treasures are hidden away and lost. I will take the masses of the people and instruct them. I will lead them up these difficult heights by a gentler grade, and will gradually raise them to the level of your noblest thoughts.'"

This is all very beautiful, but the picture is not complete until we imagine this "venerable member of the musical community" looking down and weeping over this poor little fellow's ignorance and injustice in heaping upon this "venerable member" the responsibility of the failure on the part of the musical profession in trying to make of human beings mechanical musical instruments, with which to find these "precious treasures." Mr. Seward says, "Mr. Holt will try it sometime,—then his testimony will be as strong as the strongest." I am aware that Tonic Sol-fa is as contagious as the measles, and may become epidemic for a time in some localities in this country. If I had been as much "exposed" ten years ago, I might have "caught" it. I am older now, and hope to "escape," for I have observed that it goes much "harder" with those who do not have it when "young." But, joking aside, I shall teach the Tonic Sol-fa notation just as soon as Mr. Seward, or any other teacher, convinces me that I can be of greater service to my pupils by so doing. Will Mr. Seward take the same position with regard to the Staff notation, and drop the Tonic Sol-fa notation when he is convinced that equally good results can be obtained by going directly to the Staff?

Now, if Mr. Seward will take a copy of his exercise, published in my article, I will direct him how to mark it, and he will have a facsimile of the one from which the girls sang.

Whether or not there is positive pitch in nature, we will not spend time in discussing; but that there is a property in musical sounds ascertained by scientific and mathematical demonstration, known and accepted as standard, absolute or positive pitch (yet varying in different countries), upon the principle of which all musical instruments are constructed, and upon the representation of which all musical instruments are played, I hardly think Mr. Seward will deny.

Neither can he claim that this principle has any representation whatever to the eye, in the Tonic Sol-fa notation. The household in which there is not some kind of a musical instrument is the very rare exception. Now, shall the instruction in music in our public schools be given so as to save much time and expense to the large majority who will wish to play some kind of a musical instrument, or shall all this be lost? I can do no better than to quote from my article in the *Transcript* (Boston) of June 18, upon this point:

"I asked a class of girls the other day how many had pianos at home, and thirty-seven hands were raised. Suppose these thirty-seven girls wished to learn to play the piano. It will cost at least two hundred dollars more for the instruction of each of these thirty-seven girls upon the piano if they practise singing all their school-life from the Tonic Sol-fa notation than it would if they had learned

from the Staff notation, and had become perfectly familiar with all the different keys and characters used. When these things are considered, it becomes a matter of great importance whether or not music teachers find the true, natural method of teaching singing with our Staff notation, and unite upon it."

Mr. Seward reprints the first line in the exercise in music to show that I am either very ignorant with regard to chromatic tones, or I have been guilty of telling an untruth. Now, if Mr. Seward is not accustomed to think more carefully in methods of teaching than he reads, it is no wonder that he is going around through the Tonic Sol-fa notation to get to that of the Staff. I said that this exercise can be represented in the Tonic Sol-fa notation as simple scale intervals having only one chromatic tone. Now, if it is impossible to use these notes before and after the chromatic tones as "bridge notes," then I am wrong, and can only plead ignorance of that wonderful invention, the Tonic Sol-fa notation. I think the wonder and "astonishment" will be that Mr. Seward should have made such a blunder as he "certainly did."

There is no chance for any discussion between Mr. Seward and myself upon what the musical profession have failed to do with the Staff notation, or what has been accomplished with the Tonic Sol-fa notation. I should admit all that he claims, and probably more. I have never taught singing on any other principle than the Tonic Sol-fa. I agree with Mr. Curwen in *methods of teaching* in every particular except one. Mr. Seward says, "One teacher cannot lift up the whole world." That is doubtless very true; still I shall do what I can, and I confidently expect to have Mr. Seward to help me one of these days. Of one thing I am confident, and that is, that no "portion of the human race," whether in or "outside of Boston," will need the Tonic Sol-fa notation when teachers learn, first, how to teach; second, how to name what has been taught; and third, how to represent with the Staff notation what is already known.

Now, Mr. Seward is cordially invited to visit me in my school next June, to be convinced of this fact. He shall have the privilege of writing upon the blackboard any exercise he pleases, commencing in C, and going anywhere he likes in any of the nine keys through E and A flat,—the exercise to be no more difficult than the one given his pupils; and we will try and sing them without figures above or below the notes; and while I will not promise that they shall be sung without any mistakes, he shall have the privilege and satisfaction of laughing at all of our failures.

Mr. Seward says the "average mind of the masses cannot understand the Staff notation." The difficulty is *not there*, Mr. Seward. The trouble is in the "average mind" of the teachers who are attempting to teach music, who have not studied or qualified themselves for the profession of teaching.

Boston, Mass., 1881.

H. E. HOLT.

General Information.

PIGMY ELEPHANTS.—It is commonly supposed that all elephants are huge creatures, and though, as a rule, they are an enormous size, there is one species which is very small. This kind is found in the Malay peninsula, and some specimens have been procured which are only from twenty-eight to thirty-six inches in height, with a thick coat of bristly hair or wool. Two of these pigmy elephants were recently exhibited in New York. They are described as playful and inoffensive, holding out their tiny trunks for strangers to touch—a practice of which they were particularly fond. They used to keep up a swaying movement, sometimes from side to side, sometimes backward and forward. One of them would occasionally take hold of a visitor's hand, gently curl his trunk around it, carry it carefully to his mouth, and then "trumpet" with great glee.—*Little Folks' Magazine*.