



### THE MUSICAL EDUCATION OF OUR PEOPLE.

(Synopsis of paper read by Mrs. F. H. Torrington at National Council Conference.)

**I**N the distribution of talent God knows no distinction between high and low-born humanity. The brightest gems are sometimes found in the most unlikely places, and often "in a wooden house a golden room is found"; sometimes we find the natural voice (the first requisite of a singer) amongst the opulent class, but far more frequently, in the ranks of the poor of our race. Instances of the discovery of extraordinary voices among the Italians, with scant clothing and bare feet,—organ grinders, coachmen, quarry men, colliers and the like, who, being assisted, rise to prominence in the artistic world,—are too numerous to require more than a passing allusion.

The love of music is part of our nature, it knows no nationality or creed, no difference in rank, condition or class. If we are enjoined to cultivate God-given talent, and are held responsible for doing so by our Maker, then this duty is clearly before all. The helpless cannot help themselves, and assistance is implied from some quarter or other. In recent years various agencies have been set in motion to ameliorate the condition of the helpless, alleviate poverty and distress, to raise to a higher level the desires and tastes of our less favoured fellow-creatures,—and it is now being realised more than ever, that music can be made to serve as a material aid to such a desirable end. For, being a healthy amusement and recreation, it cultivates and refines tastes, and the love for it having been once felt, a lasting and inspiring influence for good, to the individual, and community, accrues.

Any casual observer must have noticed how the influence of music is felt—by the tired soldier on the long and weary march,—by the crowd who are caught by the strains of a military band, which at once joins in the march, or quickstep, to the rhythm of the music,—and who has not seen the eye of the Scotch man, or woman, kindle as the sound of the bagpipes at the head of a regiment of Highlanders has marched past?—while it is

a common and everyday matter for even the children in the streets to be seen following the itinerant musician of 'The Handle' type, and who are also caught by the ethereal music of the German band. Suffice it to say, that love for music may be said to be universal (even in stolid old England, and let us also say her colonial branches). The tremendous strides in musical development made in England of late years, and the public demand for institutions where music is taught, such as the Royal Academy, and the Royal College of Music, in higher branches, and more in line with what we are striving after—viz., taking hold of the middle and lower classes,—is done to a great extent by the largest music school in the world—the Guildhall School of Music, which is under the auspices of the corporation of London, an example, which, if followed by our Canadian corporations, would do wonders for the recreation of our people.

Vocal music is taught, to a necessarily limited extent, in our Public Schools, and a slight musical knowledge is gained thereby, but music is not given enough real attention, nor treated in such a serious manner as to affect materially the musical education of our young people. Could the study of musical instruments be introduced, then indeed, musical education would show actual progress, for in order to play any instrument, one *must* understand the elements of music; and the knowledge once obtained proves a source of profit and pleasure ever after.

The study of the violin, and other orchestral instruments, by boys and girls is becoming general, and many amateur orchestral organisations are being formed throughout the British Empire.

We are not dealing with this subject from a "tramp class" point of view, but from the point of what can be done to keep our honest but poor people above the possibility of sinking to that level. It would be well to analyse the circumstances of the individuals who are so unfortunate in the battle of life, that they gradually fall instead of rise in the social scale, and it will be found that in such lives music is absent,—not that they are not susceptible to its influences when they come within its radius, rather the contrary, for it is generally under the influence of the hymn, and the music associated with it, that the sentiment of the words strikes home to the heart of the unfortunate. And one of the very first things a reclaimed soul wants to do is to sing in praise and thankfulness,—thus showing that in our natures, one and all, rich and poor alike, music is a source of solace and uplifting for the best elements of which our nature is composed.

One of the first consequences of the study of music, is that the mind is, for the time, so absorbed as to be drawn away from the contemplation of anything else, and the taste for music, once implanted, becomes a permanent influence for good. All who are fortunate in their surroundings, know and feel the pleasure that is derived from listening to good music, and that the more it is listened to, the greater the desire becomes to hear more, and if possible higher forms of its development; thus demonstrating clearly the fact of the upward tendency upon the minds of the educated and fortune-favoured. If this class is so influenced, surely it is a strong argument for placing their less fortunate fellow-creatures within the uplifting influence and effect of music.

The study of instrumental music introduced into our schools on a comprehensive and effective plan, would be an inestimable boon to the new generation of our young country. Under the present school system numbers of children are brought forward from the schools to illustrate what they are doing in vocal music; but taking things as they actually exist, the practical results, in so far as musical education goes, show that comparatively little has been accomplished.

Then, again, for combined effect, numbers must come together. This is comparatively easy in the large cities, but what becomes of the portion of our population residing outside of these centres, so far as musical influence goes? Apply a portion of the money provided for music in our Public Schools to musical instruments, and what must result? A far greater amount of musical knowledge apart from the actual playing of an instrument; and when it is acquired every child goes home—whether in city or country—provided with the skill and ability, not only to improve him or herself, but to incite others to learn to play, and to add to the recreation in family circle and community.

Proof of how rapidly the taste for orchestral music spreads and the useful purposes to which it may be applied has been shown in one of our Canadian cities during the past few years. Originating in an Orchestral School, which was organised with a view to promote the study of orchestral instruments and to afford orchestral training free, it has so succeeded that the professional ranks are supplemented, and orchestras are now found accompanying the music in the Sunday Schools of all denominations throughout the city. This Orchestral School is made up of young school girls and boys and many who are engaged during the day at various trades. An annual concert is given, at which young soloists from the Public Schools are brought out as evidence of what may be accomplished by school children, and an object lesson is thus provided—the young people take part in the public performances. The fathers, mothers and friends attend to see and hear their children, and through this means a material interest is awakened in music, and incalculable good is effected.

A country's amusements very largely indicate the characteristics of the people; and, therefore, as it is being shown that music can be learnt up to the required state of efficiency by the very young, why should it not be made to form part of the regular education in the schools throughout the country? We do not argue against vocal music being taught, but what a grand thing it would be if at the public exhibitions of our schools the songs of the school children could be accompanied orchestrally by school children also. This would educate our children in music beyond anything we can imagine, and the results would be, not merely to a locality, but to the interest of the country at large.

It must be conceded that the influence of music is only for good. Then place it within the reach of every child in Canada, a new interest to them would thus be created; and as all admit the tendency of music to draw in the right direction, let us give every chance to our young people to so form their habits that music will become part of their very being. A feasible plan may be easily outlined for the working out of the ideas involved in providing for the musical education of the young people of Canada through the medium of the Public Schools on the lines suggested.

R. TORRINGTON.