

ELEMENTARY MUSICAL EDUCATION IN BOSTON.

BY JOSEPH BENNETT.

THERE is no strictly uniform method of instruction in the Boston public schools, much the same liberty being allowed as in London. Here the vast majority of teachers use, for quite intelligible reasons, the system known as Tonic Sol-fa, but this is simply the result, as I understand, of their own choice. Over yonder, certain school districts are placed in the charge of certain professors, by whom musical education is directed according to the method each considers the best. This, of course, entails divergence, but not, as far as I could discover, to any great extent. The principles involved seemed to me much the same, though their working out offered variety of procedure. It was my good fortune to make acquaintance with two of these district superintendents—intelligent and enthusiastic gentlemen, with a firm belief in their respective shibboleths—and, under their guidance, to see the young New Englanders studying the A B C of the divine art.

In no case was it thought necessary to substitute any signs for those of the recognized notation. The exercises were in the ordinary staff, and performed with an ease and accuracy more than sufficient to show that, provided right methods be followed at the outset, there is no need for another written language of music. It was instructive to observe, moreover, with what alacrity the children turned to their music lesson. Evidently, the study had been made interesting to them, which, of course, implies that it had been made clear. Boys and girls are rarely inattentive or "bored" when they are conscious of learning, and these youngsters appeared to take the keenest interest in the exercise of their faculties of observation and deduction as applied to music. More complete knowledge, as far as it went, I have rarely met with. There was no sham about it—sham, let me add, is easily detected by any body who has had experience of school life. In this case, suspicion of it was impossible. The promptitude of the answers given, and the confident manner of the vocal exercises proved beyond question that the children were masters of the subject within the scope of their examination. In every instance they were severely tested, but failed not once. Their sight-singing—with the ordinary notation, *bien entendu*—astonished me.

My readers are now ready to put the question: How are these results attained? Much is, no doubt, attributable to good teachers, apt at imparting instruction, and zealous in the discharge of their duties; much, also, to the uncommon intelligence of children belonging to a highly educated community. But I think the methods employed deserve the greatest amount of credit. These, as already pointed out, differ on many points, but, as regards essentials, have so much in common that it may be said of them, *Ex uno disce omnes*. I am, therefore, justified in confining myself to one for the present purpose.

Before me lies a little book entitled "Manual for the Use of Teachers; to accompany the Readers and Charts of the Normal Music Course." Its authors are John W. Tufts and H. E. Holt; its publishers, D. Appleton & Co., of New York, Boston, Chicago

and San Francisco. With the reader's good leave, I will point out the salient features of the course of instruction there laid down. Few of these may be absolutely new; but it is in their combination and relative importance that the value of the system lies. A cardinal principle is thus expressed at the outset.

"A knowledge of musical sounds should be given by presenting, comparing and naming them orally to the ear as relative *mental* objects, on precisely the same principle that the eye should be trained to number with *material* objects. We should never lose sight of the fact that in music we are not only teaching that which we cannot see, but that of which we can give no idea by any picture or drawing. * * * In music we deal with the reality in order to gain any knowledge of it. When this fact is fully appreciated we see that in the study of the subject, we must appeal entirely to the sense of hearing and to the feelings thus awakened and stimulated.

Carrying out the idea thus stated, immense pains are taken to fix the scale in the minds of the pupils as firmly as the letters of the alphabet or the numerals; the process being continued "until the singers can take any sound of the scale in which they are singing," and not only so, but until "when passing into any other scale in which the same pitch occurs, the sounds of that scale are readily adjusted in their minds, and the new key easily established." It was in the last named exercise that the Boston children surprisingly excelled. The teacher would write a phrase in one key, and follow it by another having a different signature, but continuing the last note of the first into the first note of the second. The youngsters had no difficulty whatever in passing from one tonality to the other, the sounds of the new scale being at once "adjusted to their minds." So far the system runs parallel with the Tonic Sol-fa, and all others deserving to be called philosophical. Passing on, I find it stated that "a sense of rhythm or recurring accent can be awakened only by hearing such rhythm and accents." Consequently, a mental conception of the thing is formed before the pupils are troubled with the character employed to represent it. Simplification of this kind runs through the entire system, which refuses to burden the pupil with anything not essential to the primary object of singing at sight. "Everything necessary to enable the pupils to do this intelligently should be taught, all else should be postponed until this is attained. * * * There should be no questions or explanations on the part of the teacher that are not immediately preceded by the sounds to which they refer. * * *

The scales should first be indelibly *impressed upon the minds* of the pupils by creating mental pictures of their true representation through practice in singing them." How well these principles work I had an opportunity of seeing. The children had nothing before them but their "mental picture" of the scale, yet when the teacher called out the numbers representing the relation of the various sounds to the tonic, the sounds themselves were produced with a rapidity and accuracy most remarkable.

During all these early exercises the pupil sees no note of music. But, having clearly in his mind the pitch of the sounds of the scale and their relation to each other, he is taught their representation to the