

MUSICAL.

PUBLIC SCHOOL SINGING.

Considerable attention is being given to this subject in England. Sir George Bowyer has written letters to the *Times* complaining that under the present system of instruction the Government grant of £100,000 per annum is not only wasted, but is a source of positive injury to the art. It seems that, under existing arrangements, vocal music is to be taught indiscriminately in the public schools, whether the children have or have not voice or ear; and, as the teacher is paid a shilling per head, of course it is his interest to pretend to teach all the scholars, or at least as many as can possibly be made to emit vocal utterances that resemble in any way musical sounds. Thus the few children who are gifted with fine musical organizations have them materially injured at the outset of their career from association with those who are not so favoured by nature; and what might be a delightful recreation in the midst of severe studies, and a means of cultivating one of nature's greatest gifts, becomes instead a monotonous task for the scholar, a mere struggle for "shillings" with the teacher, and a sinful waste of public money into the bargain. The *Musical Times*, commenting on the letters of Sir George Bowyer, remarks:—"It is in periods of transition, when neither we nor our legislators are quite certain what we are about, that the most fatal mistakes are made; and naturally, under these circumstances, our mistakes assume the shape of tentative measures, commonly called 'half-measures' or 'shams.' If Sir George Bowyer means to say that our present system of elementary musical education is in that category, he only confirms what all sensible people have acknowledged."

This is pretty strong language, and coming as it does from one of the leading authorities in the Empire, causes us to enquire: How is it with us here in Canada? Are we, who are at our wits' end to make ends meet, wasting thousands of dollars annually to the injury of good natural voices and the cause of music at large? We are sorry to be forced to join with Sir George Bowyer and the many outspoken people like him, and affirm that in our opinion the cause of art would be greatly benefitted if that money, instead of being expended as it now is, were simply thrown into the St. Lawrence.

In the first place all children cannot be taught to sing, and those who are not gifted with a correct musical ear should be separated from those who are. Then, the teachers should be all qualified *vocal musicians* who are able to exemplify everything that they require their pupils to do, and not, as in most cases, instrumentalists only. There is another thing that must not be overlooked, and which is one of the saddest evils of the present system. The voices of children are usually of a very limited compass, being equally limited as to power and volume; as they grow older they gain these qualities in a greater degree till they arrive at their full state of development. Is it not, then, a foolish proceeding to give them exercises and songs to sing which are written for voices of mature age, and which are necessarily beyond the capabilities of children? It is just like putting a colt to do the work of a full-grown horse by way of improving his organisation! He breaks down entirely under the severe strain, and when it is too late we are apprised of our folly. We had occasion a few weeks ago to pass one of our public schools while the children were singing (?). Some had coarse heavy voices, and could be heard at a considerable distance; as we approached nearer, the weaker voices were heard straining to their utmost to keep pace with those of greater calibre, and all yelling with might and main. Surely this is not what we pay for!

We visited the Normal School in connection with McGill University, and were courteously permitted to be present while the scholars received instruction in vocal music. A book was produced (we are ashamed to say it bore the stamp of a distinguished board of education, being edited by a Mr. Sefton, teacher of the public schools in Ontario) full of grammatical errors, music arranged for three voices, with the lowest voice frequently above both the others, and some popular songs so badly arranged that it would be *absolutely impossible* for anyone with an ear to sing them. The teacher distributed the books, took a violin and played an air through, and the majority of the scholars sang it correctly, though coarsely, the rest keeping up an inharmonious buzz throughout. In justice to the children we may say that when they came across any rhythmical error in the book it did not receive any recognition at their hands, and the teacher also *played* the tune in its correct form, never seeming to notice any discrepancy between what was written and what was performed. Now, these children were no more instructed in *music* than infants who prattle nursery rhymes can be said to be versed in *literature*; and if, as the book announces, Mr. Sefton is entrusted with the musical education of the children in Ontario, and this is the text-book used, we protest against our money being wasted in any such manner.

In many of the public schools "Wilhelm's vocal method" is used exclusively. Now we do not advocate Mr. Curwen's or any one else's notation, nor do we care whether a fixed or a movable "do" be recognized by the Commissioners; but we are thoroughly acquainted with "Wilhelm's method," and believe that scholars who are taught solely from that work will *never be able to sing anything else* except it is taught to them by rote. Mr. Hullah is strong in his objections to children singing by rote, but is this method any better? They learn the *names* of the notes certainly, but that is all the difference; the tune is learnt by rote after all.

How few people are there who can read the simplest psalm-tune or part-song at sight! Many ladies and gentlemen manage to get through a song fairly enough after hearing it played over several times on a piano, but ask them to take part in a glee or part-song. You might as well ask them to decipher the hieroglyphics on Cleopatra's Needle!

This ought not to be; we would not think of asking a man whom we knew to have received a public school education if he could read a newspaper before handing it to him for perusal; why then do we not ask our friends to take part in a glee or part-song without first enquiring—Do you read music? Both are supposed to be taught in our schools, and we are taxed to pay for them. Where are the results as regards music? It may be urged that things are not so bad in all the schools, and that some good is done under the system. We

think we can safely assert that in no one school in Montreal is vocal music properly taught, and that in Canada, as in England, the matter should be properly investigated and no more public money squandered.

ZION CHURCH ORGAN RECITALS.

The unfavourable weather has prevented many from attending the first two of these entertainments, but those who did brave the unfriendly elements must have been gratified at the manner in which the various pieces were performed. Mr. MacLagan has improved greatly since last winter, and is rapidly making his way to a front rank amongst our organists. The programme, too, was well selected, and we were glad to find that the names of Mozart, Mendelssohn, Handel and Haydn predominated; indeed we were surprised to find that not a single piece by either Batiste or Wely was on the list.

The Boccherini Minuet was tastefully played, and seemed to please the audience very much. The Andante from Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, however, was not only the best piece but the best performed piece on the programme, and we hope to see it down again on some subsequent occasion. The Fugue in A Minor from the "well-tempered clavichord" was correctly played, but it was only an acrobatic performance, and failed to impress us very much. In the Fantasia by Herse one of the pedals commenced to sypher, and the repeated kicks from the organist, though they doubtless rectified the sypher, did not enhance the performance of the piece. With this exception the entire programme was well played, and reflected credit on the performer. Miss Scott sang "Let the Bright Seraphim" remarkably well, and "With Verdure Clad" still better. Her phrasing is excellent, and when she learns to overcome the nervousness to which all young vocalists are liable, she will be entitled to a high place amongst our local amateurs. Mr. Haeusgen was unable to sing, owing to indisposition, but we hope to hear him some other time during the course.

Herr Heinrich Bohrer gave a pianoforte recital on Saturday afternoon at the rooms of the New York Piano Company, which was a pleasing musical entertainment, in regard both to the interest it called forth and the execution of the programme, which, being for the purpose of displaying to the musical public the capacity of the Weber instruments, was arranged to comprise a great variety of movements. Beethoven's Sonata Pathetique was given with much grandeur in the opening movement, and the following Allegro with energy, while the melodious power of the upright piano was well tested in the Adagio Cantabile. Evers's Octaven Etude was next played by way of contrast to the severely classical. Schumann's Slumber Song and a Mazurka composed by the performer followed on the square piano; Chopin's Polonaise, the Marche Funebre and the Symphonique so well known to Herr Bohrer's listeners, played on the boudoir grand, ended the *repertoire* for the day. The New York Piano Company and Herr Bohrer gave the audience, which was a large and an appreciative one, an undeniable treat, and we are glad to hear that these recitals are to be continued every Saturday afternoon.

We regret that we are unable to give an account of Mr. Deseve's concert this week. He is an artist of no mean ability, and deserves the hearty encouragement of all music-loving citizens, no matter what language they may speak. Miss Louisa Morrison-Fiset comes highly recommended from New York, and will doubtless prove an acquisition to the city. She has a high soprano voice, and has acted in the capacity of solo soprano at the concerts of the New York Philharmonic Society.

The congregation of Christ Church in this city are endeavouring to raise two thousand dollars by subscription in order to procure pneumatic action for the organ. It is to be hoped that with the new action will come a change in the musical service, which at present seems much more disjointed than the organ.

A new opera of M. Gounod, "Polyeucte," has been produced in Paris, and created a great sensation. It is said to surpass in grandeur anything either he or any one else has ever written for the stage.

Madame Trebelli-Bettini took the part of "Carmen" very successfully in London last season, having declined to accompany Mr. Mapleson to New York.

A writer in an English musical paper says, speaking of the curriculum of the London University: "None of the great composers could have taken degrees under it; the end of music is poetic expression, and in that no one can be examined; success or non-success can be estimated only by the emotion of the listeners, and that which is to produce emotion must be the product of *emotion*." We do not want mere mathematicians to pile note on note, chord on chord, with the precision of a bricklayer or a stonemason; what we require are "tone-poets" to follow in the footsteps of Mozart, Beethoven and Mendelssohn, speaking to us through the poetic beauty rather than the angular precision of their compositions.

"Flores perennes carpinus" has been rendered by a classical juvenile: "Flowers grow on the Pyrenees."—*Argosy*.

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