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Music in the Prairie Schools

By Colan E. Hoole

Someone has said "Let me but write the songs of a nation and I care not whose laws they obey." The writer here is stating his conviction that the songs of a nation have more influence in molding the opinion and forming the character of a people than have the laws upon the statute books of their country. If we care to investigate the ground of this expression of opinion we may, by study of the songs of the European nations, soon find corroborative evidence of the force and truth of that belief. For instance, who has not read of the effect of the singing of the "Marseillaise" at the time when France was in the throes of despair and defeat? The song spread through the country like a prairie fire, inspiring the faltering hearts of all to victory. And what shall we say of the effect of "Scots wha hae" upon the Scottish people: surely it must have added an additional strength and hardness of fibre to the national character. May we hint also that possibly "Britons never, never shall be slaves," has carried its share of influence wherever it has been sung.



Prof. HOOLE

Germany also provides a concrete example of the power of popular song. Luther and the Reformation, by concentrating the attention of the people to the higher things in life and beyond it, made it possible for Germany to become great. She became a great nation because her people were bound together by great ideals which were expressed by great songs of the type "A Strong City is our God." Her poets, thinkers, teachers, and musicians were great and noble men. John Sebastian Bach was one of the greatest musicians that ever lived. His great Mass in B minor has never been equalled, yet he taught school for a living. The Germans grew in learning and arts, chemistry and manufacture, and had outstanding men to lead them. The people gladly followed these leaders until their place was taken by others who diverted their thoughts and aspirations to a lower plane of selfish ambition and world dominion. Then were the seeds of envy and lust of empire sown in the minds of the people through the schools and colleges, and even the churches, and for long years carefully fostered by the reigning house of Hohenzollern. Prussianism was established and the whole land became permeated with these ideals and their great noble songs were gradually exchanged for those of the type of "Deutschland über Alles" (Germany over All). Thus their ideals have been lowered and without knowing it they have fallen from their high estate. The effect of Luther's work can still be traced for they have a strong faith in God and that he will assist them in their present aspect of national life.

The Power of Song

Song gives wings to words. The rising, falling and sustaining of a melody seems to expand and intensify the thoughts contained in the words. We sing patriotic songs because they rouse feeling and stimulate the imagination. The thought embodied in the words of a great poem gains added glory and magnificence by being borne upon the wings of song. For instance can any poem be nobler than the Hundredth Psalm? Yet how tame is the spoken word in comparison with the way the spirit can soar when it is sung with heart and voice! Or take the Hallelujah Chorus; we might shout "Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" a hundred times louder by multiplying the voices but the result would be a confused babble.

The power of the singer or speaker to move the hearts and sway the thoughts and emotions of men is said to be one of the highest gifts (the gift of leadership) and it is also the highest form of expression. The effect on the hearer is that of the purest and most powerful of delights. It is as though he had been caught up into heaven and had drunk of celestial nectar in com-

pany with the Gods. An exquisite rendering of a song will live in the memory long after other events have faded away.

But is all this study of music, song, and speech, to have no other or greater purpose than to enter to the senses of delight? We think not. It is great, certainly, to be able to use our powers in such a way and worthy of all the effort to gain that command over our voices, but few of us have these transcendent abilities and in spite of all our study will never be able to impress our individuality upon the multitude. Then why not leave music, song, and speech to those who have these gifts? We answer, "because the study of these things is in itself a valuable discipline and helpful to the building up of character in the individual." It is absolutely

necessary for the common people of a country to have a high appreciative sense of music before it can produce great music or musicians. The real value of musical training is not commonly seen or known because so few are trained in the right way. We are, however, awakening to the fact that a definite and thorough course of musical study has as great an effect on the mind and body as any other subject; indeed we doubt if any other subject gives such scope and variety of training. For Rhythm trains the mind and body to decisive step and action; note the effect of the drum when marching. Time ensures accuracy, confidence and poise of movement. Melody expands the imagination and makes for receptivity of thought. Beauty and Purity of Tone are well-springs of unalloyed pleasure and develop the appreciation of the beautiful in nature and in art. Light and Shade ally themselves to color and contour of outline; the proportion of one thing to another; the fitness of things. Diction gives command of facial expression and assists in gaining fluency of speech and clearness of interpretation. Expression uses all the means at her command to assist the natural spontaneous emission of the thoughts, feelings, and emotions. In short, the ability finely to express fine thoughts and feelings constitutes true culture and the dependence of this culture on trained musical tastes is obvious.

The Opportunity of the West

The western provinces may be likened to a young well-favored maiden. The world around her is glowing with an abundance of joyous color and material wealth. Her step is firm, yet light and springy, her movements are melting undulations, her cheeks are like the prairie roses, her eyes are bright as the shimmering waters of her lakes and her hair is golden as the sunshine upon the autumn wheat but—she is dumb; or nearly so! she will not express her longings and emotions in speech—for speech is oftentimes too crude a medium for ecstatic expression—and to sing she is afraid. At present there are but few centres in each province where good vocal and instrumental tuition can be obtained. Many villages are devoid of any musical activity whatever and there are many schools where the singing of children is never heard. Even in some of the prominent schools of our cities not a song, not a note of music is taught. Is not this lamentable? The excuse is given that other subjects which are of more importance take up all the time. There are, however, some subjects which might with advantage to the student be omitted and music or song substituted. A little more elasticity of study would make for expansion and individuality. The prairie provinces suffer in this respect more than most countries because they are so young and their people have not as yet had time to concentrate their attention on musical education. Older countries such as Norway, Sweden, Russia and Austria, though in parts sparsely populated,

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