

VOCAL MUSIC

An Essay Delivered by Prof. Hunt at the Teachers' Institute at Albany.

Continued from last week.

Having given a few of the reasons why vocal music should be taught in the common schools, I will try to answer the second: How should it be taught?

It should occupy a place on the daily programme and receive as much attention as any other study in school.

Perhaps there are not five per cent. of the schools of the U. S. in which this is so at present, but why? Because that when the schools were in their infancy years ago people thought studies should be pursued that were of practical benefit in the every day affairs of life, i. e., reading, writing and arithmetic.

Parents' knowledge of music is quite limited in comparison with some of the other branches. Hence they do not appreciate its value. They did not study it when they went to school, so why should their children.

There are four systems or methods of teaching music being used to some extent at the present time, viz: Rote singing, fixed do, moveable do, and tonic sol-fa.

The following statistics are taken from the reports of 343 cities to the bureau of education at Washington, D. C. Out of the 343 reports sent in 96 report no musical instructions given, 4 report that singing is permitted. From the 243 remaining, 50 are either teaching by rote or no system at all, 22 are using the "fixed do," 5 the tonic sol-fa, 37 various modifications and combinations, and 129 the "moveable do" system. From the above report it will be seen that the preference is given to the "moveable do" system over all others in about the ratio of two to one.

The "moveable do" system is the method that is employed in nearly all singing books that I ever saw, and what I know of the others, this seems to me to be much the best. All systems must have symbols to represent tone-pitches and tone-lengths. How can tone-pitches be represented in any better way than by the lines and spaces of the staff, and how can tone-lengths be represented in any better way than by half, quarter or eighth notes?

During my visit at the National Education Association last summer at San Francisco, I attended the department of music regularly. There was a great deal said about tonic sol-fa, "fixed do" and "moveable do." One of the ladies present said it was all dough to her, and that there was no bread to feed upon. What we need as teachers, I think, are directions for teaching the commonly accepted method. Why should children be taught to read music? Because they will take more interest in the subject than if only taught to sing a few songs by rote. They will be independent and will not have to have others to teach them every new song that they may wish to learn to sing. If children are taught to sing by rote only, in a short time the habit will be so firmly fixed that it is only by a great effort that they can be taught to become readers of music at all. Learning to sing by rote is like learning to play on an organ by ear. Why should we fill children with songs to be ground out like a hand organ? Hence I say, by all means teach children to read music.

Any teacher who can sing the diatonic scale nicely and correctly is, I think, prepared to commence teaching vocal music in the common schools to beginners. Of course a great deal of self study and practice would be necessary for them to keep ahead of their classes.

The first thing I think that we teachers of Oregon should do is to send for the series of music readers adopted by the state, Loom's Music Lessons Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4, which, by the way, are the best that I have seen.

Then if possible introduce one or more of the numbers into our school, which ones depending on the grade of our school. But if we can't induce parents to buy them at first we must teach without the book.

Buy blank books costing five cents apiece ourselves for our pupils. Then we can let them copy songs that we have written on the black-board into the blank books, which we will now call music readers.

Pupils should be taught to beat time almost from the first. I find that children from eight to twelve years of age learn to beat time more readily than older pupils or adults do. A number of exercise or motion songs should be taught to a school of young pupils, and a few rounds to a school of older pupils to be sung whenever they become tired or restless. I should always make a habit of commencing and closing school with some appropriate song, but in teaching them to read music I should always call them out in classes. See that they sit or stand in the proper position. Do not let them strain their voices by singing too loudly. Attend to the correct pronunciation and the distinct articulation of the words, and in the end you will feel rewarded for all of your efforts.

To be a good singer is as great an accomplishment as it is to be a good orator, painter or sculptor. Think no time lost in which you cultivate assiduously the ability to sing well. Shakespeare has said that:

The man who hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved by concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treason, stratagems and spoils;
The motions of his soul are dark as night
And his afflictions dark as Erebus,
Let no such man be trusted.

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