

THE PLACE OF MUSIC IN EDUCATION.*

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YOUR GRACE, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—

A GOOD many years ago, when I was an undergraduate, I took Latin prosés to a grim old college tutor who was a sort of mainstay and pillar at that time of classical learning in Oxford. At the beginning of a term I went with my stable companion to get our times arranged; mine happened to clash the next week with an orchestral concert, and I asked my tutor to change it. I am bound to admit that he stopped short of personal violence, but apart from that there was no circumstance of contumely with which that request was not refused. My friend with some misgiving then asked that he might be allowed to have his time altered because he wanted to attend a debate at the Union. This proposal was received with entire favour. "I can understand that", said my tutor; "there is some sense in that."

I begin with this reminiscence, partly because it illustrates the attitude of Oxford to music in education fifty years ago, and partly out of sheer malice, because I venture to believe that there are some people in this country who would still maintain this opinion, who would still hold that music is an agreeable, pleasant and amiable thing and part of our enjoyment of life, but that there is not any sense in it, and that to talk about music as an element in education is like giving the same title to confectionery. That was for a long time in this country the general attitude of the "learned world." I could parallel my Oxford story with a dozen others of the same kind, which would show that the people who emphasized and supported the literary and intellectual side of education regarded music as an outsider, as an interloper, an intruder who had no right of place. And this is the more remarkable because, if you come to think of it, our traditions are entirely different. Three hundred years ago, in the thirty years which followed the death of Palestrina, there is no doubt whatever that not only was England the first musical country in the world—it had a reputation far in advance of any competitor—but music was regarded as an essential part of all literary education at that time.

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If you went out to a supper party at the end of Elizabeth's reign, you were liable to be asked by the two people sitting on either side of you whether Stravinsky or Bartok had exercised the greater influence on harmony—or at least the Elizabethan equivalent of this—and if you did not express any opinion, they did not regard you as ignorant, because it never occurred to them that you could possibly be ignorant, but they regarded you as a curmudgeon who, having something of value to contribute to the discussion, disdainfully refused to offer it. That represents an entirely different point of view from the custom which is adopted in education at the present time. Although the horizon of education is very much widened, although new topics and new methods have come in and have to be taken into account, yet we are not so much finer fellows than our Elizabethan ancestors that we can afford to disdain what they regarded as one of the most important resources in civilized and cultivated education.

I began by citing Oxford of fifty years ago. Things have improved a great deal since then. I am very seldom sorry to see Dr. Arthur Somervell, but I am sorry on this particular occasion, because I am shy about saying in his presence what is the undoubted truth, that almost the whole of this educational advance in music in this country during the last thirty or forty years is due to him. I speak of this from first-hand knowledge, because I have been a follower in that army the whole time, and I know exactly how he has pioneered us from the days when he came back from Germany up to the present moment. That goes back to the early nineties, or even perhaps a little earlier than that, and you will think it has taken rather a long time to establish musical education in this country. Now I hesitate very much to brag about our national qualities—every country has its own qualities and its own defects—but I cannot help thinking that there is one gift of this home country for which we have not had quite sufficient credit given us by the larger world outside, and that is our extraordinary power of withholding attention. Falstaff, with that modesty which is another of our national characteristics, describes it as “a malady of not marking”; but it has long ceased to be a malady, it has long ceased even to be endemic; it has become a sort of normal condition of our lives. Our advertisers, for example, have long ceased to be content with descriptions of their wares, and endeavour to attract our notice solely by competitive shouting. Amid all that outcry it is not surprising that the quieter and gentler voice of the musician escapes notice. Therefore it is that we have taken something like forty years to induce the British public to see that there is

anything happening at all. They are just now beginning to stir in their sleep, and to observe that there is something in music as an educational power which at any rate is worth their investigation. It is in view of this enlightenment that I venture to come and plead that cause this afternoon. Indeed, ladies and gentlemen, I am almost ashamed to plead it, for the case is so overwhelming that I hardly dare to state it in full for fear you may think I am exaggerating. If you ask to what side of human nature education is directed, the answer would surely be—to the whole of it, to every side. I venture to say with entire seriousness that I know no other single subject, no single topic in our educational scheme which appeals so widely as music does to every part of our nature.

Let me try to elaborate that for a moment. Take first of all the purely physical side. I have to touch upon this lightly, and to pass it over with comparative brevity, because the subject has not yet been properly explored. Our psychologists have not yet succeeded in developing the actual relations between music and the nervous system of man; but we have a certain amount of empirical testimony which is of first-rate value, and which I hope will be developed by our educational psychologists before very long. Take, for instance, the well-known example of music as a curative agency in cases of shattered or impaired nerves. We have not only the historical instances, many famous cases in which physical disease of the nerves has yielded to the persuasive and soothing influence of musical sound. May I supplement them by an experience of my own, to which I dare say many of you can provide a parallel? Just after the war I was asked to go to a concert at Chelsea Hospital. The singers were all patients in the hospital; they sang a number of part-songs with great and obvious delight, with verve and go, and with intense human feeling. Every single one of those singers had been admitted to the hospital so broken with aphasia from shell-shock that he could not say his own name; he could say no word and, so far as the doctor could tell, could understand no word. They were put into the hands of Sir Frederick Mott, one of our greatest benefactors in this respect. Sir Frederick Mott told me that he began by trying to get them to speak. No result. Then he tried humming to them some tune of a soldier's song from the trenches. There came a tiny quiver of responsiveness, and after a few days he tried breaking off the tune in the middle and waiting for them to finish it. To this again came the response and so, through the curative influence of music, he brought them back into life and sanity. We do not know enough about this to enlarge upon it at present; but here is something which I have heard

and seen myself. So if that is possible, and if our experience of it comes at the end of a long series of historical instances, surely here is a possible effect of musical education which should be further considered. I believe that the health of school and college life might really be enhanced by giving music a larger part in the educational system.

It follows next to consider the effect of music on the emotions. Everybody knows that this is enormously potent; indeed some people have told us that music appeals to the emotions and literature appeals to the intellect, which is really nonsense, for both appeal to both. Nobody who can distinguish one tune from another can doubt the emotional effect of music and, on the whole, the very largely ennobling, heightening and raising effect upon the emotions. I do not deny that there have been instances in which the effect of music has been overstrained or over-emotionalized—over-sentimentalized—and this no doubt is unwholesome. You may recall a passage in the *Life of Johnson* where Boswell enlarges upon the subject with great rhetorical fervour, and says that when he hears music he wishes to get up and shoulder a gun and fight for his country. You remember Johnson's rejoinder: "Sir, if music made me feel such a fool, I should never listen to it." But Johnson is speaking of an excess and a degradation of the right thing; it is not degrading, and it is not feeling a fool, when you are emotionally moved by the *Marseillaise*, or by the slow movement of the Ninth Symphony, or by some great tune of Mozart.

Those two aspects I have passed over lightly, because I am quite sure that on them we are in general agreement. Now I come to a third point, about which there is more discussion, and upon which I wish to lay my highest emphasis, and that is the intellectual appeal of music. If it did not possess that, if it merely produced a sensuous or emotional effect, then I would not gainsay those who decried it or even who ranked it with confectionery. It is just because it has this extraordinarily intimate intellectual appeal that I wish to support its claim to a place in education. But from this ground a large number who are fond of music stand altogether outside. Many people who go to concerts leave their intellects in the cloak-room with their coats and hats; they come into the concert hall, as John Farmer said, to "have their souls shampooed"—and with this their susceptibility to music begins and ends. They have not come into the outer courts of the art; they are still in the open fields outside. Let me illustrate again by a personal experience of my own. Not very long ago I was wandering round the Sheffield Library trying to find something to read in the luncheon hour,

and I happened across a volume of the lyric poems of Frederic Mistral. I am bound to confess that my education in the matter of the Provençal language has been neglected; but this was a volume of Lemerre's edition, with the Provençal poems on one side and a translation on the other. I went on reading the volume through with increasing delight. Presently I came upon a poem that I propose to use now as my example. I was a lyric poem of about ten stanzas, and each stanza had the refrain:—

*La luna barbano
Debano
De lano,
La luna barbano
Debano
De lin.*

I think you will agree with me that if we do not understand one single word of that, we get some real pleasure out of the play of the vowels in it and the delightful lilt of the rhythm. I consulted the translation on the other side, and I found it meant the fleecy clouds going across the moon in the evening. The rest of the poem described the fall of the evening over a Provençal village, the little curl of smoke from the cottage, the bark of the dog in the distance, the old people gossiping by the fireside, the two sweethearts stealing out together on some absolutely preposterous errand to the forest, the little god of love sitting on the gateway laughing as they go by; and at the end of each verse "And the pale moon spins her wool, the pale moon spins her flax." Do not you feel that, by understanding what the poem is about, your delight in it is enhanced, is multiplied a thousandfold, a millionfold? It becomes entirely new to you when you understand what it means. Now music is just as much a language as Provençal. Every single great tune has got a meaning; not every succession of notes is a tune at all, and not every tune is a good tune; some tunes are poor, just as some verses are poor, but the great tunes are like the great lines of Shakespeare or of Vergil or of Milton, as full of meaning and as full of delight, and as infinite in their range of beauty and significance. When you once realize this, that music has got so much to say to you, not only a succession of very pure and very noble pleasures, but in addition to that a whole realm of poetic meaning (which only requires understanding, and is not so difficult to understand as many people think) for you to enter into and enjoy, do not you agree with me that here is a vehicle of general civilized education which we cannot possibly afford to disregard? Take for instance, a parallel between music and the drama. Consider

the greatest masters of dialogue who have ever written—Euripides, Aristophanes, Goethe, Shakespeare—and think of the texture of the dialogue in any one of their plays. I assure you in all seriousness that the design of Mozart's G minor Quintet or of Beethoven's first Rasoumovsky is just as complete as the dialogue of any great dramatist, that you have only to understand the interweaving of the parts to realize this and to enjoy it. And its enjoyment opens to us all a new garden of delight.

Again, all the great musical compositions are built on as intelligible a plan as the plot of a great novel, or the plot of a great play. You can go to a theatre not knowing what the play is about, as I have done in Hungary, and amuse yourself by watching the episodes as they happen on the stage, and by your conjectures as to what is probably coming next; but surely it is no paradox to say that if you could understand the language, you would gain a great deal more from the drama. A symphonic movement is not a river of unintelligible sound with little tunes sticking up like islands; it is as closely knit as a plot of Shakespeare or of Racine or of Molière. Take for instance the third symphony of Beethoven. It opens with a simple, plain, broad theme; in the fourth bar there comes a sudden chromatic harmony which you may let pass without notice if you have your mind on something else; but if you are alert, you ask "Why is that?" And if you understand the structure of the piece, you know that later on in the movement that passage is going to return. When it returns, you are suddenly aware of the repetition of this curious chromatic harmony; and as you are aware of it, Beethoven turns it inside out and so opens the door into an entirely new world. No doubt if you listen to this with both ears closed, it will all pass over your head. It would be the same if you went to a play of Shakespeare and paid no attention, or if, like the Viennese of the 18th century, you attended the opera chiefly to play cards, and stopped the game only when a favourite singer was occupied with a particularly high note. If you go to music in the attitude of mind in which those Viennese went to the opera, of course you will not get anything out of it. But is it not worth while determining that you are going to get something? This, then, is the ground upon which my contention is based, that music contains all the delights of the study of a language, all the delights of a very great literature, and in addition to that, the same kind of analytic problems which you meet in the study of a science. Do not let us hear anything about the advantages of ignorance in aesthetic matters; about the pure unsophisticated pleasures of people who are not weighed down with the dust of

pedantic knowledge. There is nothing in this: nobody has ever admired a flower less for knowing how the flower is constructed; nobody has ever admired a play less for knowing what the plot was; nobody has ever admired music less for knowing what aesthetic principles there were lying at the back of it. Again, the historical study of music enables us to realize the succession of periods, the way in which they draw from their predecessors and lead on to those that follow after. It makes a difference to our enjoyment of music if we know whether Bach or Beethoven came first.

I happened once to go into the Musical Club at Oxford, and sat next to a lady who had come in to hear the rehearsal. "For my part", she said "I adore Bach; he is so far above the common herd." I rather demurred to that. "I think", I said "that a great many people really like him." "But", she said, "do you think they understand him, because there is no tune in him?" I can imagine people saying they like Bach; I can just imagine people saying there is no tune in Bach; but I cannot imagine anybody saying both.

It is not a question of any preference of the bad to the good. I do not believe that people prefer songs about bananas to Schubert, but I believe that our errors are due to not discriminating between one kind of tune and another. May I give you an instance of this, because instances are much better than theory? I once attended an Education Conference at which one of the afternoons was devoted to an exhibition of school orchestras; all the schools in the neighbourhood sent in their little bands, which played one after the other. It was very encouraging to hear the verve and attack of the performances; the players were keen and well-drilled; but the programme was a nightmare. Out of the 24 items that were included in that afternoon's performance, there was only one that had the slightest claim to rank as music at all, and that was a piece of Gounod, which was not very good music. After the competition was over, I was asked what I thought about it. I readily praised the way in which the performances were conducted and the careful training which they indicated; then very hesitatingly I added that on similar occasions elsewhere the teachers had paid great attention to keeping up a very high standard in the quality of the music; to the determination that nothing at all should be presented to or played by children which was not of the very highest value. "Quite right", said the Superintendent, "so do we." The conversation then died down by the roots. I have kept that in mind, because I am quite certain that that is psychologically true. A very large number of people in England think that so long as something is going on, which is pretty quick and

fairly loud, it is sure to be all right. They do not realize that the notes in a great tune follow one another as the words of a great sentence, and they cannot realize that there is as much difference between a tune of Mozart and a hackneyed tune of the streets as between a line of Shakespeare and a catchword. It is not that they transpose them, or that their judgment has gone wrong, but that they have no judgment at all. What we have got to do in musical education is not so much to train the pianist or the singer; but to bring back the belief, which I am quite certain is well founded, that music is as much part of a literary culture as a literature or a science, and that we cannot leave it on one side. I do not ask for prerogative terms; all I claim at the present moment is equality. You cannot study Elizabethan civilization if you know only Shakespeare and do not know Byrd. They belong to the same process of ennobling and enlarging the human spirit, and it is our educational loss if we allow ourselves to go on like an ill-roasted egg, "all on one side", shutting our eyes and our ears to what I am quite certain is of the greatest value, the educational contribution that can be made by the art of music.

I think that too much time is occupied, and perhaps even wasted, in schools at present with teaching solo playing. That I should leave on one side, and at any rate bestow only upon persons who had special qualifications. I remember that in the old days in boys' schools music was considered to be an unpopular alternative to cricket, and for girls I fancy music was intended chiefly as an accomplishment for an afternoon tea party. I do not think that this is of any educational value at all. But there are two things which can easily be done in every school in the country. I am speaking here in the presence of at least three authorities on musical education who know a great deal more about it than I do, and from whom I think we should very much like to learn what they have to say. But there are two points which I could make as a sort of introduction to them, a sort of porch to their doorway; first of all, that in every piece of school education, elementary or secondary, there should be a certain period of corporate school singing; it might be quite short; a quarter of an hour a day would do; and it should be confined entirely to the very best songs there are in the world, "The Vicar of Bray", and so on, and other national songs, rising in the course of time to Handel and Schubert, but beginning with great national songs and their imperishable tunes. Give them a quarter of an hour of these, and do not pay any attention to the schoolmaster who says it will shorten the hour of history or French. It will not shorten it; it will enlarge it. I speak in this matter from

experience. I am quite certain that if you can occupy a certain period in education by interesting the children and making their minds alert, they progress so much more rapidly in the rest of the lessons that you have done much more than make up for the time spent upon it. Begin, then, at somewhere or other in the morning, when tempers are likely to get a little frayed; bring them together, and make them sing in chorus half a dozen songs; they will not only do the rest of their day's work ever so much better in consequence, but they will go out into the world with their minds stored with a treasurehouse of delight.

Then the other point, which bears a little more directly on what I have been saying, is this. I have always maintained that in the school curriculum there should be one hour a week devoted to things in general. Let that hour be sufficiently often occupied by making the teacher expound to them the structure of great music. Believe me, it is not difficult. It has been made unnecessarily difficult by musicians who hedge the subject round with a *chevaux de frise* of technical terms. You may no doubt go to the end of your life without exhausting the subject, but so you may with a play of Shakespeare. The amount of information required to start an interest in it, to get them wishing to know more about it, is very readily acquired, and the number of teachers in schools who are capable of acquiring it is increasing day by day. I am astonished to see in my own city the enormous advance of musical education in the last ten years, simply because it has been properly encouraged. Make the children delight in an hour of Schumann or Mendelssohn or Beethoven, and get them to see and love the music, just as they are ready to see and love the beauty of great poetry.

While dealing with that subject, may I enter one more *caveat*? I believe at the bottom of my heart that one of the reasons why there has been a dead set against music in education during the last century was because music was pleasant. There was a great deal too much attention paid to Mr. Dooley's maxim, that it doesn't matter what a boy learns so long as he doesn't like it. I admit with contrition that music is pleasant, but it is no less educationally valuable on that account. Let us see that our children are taught what the best music is about; not some ridiculous interpretation of what it is supposed to portray, but the real meaning and significance of music itself in its own terms. Believe me, it is of absorbing interest, and it is an interest which begins in early life and goes on right through and continuously increases. Let the school set the right key and maintain the right tone; the rest will come in due course.