

folks, an' ef I git the racket out'n my head by next Chris'mas, I'll be *mighty* lucky. They sot me over ag'in the biggest fuss they could pick out, an' gimme a pa'r of cotton kyards. Here's what kin kyard when she gits her han' in, an' I b'leeve'n my soul I kyarded 'nuff bats to thicken all the quilts betwix' this an' Californy. The folks, they 'ud come an' stan', and star', an' then they 'ud go some'rs else; an' then new folks 'ud come, an' stan', an' star', an' go some'rs else. They wuz jewlarkars thar frum ever'wheres, an' they lookt like they wuz too brazen to live skacely. Not that I keerd. No, bless you! Not when folks is a-plumpin' down the cash money. Not me. No, siree. I wuz a-settin' thar one day, a-kyardin' away, a-kyardin' away, when all of a sudden some un retched down an' grabbed me 'roun' the neck, an' buss'd me right here on the jaw. Now, I haint a-tellin' you no lie, I like to 'a' fainted. I lookt up, an' who do you reckon it wuz?"

"I bet a hoss," said Teague dryly, "that

Sis wa'n't fur from thar when that bussin' wuz a-gwine on."

"Who should it be *but* Sis!" exclaimed the old woman. "Who else but Sis wuz a-gwine to grab me an' gimme a buss right here on the jaw frontin' of all them jewlarkars? When I lookt up an' seen it twuz Sis, I thought in my soul she'uz the purtiest creatur I ever led eyes on. 'Well, the Lord love you, Sis!' s' I, 'Whar on the face of the yeth did you drap frum?' s' I. I ketch'd 'er by the arm and helt 'er off, and s' I, 'Ef I don't have a tale to tell when I git home, no 'oman never had none,' s' I. She took an' buss'd me right frontin' of all them jewlarkars, an' airt'er she 'uz gone, I sot down an' had a good cry."

And then, the old woman fell to crying softly at the remembrance of it, and those who sat around the wide hearth cried with her. And narrow as their lives are, the memory of the girl seem'd to sweeten and inspire all who sat around the hearth that night at Teague Potteet's.

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## ON THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN'S VOICES.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE CENTURY.

*Dear Sir:* It gives me much pleasure to comply with your request to write an introduction to my friend Mr. W. L. Tomlins' article on the training of children's voices.

In a brief and necessarily hasty paper on "Musical Possibilities in America," which, at the request of its editor, I prepared for this magazine in March, 1881, I took occasion to express my emphatic disapproval of the system of musical instruction which prevails in the public schools. My remarks upon this subject excited wide and animated discussion, and letters from music teachers and students poured in upon me from all directions. They were mainly in sympathy with the views I had expressed, and afforded gratifying evidence of a general desire for progress toward better things. I am glad to take this opportunity to acknowledge them, and to express my regret that the pressure of constant and exacting duties made individual replies to them impossible. Many of them came from superintendents and other school officers, expressing an earnest wish to carry out the reform suggested, and asking for specific directions and personal suggestions. To give these, required time which I could not command. It was with the greatest reluctance that I consented to write at all, and I only did so with the hope that, by mentioning abuses which had come within my observation, I could

awaken discussion and prompt others whose talents more especially fit them for the work to point out the methods best adapted to secure the needed reforms.

On one important point, the treatment of the voice, this hope has been completely realized. In the paper alluded to, after speaking of the harm done to children by allowing them to scream instead of sing, I said: "I was once asked by a gentleman what he ought to do to make his children musical. I told him to form for them a singing-class under the care of a good teacher." By a "good teacher," I mean a man who is competent to give instruction, not only in reading music but also in the proper use of the vocal organs. It rarely happens that these qualities are combined in one teacher. Instruction in the use of the voice ought only to be given by a teacher who has made the development of the voice a special study. Teachers ought to be trained to combine both branches of instruction. At present, this is not the case. The children are taught to read music, without being taught how to form a good tone. If it be objected that the classes are too large in our schools to make such teaching in singing practicable, the reply is, that the experiment has already been successfully made. Mr. Tomlins began last fall a pioneer work of this kind. He formed a class of children, numbering between two hundred

and three hundred, and began work with them by methods which are best described by himself in a letter received by me a few months ago, just before a visit to Chicago, where I was present at a first exhibition of his class. In that letter, written for my private information, and with no idea that it would be published, he said:

"Your time in Chicago is so short that I advise you in advance in regard to the children's class, telling you what I have endeavored to do, and my plan of working. I found the voices loud and hard, as children's voices are. Directly I reduced the improper muscular action the voices became weak, husky, and very flat, and soon became tired. The proper muscles were unused to action, and the sprained condition of the throats also contributed to this state of things. I therefore rested them (from all but the slightest work) for weeks, and devoted most time to the strengthening of the chest muscles. Cultivating the ability to throw a steady but very light stream of breath through the throat. At last I reduced this stream of air to a softness equal to the faint ability of the throat to chop it into vibration. And from this point we began to build. With many goings back for the sake of the weaker ones and on account of overdoing and on account of climate changes which so readily affect voices in such a condition.

"I began first with 'm' (humming), then 'e' and 'o,' alternating these vowels on a single note; then changing two or three notes on a single vowel; then changing vowels and notes. From this point we worked the many vowel and consonant forms and combinations up to words and sentences. I found, however, that after mechanical correctness was acquired, the most rapid advancement was made by appealing to their emotional natures; in this respect they made greater progress than any adult class I ever taught.

"The stiff, stolid singing of a chorus is its greatest curse. A solo vocalist naturally smiles, relaxing the muscles of the neck and head. A chorus-singer gets dignified, and in public, especially, hardens the muscles of the throat, obstructing the breath, and injuring the tone. Now I have noticed that the children, in reciting lessons or singing, indulge in this bad habit and produce the bad tone; but in the play-room they relax, and under the influence of emotions, playing various characters as they do, the tone becomes lighter and better. And so we have all sorts of things played in class. In a cradle-song we have played that Dolly was sick and had to be soothed to sleep, as mamma has soothed us when we were sick. We have played 'ladies and gentlemen' (polite people), smiling and singing softly to each other.

"And to get an active action of the face and throat (by active I mean that action which is used to influence others, earnest, fervent speech or song). We have played circus-clowns paid to sing to the people to make them laugh.

"During the past two weeks we have taken a soldier's song, playing soldiers who were marching to surprise an enemy, singing with precision and sharp jaw-action for the march, but with *softness* for the surprise. This tends to break down the common habit of singing sluggishly when one sings softly.

"Of course, all this is in miniature; ounces instead of pounds of voice. But the ounce must contain the germ of all that is good in singing—the smile and the sigh are the first steps in emotional tone, and thus far have we gone.

"I have wasted no time in the work of ordinary singing-schools; in the first place, because this is the experimental part, and, to my mind, the important

work. Music notation, reading music, singing together, watching the leader, singing in parts, etc., are all necessary, but not *so* necessary. All of these, we can take for granted, will come in time."

The singing of the children, as I heard it on that occasion, demonstrated the soundness of Mr. Tomlins' theories, and his rare abilities as a teacher. They showed ease, spontaneity, warmth, expression, accuracy of pitch, precision;—in fact, came so near to perfection, that I assured them I had never before heard such beautiful singing. From that time I have naturally been deeply interested in Mr. Tomlins' work, and I cordially recommend all persons whose attention has been drawn to this important field of instruction to read, in the first place, his exposition of his theories as unfolded in the subjoined article; and, in the second place, to improve the first opportunity which presents itself of witnessing the results of his work among the children of Chicago.

*Theodore Thomas.*

WHEN the study of singing was first introduced into the public schools of Boston, the most utopian anticipations were indulged in with regard to the degree and value of the musical culture that would then become the acquisition of every child. Two advantages, in particular, were counted upon: That fluent singing by note would become common, and that a foundation would be laid for a genuine appreciation of good music. To some extent, these expectations have been realized. A certain very moderate knowledge of musical notation has become general among the younger people—not only of that city but of almost all other cities throughout the country, for into nearly all of them music has been introduced. Even this moderate facility in reading music has served as a means of enlarging the pupil's practical acquaintance with musical literature, and to that extent the school instruction has done something to advance musical taste.

But, on the other hand, it is very far from the truth, that the ability has become general to sing accurately by note any but the simplest music, even among the more musical of the students in these schools. It is equally doubtful whether the wider dissemination of musical taste is to any considerable extent related to the public school instruction in music.

There is, however, a more serious question which deserves to be considered. It is, whether the exercise of singing as commonly conducted in the public schools is not positively harmful to the voice and destructive to future ability to sing artistically.

Briefly mentioned, the faults of current instruction are these: Everything is sacrificed

to a knowledge of musical notation. The voice is developed only in respect to power, and this, unfortunately, in a way which must be entirely undone whenever the study of artistic singing is begun. Instead of soft, pleasant, expressive voices, one hears in school almost universally a hard, shouty tone, unsympathetic and inexpressive. This tone is produced by an improper action of the throat which absolutely prevents the production of an emotional tone. In this way is formed a bad habit which must be entirely undone before expression can be acquired. Singing thus conducted is not even a healthful exercise, for it engenders vocal habits which react unfavorably upon the throat.

Nor do the musical text-books exhibit a real progressiveness toward higher and nobler ideas. How far this is the case will appear as soon as we compare the singing-books with the ordinary school readers. In the latter the child begins with easy words and very simple thoughts. From this he is led to longer words, more involved sentences, and more mature ideas. The progress does not stop short of Shakspeare and Milton. Instead of such a progressive course in music, the pupil is held to the lower grade. Even where the difficulties of music-reading are gradually increased, the musical ideas are not correspondingly raised.

All of these short-comings finally reduce themselves to two, namely: Ignorance of or indifference to the physiological relation between singing and the vocal organs; and second, apathy with regard to all kinds of musical relations beyond the simplest and most obvious.

This state of things, which prevails for the most part throughout the country, is to be accounted for, or at least, has been influenced by two or three circumstances. The music teachers are chosen mainly for their knowledge of notation and the sight-reading of music. They are generally earnest, practical teachers, with perhaps a turn for music, but with no systematized training in the physiology of the vocal organs, and without practical acquaintance with the technic of vocal culture. They are pre-centor-like singers, with loud, unsympathetic voices, and with a low grade of musical ideas.

Another cause of trouble has been the text-books, which have catered to this musical ignorance. The Sunday-school singing-books and the Moody and Sankey hymns are for the most part written down to the market demands. That they sell as readily as dime novels is good for trade; that they are as readily discarded for newer books is also good for trade. But educational work, musical or otherwise, should be above such mercenary motives.

The advantages proper to be sought by

instruction in singing in the public schools would seem to be these and in this order:

*First.* The cultivation of a musical voice. This embraces not only the proper utterance of thought in speech and song, but its appropriate coloring by an emotional character of voice. The presence of this quality determines that the mechanism of the voice is in right action, for any impropriety in tone-production will immediately reveal itself in the form of a hard or unmusical and inexpressive tone.

*Second.* The "How to observe good music," or the ability to perceive and feel musical relations. This includes a familiarity with the primary principles of music, the habits of chords, an analysis of forms, simple exercises in musical construction, primary rhythms,—in fact, an appreciation of the thing, Music, apart from its sign, musical notation. All this may be delightfully taught in connection with singing and listening to good music.

*Third.* Knowledge of musical notation and the ready reading of new music.

*Fourth.* Acquaintance with musical literature.

To these may be added the practice of singing as a recreation and healthful exercise.

In regard to the relative importance of these proposed ends of musical instruction in schools, there appears to be no room for reasonable difference of opinion.

A pleasant voice is eminently desirable both for ease in using it (for ease and pleasing quality go together) and for the sake of clearness in expressing refined shades of meaning, as well as the agreeable impression it makes upon others. All our life long we are addressing ourselves to others, frequently in cases where it makes a considerable difference to ourselves whether we commend our cause or not. Hence a pleasant voice is greatly to be desired, and can be acquired by almost every one if right methods of speaking and singing are formed in childhood.

The disposition of the technical means necessary for attaining these advantages would amount almost to a complete reversal of the methods now prevailing.

Proper methods of singing demand that the flow of the air-column which passes the throat of a singer shall be (1) controlled and regulated entirely by the action of the lungs, (2) transformed into the higher power of vibration by the action of the throat, and (3) shaped into vowel and consonant combinations in its further progress through the chambers of the upper throat and head. The breath is both the substance and the motive power of vocalization, as a current of air in forcing itself through a revolving ventilator will compel it to action and be thereby transformed into vibration.

The machinery of a child's voice must run with the minimum of effort. The slightest excess will provoke a rigidity of the throat and head, and thereby prevent the sympathetic response of those resonant cavities of the head and chest which reflect the vibrations of the throat, and in voices, as in the violin, impart sonority and musical quality to the tone.

Singing, therefore, should never be accompanied by physical exertion, nor should the vocal exercises of the school immediately follow the exertions of the play-ground. The panting of the breath directs the blood to the throat and lungs, and involves an action of the extrinsic muscles of the throat, which directly antagonizes the proper act of singing. Nor is the effect confined to the short period of being out of breath. It is a fact well known to voice-trainers, that any physical effort which induces labored breathing thickens the voice for at least an hour. For this reason energetic dancers never have good voices.

It would be impossible, within present limits, to enumerate the many forms of wrongdoing in which children are indulged, or to explain the exercises which are necessary to correct them. An analysis of these bad habits would prove them to be for the most part but the natural outgrowth of an underlying principle of wrong, namely, the attempt to control and regulate the air-column by an improper contraction of the throat.

A second point is that children's voices should be very soft. The vocal chords in a child's throat are not able to withstand any overpressure of the breath. How often one may observe among singers and preachers that a voice which is agreeable and winning when used in moderation becomes repelling and unsympathetic directly too much emphasis or power is employed.

Another point of complaint is that children's voices are commonly used at a low pitch, a custom sanctioned by authorities, but nevertheless a faulty one. The natural voice of a child is soft and high: neither shrill nor harsh, but of low power and high pitch. This is reasonable, for at the age of five or six years, the child's larynx is retarded in its growth, and does not materially increase in size until about the age of fourteen, when by a year or two of rapid growth it is enlarged to adult size. Prior to this period of "change of voice," a child's larynx is in proportion to a woman's as 3 to 5, and to a man's as 3 to 7. Children's voices, therefore, are naturally higher than those of women, as women's are higher than men's. It is true that the children as at present taught are unable to reach the high notes. As well might a violinist expect to obtain the upper tones of his in-

strument by tightening instead of shortening the string. Listen to the soft laugh of a child when a smile has relaxed the muscular contraction of the throat, and the true childish ring will be heard, charming as it is.

It is an unfortunate phase of this subject that wrong habits have been formed that will not be corrected by those practices which in the beginning would have prevented them. The experience of many who have studied with good teachers testifies to years of tedious study and undoing.

In this connection a lesson can be learned by contrasting the voices of the boys in a play-ground of one of the cathedral schools in Europe, schools consisting only of children of a surpliced choir, with those of a company of street *gamins* whose habits incline them to vehement assertion. The former are gentle, distinguished, genteel in quality; the latter, hard, strident, and coarse.

In fact, the vocal trouble complained of is largely induced in the play-ground, where loud talking is accompanied by excessive physical exercise. While it is impossible to control fully the evil in the play-ground, it is quite possible to modify it at home and in school by proper habits of speaking and singing. The personal experience of the writer has afforded him unusual facilities for the examination of young people's voices, and testifies to the terrible effects of improper singing in day-schools and Sunday-schools: voices wrenched by over-effort out of all semblance to proper vocalism, and sprained throats with their baneful results to health. Children whose gifts of voice or musical ability have fitted them for leadership have suffered in greater proportion and to a greater degree.

While it is an open question as to the amount of musical instruction which should be included in the system of school teaching, there can be no doubt that, whether the exercise of singing be undertaken as a study or a recreation, some reform should be adopted which will save the children's voices from injury by day-school teachers, whose musical ability lies solely in their knowledge of musical notation, and from Sunday-school leaders who ruin young and delicate voices by bad examples and injudicious precepts.

In the nature of the case, such a reform can take no other shape than the general observance of the fundamental principles of good vocalization, as indicated above; and this, in turn, must be accomplished through a general dissemination of proper knowledge among teachers, which might perhaps be done through the normal schools and teachers' institutes.

*William L. Tomlins.*