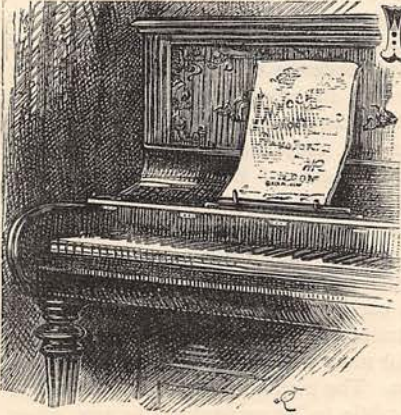


MUSIC FOR THE BLIND.

BY WILLIAM H. CUMMINGS, PROFESSOR OF SINGING IN THE ROYAL NORMAL COLLEGE FOR THE BLIND.



IN every age and clime, the blind or sightless have claimed and received consideration and sympathy from their fellow-beings happy in the possession of a

perfect sense of vision. In days not long past—nay, hardly yet departed—blindness was considered the most terrible of all human afflictions, and those who suffered by the deprivation of sight were too often regarded as abjectly dependent on the benevolence of others, and almost compelled to degrade themselves into a condition of pauperism. The notion, too, generally prevailed that a man's capacity for usefulness ceased to exist with the extinction of vision.

When the brutal Emperor Justinian, in a fit of jealousy, put out the eyes of his most successful general, Belisarius, the hands which had vanquished the Persians, the Vandals, and the Goths were stretched out to beg alms of the passers in the street, with the pitiful appeal, "Date obolum Belisario." In later times substantial gifts were often bestowed with lavish hand upon sightless men and women, but the opportunity for earning their own honest living was persistently denied them, on the pre-supposed ground of their helpless inability to undertake any useful occupation. The beggars' posts in the churchyards and at the street-corners came to be regarded as their appropriate and only place, and they were rigidly excluded from all benefit of school or college. Who can wonder that, thus condemned to idleness and intellectual darkness, they, as a class, presented a sad spectacle of physical and mental degradation?

"O loss of sight! of thee I most complain;
Blind among enemies, O worse than chains,
Dungeon or beggary, or decrepit age."

What a picture!—penned by our great poet, Milton, himself destined not long afterwards to taste the bitterness of a "total eclipse" of sight—happily, in his case, tempered by the glorious intellectual inner vision which alone could rob the affliction of its most potent terrors.

In 1784 the first great effort to raise the condition of the blind was made by Valentin Haüy, a native of Picardy, who founded the "Institut des Jeunes Aveugles" (Institution for the Young Blind) in Paris,

and there he commenced printing raised or embossed italic letters for the use of his scholars. The institution founded by him, after many vicissitudes, still exists, and stands probably at the head of all kindred schools for the blind; the system of printing invented by Haüy has, however, undergone many modifications and improvements, until at length it has become superseded in Great Britain by the plan invented by Moon, a blind man—one of the specialties of this system being such an arrangement of the raised characters as to permit the reading of the lines alternately from left to right, and from right to left.

In France a system is now universally adopted in which the characters or letters are represented by dots variously arranged. The invention is that of Louis Braille—who, like Moon, was himself blind—and, being a pupil of the Institut des Jeunes Aveugles, he introduced his method to that establishment in 1834, since which date the system has very greatly spread. In France it is the only one employed for both writing and printing, and at present it seems probable that its use will supersede all other methods in Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland, Italy, and Spain. The Braille system is largely used in Germany, America, and England.

In the last report issued by Mr. Buckle, from the York School for the Blind, he says, "The Braille point type we find in all our school-work to be invaluable, and it is now a source of wonder to us how the education could have been carried on efficiently without it." At that noble institution, the Royal Normal College and Academy of Music for the Blind, situate at Norwood, close to the Crystal Palace, the Braille system has been adopted and most admirably applied, not only for ordinary literature, but also for musical purposes. It may be well to give a few words explanatory of the Braille system. Its arbitrary signs are made by the varying combinations of six dots. As there are sixty-two possible combinations of these six dots, there is no difficulty in providing signs for the whole of the alphabet, and for all necessary marks of punctuation, &c. For writing, a frame is used, consisting of a grooved metal bed, containing ten grooves to the inch; over this is fitted a brass guide, punched with oblong holes, whose vertical diameter is three-tenths of an inch, while the horizontal diameter is two-tenths. This perforated guide is fixed into a light wooden frame, like the frame of a common school slate, which is attached to the grooved metal bed by hinges. The paper is introduced between the frame and the grooved bed. The instrument for writing is a blunt awl, which drives or punches a little cap of paper before it into the grooves of the bed, thereby producing a series of small pits on the side next the writer. When taken out and turned over, little pro-

minences are felt corresponding to the pits on the other side. The reading is performed from left to right, consequently the writing is from right to left; but this reversal presents no difficulty as soon as the pupil has caught the idea that, in reading and writing alike, he has to go forwards. The brass guide has a double row of openings, which enables the writer to write two lines; when these are written he shifts his guide downwards, until two little pins, which project from the under surface at its ends, drop into corresponding holes of the frame, when the writer writes two more lines, and this operation is repeated until he arrives at the bottom of the page.

Many partially successful attempts have been made at various times to supply the blind with a musical notation, and indeed the ordinary musical staff of five lines and spaces with the notes in common use have been reproduced, but the success has not been encouraging; and it was left for the Braille system to provide efficiency and thorough practicability in this direction also, so that wherever his printing and writing characters are used, his musical signs are sure to be adopted. The basis of the musical notation is the ordinary Braille alphabet arranged in four rows containing ten letters each. The seven last letters in each row represent the seven musical notes; those of the first row being quavers; those of the second, minims; of the third, semibreves; and of the fourth, crotchets. The sign for semibreve also stands for semiquaver; that for minim, for demisemiquaver, &c. This use of the same sign in two senses presents no difficulty to any one acquainted with the rudiments of music, as a bar consisting of one semiquaver, or of sixteen semibreves, is an impossibility. The notes therefore take twenty-eight signs, and for the other signs used in music there remain thirty-three. Each sign occupies only the space of a single letter. Thus the blind are provided with a means for reading music, which enables them to obtain a thorough knowledge of the composition to be studied. A very considerable amount of classical music has already been printed on the Braille system; and when music (not already printed) is required, it need only be read out by a sighted person for the blind to write it himself for future use: of course this dictation can be as readily taken down by fifty or a hundred blind. It used to be the fashion to teach the blind by ear, parrot-like; indeed this system still obtains in many establishments, and in such cases it is of course impossible to attain perfect accuracy and high culture. Those interested in the teaching of the blind should visit the Royal Normal College and Academy of Music, at Norwood, a place easily accessible to Londoners. At this College articulation, especially as applied to music, is carried on with unremitting zeal, and extraordinary success. An examination of the pupils will show that they not only sing and play the very best and highest-class music, but that they also have a thorough knowledge of the scientific and technical structure of the pieces performed. The pupils are not encouraged to prepare mere show-pieces for public exhibition, but are

thoroughly trained and grounded in all the preliminary work so necessary for them in their future careers, either as performers or teachers. As might be expected, the pupils at the College generally exhibit a remarkable faculty for, and sense of, musical pitch; it is not therefore surprising that many of them achieve great success as pianoforte tuners. They are trained under the superintendence of a most skilful expert from the old firm of Broadwood, and have practically proved that they can not only tune and repair pianofortes, but that they are also able to turn out most capital instruments of their own manufacture. These pianofortes sell for a very reasonable price, and are therefore in demand with those who know how admirably and carefully they are constructed.

There can be no doubt that, with proper training commenced in early years, a blind man or woman (both sexes are trained as tuners at the Normal College) would make a far more accurate pianoforte tuner than a sighted person. The pianoforte tuner has to control vibrations too subtle to be recognised by any sense except that of hearing. To deal properly with them the tuner must possess a susceptible organism, and a sensitive and well-trained ear. The loss of sight is generally compensated for by an acuteness of hearing which only needs education to develop to perfection. The fact is recognised in Paris, and in Boston (United States), where blind tuners are in great request.

To return to the question of musical education: we cannot but notice the enormous increase of colleges and academies for sighted persons which have recently sprung up all over the country. These undoubtedly are the outcome of a demand that the musician of the future, whether amateur or professional, shall be a person of general culture and knowledge—any one who may aspire to be regarded as a musician will be expected to be something more than a mere singer or player. And it is interesting to note that the authorities at the Royal Normal College for the Blind are fully alive to the fact that their pupils will have to compete with sighted persons trained to a high standard, consequently the work of general education is most carefully and efficiently pushed forward. A recent inspection showed that pupils of twelve years of age and upwards were able to work out problems in Euclid and Algebra, and to answer arithmetical, geographical, and other questions in a manner which would put to the blush many who have enjoyed the advantages of education at some of our most celebrated public schools.

Thanks to the Braille system, which we have endeavoured to explain, the whole field of general and musical literature is now available for the blind. They can have in their libraries, not only the Bible, Shakespeare, and Horace, but also the works of Bach, Handel, and Mendelssohn; so that at any moment the student is able to refresh his mind, and re-peruse a work learnt, perhaps, years ago, without calling to his aid a sighted reader.

The foregoing observations have chiefly referred to the course of training pursued at the Royal Normal College, because there professedly the curriculum of

study is laid out for the express culture of music ; but it must not be supposed that there are no other schools for the blind in England where music is taught. One admirable institution, the Yorkshire School for the Blind, instituted in 1833, enjoys a high reputation for the teaching of its pupils, but the school is deficient of many advantages enjoyed by the institution at Norwood. According to the last printed report, signed by Mr. Buckle, the able superintendent of the York School, "there are at present 25 pupils, 17 boys and 8 girls, receiving instruction on the pianoforte or organ, or both;" and he adds, "it would be a great advantage to the Musical De-

partment if we had, as they have at most blind institutions, three or four small rooms, each large enough to hold a pianoforte for the pupils' practice."

At Norwood there are upwards of forty rooms, each with a pianoforte, four of them "grands," and there are also three organs, blown by a gas-engine, in separate rooms. When to these advantages we add the facilities enjoyed by the pupils for attending the vocal and instrumental concerts in the neighbouring Crystal Palace, it is easy to understand why the Royal Normal College stands at the head of all others in the musical department, the particular study for which, by nature, the blind seem more especially fitted.

WHAT TO WEAR.

CHIT-CHAT ON DRESS. BY OUR PARIS CORRESPONDENT.



SPRING is yet young, and as the season advances there will be many changes in present fashions, but we are able to decide on the merits of the new materials, and in them there is much novelty.

Heliotrope, biscuit, dark greens, dark clarets, greys and browns, and many varieties of neutral tints will prevail. Foulé cloths will still be worn, and are brought out in better qualities than last year. Casimir is the latest improvement on them; it is thinner, softer, hangs and drapes better, but it is closely allied to the original foulé. Bège has so much to recommend it that it reappears each season; the novelties now are satin bège, which has a glossy face, and is finished like satin cloth; llama bège, thinner, and made principally in light pinks, blues, and cream, and specially to be recommended as being warmer than cashmere, and yet light; and finally bège tricot, woven as closely as possible to resemble stocking-cloth, which the jersey bodices have brought to the fore, and closely allied to another novelty called elastic cloth, woven in plain colours with similar effects. Camelina is a name applied to a soft make of woollen stuff having long irregular hairs on the surface, an absurd freak of fashion lacking both beauty and use. Another variety of the same cloth has a raised mignonette pattern on the surface. Checks and twills and brocades have very much superseded stripes; brocades, plain materials, and checks only will be fashionable in woollen goods, and a cheap, and at the same time good-looking cloth, in red, blue, or black shepherd's plaid, a mixture of wool and cotton, is now made up to a large extent for morning dresses. Drap de Carreaux is another novelty in check cloth, but the patterns in this are various—single checks, double checks, broken checks, and other kinds. The chief characteristic, however, of the new woollen materials are the brocades, which are chiefly of the cashmere style of design, and most frequently show an admix-

ture of silk thrown on the surface, and several colourings blended. Newer than all are the woollen brocades, into which, with the silk, gold tinsel is also interwoven: these look a great deal better than they are, and are used with plain silk, satin, and wool as trimmings. Spots of different colours on a plain ground are made in good satins, and in woollens, the spots in the latter case being silk—for example, dark claret spots on a blue ground, blue on biscuit, cream on biscuit, blue on dark green; these are being fashionably made up with plain materials. Several familiar fabrics have been brought out this season at unusually low prices, such as a cheap make of Indian cashmere, and of satin sheeting at less than three shillings a yard, and sold in colourings dear to the artistic eye: brilliant yellows, light pinks, clarets, olive-greens, and turquoise-blue, as well as the now popular shade which is known as the "Etna," a rich red-brown. In silks, satins, and gauzes, three new shades are quite the mode: heliotrope, a bright vivid peach; chaudron, a delicate red-brown, and terra-cotta. These appear also in some of the lighter woollen stuffs made for home in-door wear, which are either striped with the same colour, or covered with a tiny pattern. Painted silks and satin are the special novelty which Parisians particularly favour, and many of the new spring ribbons are printed with floral and Pompadour designs to resemble hand-painting, while a new printed satin surface appears on a thin mixture of wool and silk, the pattern being marked by a distinct line all round, and almost covering the fabric. These as well as the many coloured brocades are made up with self-colours of the prevailing tone, but the plainer kind of woollen goods do not admit of any admixture of colour, and with bèges, &c., a cloth has been brought out which has a satin brocade of the same colour on the plain ground. Striped chalis in self-colours are also to be much worn for simple evening toilettes, for they are dressy-looking and inexpensive—indeed, while some of the accessories of dress were never more costly, young ladies have unusual opportunities of dressing well at little outlay. They have special encouragement just