



THE TONIC SOL-FA COLLEGE, FOREST GATE.

THE TONIC SOL-FA COLLEGE AND ITS WORK.



RAPID growth of the Tonic Sol-fa movement is one of the greatest wonders in the musical history of the last half-century. Born in the midst of enthusiasm, but meeting with all the prejudices which an innovation is sure to call forth, the system has not only held its own for upwards of twenty years, but has in

that time made as many singers in our own country, as have been made by all other agencies put together during the rest of the century. The movement has spread, not by any inducements held out by Government, or by philanthropic agencies promoted and upheld by the upper classes; but because the majority of the people desire to learn to sing, and Mr. Curwen's system offers such a perfectly easy, cheap, and true method of gaining the wished-for end. The founder of the method started with the proposition that the main problem of musical instruction should be to teach people to read music as they read their newspapers. To-day, the tonic sol-faists are, we may safely say without prejudice, the best sight-readers of music in the country.

The work of the Tonic Sol-fa College is as distinct from that of the other great musical institutions of the country as it could well be. The leading schools

of music, with which we have dealt in former articles, are conducted on a strictly academic plan, and devote themselves almost entirely to the training of skilled musicians and composers. But something more than the production of finished artists is needed if we are to have a people who will "make music" themselves, appreciate good music when they hear it, and be capable of distinguishing between the true and the false in art. We want popular elementary classes established throughout the country; we want our Sunday worshippers taught to take their own part in the praises of the Church; we want our ragged-school children to be able to join in the merry song or soothing hymn; and, above all, we want the homes of the people made more attractive and more happy by the sweet influences of music. All this is, in reality, the work which the tonic sol-faists are doing. The organisation boasts of some four or five thousand teachers, who are teaching about a million and a quarter of pupils, and these drawn mostly from among the lower and middle classes. The followers of Mr. Curwen are, in short, working for national objects, and have a right to claim the sympathies of all who rightly estimate the religious, the social, the artistic, and the educational value of music.

Until quite lately, the whole of the teaching under the tonic sol-fa system was done by amateurs—men who, after a hard day's work, hung up their modu-

lators in mission schools or lecture-rooms, and cheerfully guided their little classes through the rudiments of vocal music. Gradually the school boards of the large cities adopted the system in their schools, and this created the need for professional teachers. But how were these teachers to be trained? The Tonic Sol-fa College was indeed in existence, but it was nothing more than a voluntary association conducted on the mutual improvement principle, and without either a building of its own or a staff of professors. But the founder of the system was not a man who was easily daunted, and so he set to work at once on behalf of the College, lecturing all over the country in aid of its funds. The response was unfortunately small; the rich and liberal classes knew nothing of tonic sol-fa and its work, and consequently withheld their subscriptions. Aided, however, by the teachers themselves, and by the pupils of the system, a few scholarships were obtained, and funds enough to justify the organisation of a summer term of study for young teachers. This was in 1876, and every summer since then this term of six weeks' continuous study has been held. The attendance varies somewhat, principally on account of the expiration of several of the scholarships; but the average number of students is thirty. These come from all parts of the country—the majority from Scotland—and occasionally a pupil from the Colonies presents himself. In the choice of studies, chief importance is, of course, given to subjects bearing on the work of the teacher of choral music. Thus, voice-training, pronunciation in singing, chanting on elocutional principles, and the art of explaining and developing a subject to children and beginners are selected as being of primary importance. The harmonium is, we believe, the only instrument taught in the College, the sol-fa notation not lending itself readily to the requirements of instrumental music.

The plan of having only a six weeks' session was founded on an idea of Mr. Scott Russell's, that the best way to learn engineering is to spend six months in the lecture-room and six months in the shops. The students, as we have already said, are nearly all acting teachers; they come to learn more, and go back to their posts to apply what they have learned. This is how Mr. Curwen describes them:—"There are no idlers allowed in the College; all are workers. Class succeeds class as regularly as the clock records the hours. All day long the steady work goes on with scarcely any intermission, except for meal-times and sleep. So close and trying are the studies, that none but earnest men would endure them, and none but well-seasoned and well-prepared sol-faists could stand them. Yet there is no sign of weariness. Why? These students are here to equip themselves for their chosen and loved vocation. They are the pioneers of a new profession—music teachers for the people—and they exult in being students of the Tonic Sol-fa College."

The little staff of professional teachers employed to guide these summer term students in their studies is composed of thoroughly practical men—men who are

daily performing the work they are seeking to qualify their pupils for. The art of teaching class is generally assigned to two or three masters, and the students have thus the opportunity of copying more than one style of imparting instruction. In this class the members themselves are in turn required to give a lesson on a previously arranged subject to their teachers and fellow-students, who at the close of the lesson criticise the manner in which it has been given. One of the great weaknesses of the young and inexperienced teacher is nervousness before his class, and there could certainly be no better method of removing this than that of reversing the positions of teacher and taught.

It was the writer's good fortune to be a member of one of these classes, presided over by the late Mr. Curwen—as genial and kindly a man as ever lived—and he can testify to the great benefits derived by the students from the system employed. It compelled every one to be not only thoroughly conversant with his subject, and the best methods of presenting it, but it helped to impart that coolness and deliberation which are so essential to the teacher's success with his pupils.

These classes have done more than anything in raising the standard of ability of tonic sol-fa workers. The teachers of the system scattered throughout the land are still far from being all they might be, but the aim of the leaders of the movement is to make teachers who shall be thorough musicians, and capable of taking their places by the side of the best professionals.

The first few summer terms of the College were held in hired school-rooms and temporary offices. This was found to be altogether unsatisfactory, and an effort was made to obtain funds for the erection of a suitable building, in which the entire work of teaching and propagating the system might be carried out. We need not speak of all the labour that had to be gone through ere sufficient money was collected for this purpose. It will be enough to say that in July, 1879, the new College at Forest Gate was opened—by the late Earl of Kintore—amid great demonstration and rejoicing, and that in a few days afterwards the summer term for teachers was first held within its walls. Had sufficient funds been available, it was intended to hold classes all the year round; but it has been only possible to have, in addition to the short summer term, occasional classes in the winter evenings.

It must not be supposed that the work of the College is suspended during the time in which classes are not held within the building. An important part of its labours consists in the management of correspondence or postal classes, and in the issue of the certificates connected with the system. By means of the former, instruction is conveyed to those who, from their isolated positions, are beyond the reach of a teacher. The exercises are sent up by post, corrected, and returned for small fees. The subjects taught in this manner include harmony, counterpoint, composition, musical form, acoustics, staff notation, and

even such an unlikely topic as harmonium fingering. The certificates of the College are all issued from its offices, and entail an immense amount of labour. We have avoided anything like mere statistics, but it may be interesting to mention that during the year ending May, 1885, the number of certificates issued by the College was 24,240. In the same period the secretary received 19,691 letters in connection with the work of the College. The certificates, it may be added, are of various grades, beginning with a simple examination for school children, and ending with an examination in musical composition, which Sir George Macfarren has for some years conducted.

It will thus be seen that the Tonic Sol-fa College

is essentially a "school of music for the people." The aims of its founders have always been in the direction of popular usefulness. They have worked, as they are fond of saying, for "schools, homes, and congregations," rather than for limited art circles. By means of the College the practice of singing and the elements of musical knowledge have been carried into thousands of places in England, Scotland, and Wales, which had not been touched by any previous musical movement. Mr. Curwen's object was to make the people of this country and their children sing; that object, if not yet fully realised, is being daily brought nearer by the noble and untiring efforts of the Tonic Sol-fa College, and those who work under its banner.

J. CUTHBERT HADDEN.

THE SISTERS: A LOVE-TALE OF JAPAN.



AT one end of the long street forming the village of Morioka, in Japan, stood the low thatched cottage in which the sisters O-Suba and Niya lived with a widowed aunt. Their father had fallen in battle, and his wife soon followed him to the grave, committing

her children to the care of their only remaining relative. O-Suba, the elder, was a brunette, with sparkling black eyes, and white teeth that shone between full, ruddy lips. She was taller than Niya, who was fair and slight, with mild, blue eyes, and a soft voice.

For over a year O-Suba had been betrothed to Kampei, the son of a neighbouring farmer. Their parents had arranged the matter. Though it was not made formal by an exchange of presents, the young people regarded it as settled; and the marriage was deferred only until Kampei returned from a campaign against a rebel prince, in which he was to follow his lord, his father being too old to take the field.

When the young man called on the sisters in order to say adieu, he was mortified by O-Suba's manner, which seemed to show that she regarded his absence as a reprieve; and his face betrayed his feelings.

"Do not look thus, good Kampei, before your commander!" she said laughingly. "He will think you a coward. Go and win booty, and come back covered with glory. Who would not be a soldier rather than a mean farmer!" she cried, with animation. "A warrior is a gentleman, has his pockets full of bright silver, and is esteemed by his lord. Go, Kampei; I shall despise you if you hesitate!"

Kampei was stung by her tones, and rose hastily. A deep sigh reached him, and on turning round he saw Niya sitting in a corner of the room, her face buried in the loose sleeves of her robe.

"Farewell, Niya," he said.

A sob rose in the girl's throat as she replied, "Farewell, Kampei. And remember," she faltered, "that if anything occurs to you, I—we shall be broken-hearted."

"You will not forget me, O-Suba? It will cheer me to know that."

"I shall not forget you," she said impatiently; and the young man left, catching a glance, as he closed the garden gate, of O-Suba waving a gay adieu, and of Niya with her face hidden in her hands.

One day, a few months after Kampei's departure, his mother called at the cottage, and after relating a pitiful tale of bad harvests, poverty, and debt, said that her husband, who was in feeble health, would be sent to prison if she could not obtain eighty *ryos*, and she begged O-Suba, as her son's betrothed, to at least lend that sum to her. O-Suba treated the poor woman harshly, refused the money, and reminded her visitor that as presents were not yet exchanged, their marriage must not be regarded as certain.

Niya in vain urged her aunt to apply a portion of her little fortune to the farmer's relief; her relatives were obdurate; and the old woman was going away sadly, when the younger girl sprang up, thrust her feet into a pair of sandals, and hurried after the visitor, overtaking her before she reached the gate.

"When must you have the money?" she asked.

"Within three days, Niya."

"You shall have it," said the girl; and escaping from the thanks and blessings of the old woman, she returned to the house. She threw herself on the mats in a corner, clasped her hands, and puckered her brow thoughtfully.

Suddenly she uttered a joyous cry. The screens were drawn back, leaving the whole front of the house open; and Niya saw a pair of swallows fly into the room, and perch on the space between the wall and the ceiling, chirping and chattering together busily.

"See, sister! the pretty birds are going to build;