

BARNETT HOUSE PAPERS. No. 3

The Needs of Popular Musical Education

BY

SIR W. HENRY HADOW, D.Mus.

PRINCIPAL OF ARMSTRONG COLLEGE
NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE

With Foreword by the

Right Honourable H. A. L. FISHER, D.Litt., M.P.

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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FOREWORD

I AM not so presumptuous as to suppose that any words of mine can add weight to an address given by one of our most accomplished musicians upon a theme which he has made his own. Sir Henry Hadow speaks upon musical education with an authority which no wise man will challenge, and with the wit, grace, and knowledge calculated to commend his message to a wide audience. I trust, indeed, that his audience will be wide. I could wish that every teacher, every body of school managers, every local education authority would ponder the substance of this pregnant allocution, holding, as I do, that in no way can the general refinement of life in this country be more effectually furthered than by the restoration of music to its proper place in the scheme of our common education.

H. A. L. FISHER.

NOTE

THIS Address was delivered at Oxford on June 27, 1918, by arrangement with Barnett House, and is here published from shorthand notes taken down on that occasion.

Sir Henry Hadow's original intention of writing it out more formally could not be fulfilled, owing to his departure to take up the appointment of Director of Education with the Y.M.C.A. on the lines of communication in France.

THE NEEDS OF POPULAR MUSICAL EDUCATION

I AM going, as far as is possible, to avoid anything which is of a controversial nature, and I am afraid that the few things I have to say will seem so obviously true that it is hardly worth your while to listen to them. There is one word in the title which has been chosen for this lecture which may seem to want a little explanation, and that is the word 'popular'. For some reason, we nearly always use the word 'popular' with some sense of depreciation, as though an appeal to the people had some taint. According to an article in the last number of *The Spectator*, a popular essay means one which contains no reference to mathematics. No doubt popular prices are prices which all people are glad to pay; but a popular entertainment is one the very name of which warns off any one who has any discrimination, and a popular book is the kind of book which everybody reads except those who are studying the subject. Now I do not mean 'popular' in that sense at all. The error has sunk so deeply into the minds of English people that it has become much more than a matter of nomenclature. Not very long ago—just before the war—a friend of mine and I gave a reception in the north of England. I had to choose the music. I sent to a local orchestra, and asked them to submit me a programme. They sent back the most dreadful list of rubbish which it is possible to conceive. I said a few eloquent words to them over the telephone, to which they replied, 'We did not know that you wanted it to be high-class'. Imagine, ladies and gentlemen, applying that to the

flowers on the table, the fruit on the dishes, or anything except the artistic part of the entertainment. No, I do not believe in the use of the word 'popular' in that sense at all. I have always been convinced that the taste of English people in music is sound. The only reason why bad music flourishes is indifference. But since, after all, an address has got to be about something, and I have barred out one possible discrimination in this wide topic, I should like to say at once that what I do propose to talk about is not so much the musical education which is to be a preparation for a professional career, but rather the place that music can hold in a general liberal education—the part that music can play in the training of the intellect and minds of all of us. That part has not been played hitherto to anything like the extent which seems to me possible or desirable. We have been too much in the habit of looking upon music as audible confectionery, instead of being the best analogue of all that is finest in great literature and poetry. We have not always believed this. If you look back to Elizabethan times, when, after all, the intellectual life of England was at its highest, music was part of every educated person's career. Morley, in his *Plaine and Easie Introduction*,¹ tells how a scholar, who betakes himself to a teacher of music, describes how he was out at a supper party, madrigals were handed round, and he was asked to take his part. When he explained that he could not read music, the whole company drew away from him, and discussed in knots where he had been brought up. That is what our Elizabethan ancestors thought of music as part of a liberal education. I dare not ask how many of the company here assembled could acquit themselves satisfactorily under a like ordeal. There is no need to enter into the reasons why music dropped into the background in the reign of Anne. I believe the greater part was the accident that the social and intellectual life was con-

¹ Published 1597.

finied to London, and that its leaders happened to be unmusical. If you look at the different ways in which music was treated by Shakespeare and his contemporaries and by Swift and his contemporaries, you will see that the music which was the very breath of our nostrils has become, by Queen Anne's reign, a remote and rather costly exotic, for which a few people profess an admiration which is not always genuine. And that bad tradition, which was set in the eighteenth century, has gone on almost to our own time. Look at the difference in Oxford between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the diaries of Wood we find keen appreciation, in those of Hearne¹ I do not think that I remember any allusion to music except the disdainful reference to Handel's visit: 'Handel with his lousy crew of fiddlers.' And to come down even to later times, it is, I think, even within living memory, or, if not, only just out of living memory, that an undergraduate of Christ Church called upon the Dean with a request to have the use of the Hall for a concert. The request was not considered, the sole response being to order Mr. Ouseley out of the room. Think of the change nowadays. Think of the position which music occupies here and now, and you will see that the change is coming, and that we have already progressed considerably along the way. What then remains to be done? The answer to that question is—'A good deal.' We want to give music much more of a place in our schools, from the elementary schools upwards, and in our universities. First of all, we must rid our minds absolutely and altogether of the belief that music is something apart from the rest of our intellectual life. We have got to treat music as a language; its grammar must be studied like the grammar of a language, its classics as those of a literature, its composition as that of a language. That does not mean adding further burdens to an already overcrowded curriculum of subjects. It means

¹ Anthony Wood, 1632-95; Thomas Hearne, 1678-1735.

teaching subjects in a different way from that in which they have been taught hitherto. It is not so much a matter of hours as the way in which those hours are spent. Looking back over a period of forty years, I do not remember a very large number of hours—either as teacher or learner—which could not have been packed a little fuller with advantage. I do not think I ever learnt any history at school—any history of England. What passed under that name was an account of the disputes in which the people of England were from time to time engaged, and the bloodthirsty way in which those disputes were usually settled. When I was fifteen I could have told you the date of every battle fought in the Wars of the Roses, but I certainly could not have told you of any single invention during that period which had done anything to ameliorate the lot of man.

How many of us have ever studied the civilization of our country in such a way as to put the musicians or artists into their proper places? It does make a difference to one's knowledge of a composer's personality to know what was his provenance, what were the circumstances in which he lived, what was the general history of the civilization into which he came, how was his life, work, and art connected with that of his contemporaries or with the great political movements of his time, and to what extent is this influence found to throw a flood of light over the music itself. That is one reform that can take place. Let us see to it that the text-books shall be written from a different perspective, and that they shall find room for the achievements of the great composers. Let us try to remodel our conception of literature and history so as to bring music into some kind of relation with the rest of human life. It has played a very large part in the civilization of our country, and it is not right that we should be brought up in such entire ignorance of what it has done.

Now for another point. We want an almost complete

change in the way in which music is taught in our schools at present. For a long time the teaching of music meant teaching a certain number of reluctant individuals to play the piano badly. There were also visiting teachers, generally with little or no status, and the estimation in which their work was held may be gauged from the school prospectuses, in which, long after the other subjects, you had music and singing as 'extras'. The dissociation of music and singing is ominous in itself. The first thing we have to do is to see to it that the children, when quite young, are taught musical dictation. There are a great many people in this country who regard the reading of music as something miraculous. You will remember in *Lorna Doone* the old Devonshire servant had exactly the same view of people who professed to read the newspaper. It ought to be no more difficult for a child to be brought up to read music than for a child to be brought up to read French. I say advisedly, ought not to be. It is at the present so, and the great obstacle is our preposterous system of musical notation.

All that can be remedied. If we could get a more logical scheme of notation, we should have cleared away one great obstacle from the progress of music in general. Even now, with that difficulty in the way, it is astonishing how quickly children in a school will pick up musical dictation. I have visited one or two schools where the teacher has written a passage on the blackboard and the children have read it out at once. The correlation between eye and ear is complete, so that the two work in with each other just as perfectly as they are accustomed to do in reading the printed page. After all, it is a very low order of education which does not enable a person to read a page or write a letter without reading out the words aloud. The same degree of education which enables us to read a page of Shakespeare to ourselves would enable us equally well to read a page of Beethoven. Thirdly, we want to make music very much more a part of the

corporate life of the school than has hitherto been done. Here again there has been a very great advance, notably in some of our public schools, such as Harrow, Clifton, Rugby, &c., where the music has really been made an actual part of the school life, and where the whole education has immensely profited in consequence. For one thing, there should be a certain amount of class-singing. I should like it for at least ten minutes or a quarter of an hour each day. Get the pupils together in classes and make them sing first-rate English songs, such as 'The Vicar of Bray'. I have sometimes heard people say that they cannot understand how any one who professes to like classical music can like anything so 'tuney' as a folk-song. I remember once in Oxford meeting a lady who was up here on a visit, and who engaged with me in a musical conversation. 'I adore Bach,' she said. 'He is so far above the common herd.' I remarked that most of my friends seemed to enjoy his music. She replied, 'Ah, but do you think they really understand him? Because there is no tune in him.' What can you make of people who adopt that attitude? They are in the same chapter of *bêtise* as those who suppose that to be fond of good music means being fond of serious music. (I have heard a good deal of serious music which was not good at all.) There is plenty of room in Shakespeare for Touchstone as well as Lear. There is room in music for both grave and gay, provided you get the best in both kinds. But there is no room for the second-rate. There is no kind, however simple, which cannot be good in its way, and have a place in the hierarchy of the arts. One of the reasons why people feel a little misgiving at the teaching of the best music in schools is because they are afraid it will be too heavy for children to take an interest in. Let it be properly and carefully chosen. Do not give children the Fourth Symphony of Brahms to start with. Give them something of transparent structure, broad melody, and effective rhythm. I spoke just now

about history text-books, and the need of replacing them by something which would give the artistic life of the country a much fuller place. In every school there should be a certain number of books on the history, the aesthetics, and biography of music. These should not be treated so much as part of lesson-time, but put into the school library for any one to study who will. I should not be surprised to find a large proportion of the boys and girls who would like to take these books out and read them. If you begin by making them read the actual text of the music, as they would of a foreign language, you have increased their horizon, and given them a whole set of new opportunities, both of emotional and intellectual training. I say 'intellectual', and that is the point upon which I wish to close. It is not in the least true that any fortuitous concourse of notes will make a tune. One of the surest tests between good and bad music is that the bad music does not mean anything; it has no significance. I remember once Professor Tovey executing an extraordinarily brilliant and extremely amusing burlesque of Richard Strauss. It was an admirable parody. There was no musical meaning to it whatsoever, and when he had finished playing he said, 'That is what music sounds like to people who do not understand it'. If we do not try to understand it, it will sound like mellifluous nonsense-verses. Now may I qualify that for a moment lest it be misunderstood? The meaning of music, the meaning of a great tune, does not consist in referring to anything outside music. It is no use asking a musician what the tune in the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven means in words. The meaning of music is inherent in the music itself, and can be expressed in terms of music, and of that alone. One cannot translate a cathedral into Greek prose. Programme music, where the succession of harmonies is intended to represent something outside, if it represents sounds in nature, may do so without any great sense of failure, although even there I think most

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people would rather have it away. Those musical thunderstorms (in which the thunder almost invariably precedes the lightning) do not fill us with the awe inspired by that phenomenon of nature. Beethoven has done one; Wagner has done one; but they are failures. Beethoven knew perfectly well what he was about when he said that the first movement of the Pastoral Symphony was more an impression of emotion than a landscape. He knew the limitations of his medium. We have been, in recent years, confronted with a somewhat incongruous musical form called the symphonic poem, in which the music is only intended to give part of the impression, and the programme gives the rest. I do not doubt that this is a legitimate form, and that it is likely to develop further in the future, but I am quite sure that, at any rate to my own idea, it does not compete in beauty or power to touch the heart with a Beethoven quartet, the whole significance of which is its own musical significance. By saying music is not translatable into another language, we do not lower or undervalue music, but raise it to a higher plane. That power of direct communion between the artist and the hearer seems to me to be more expressed and felt in music than in any other art. In music, the beauty of form is identical with the beauty of meaning. The rise and fall of the phrase and its rhythm is the meaning of the melody, and therefore I believe that great music has even more power to touch the heart than great poetry itself. A study of the way in which it has come down to us is at least as well worth while as the study of any other aspect of history. If we do give a fuller attention to this, we shall be better able to put music into its proper place in our intellectual life, and then we shall come back to that sense of the value of music which was one characteristic of our Elizabethan forefathers.

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