

# CONFERENCE OF MUSIC TEACHERS.

## A SUCCESSFUL INAUGURATION.

There was something especially significant and stimulating in the gathering at the University of Adelaide, which opened the Conference of Music Teachers, which, during the week, promises so much for the future, not only of one art, but of education as a whole in South Australia. It seems that now, when the world is suffering from a period of too complete devotion to the so-called "practical," is the time for an awakening to the side of life which makes for peace of heart and balanced mentality. As Dr. Davies (Director of the Elder Conservatorium) said in a fine inaugural address, to watch the tired faces in the street, and then to see them transfigured during the community singing, is proof enough of one side of the appeal of music. But the conference stands for more than the opportunity of special study and help offered by those best able to give it, fine though this is. It is the heartiness and enthusiasm with which the teachers are availing themselves of the facilities thrown open to them, that is going to make a real, live movement—to be continued, it is to be hoped, from year to year.

### —The Reception.—

The conference proceedings on Monday were opened with a reception in the Elder Hall, when Professor Harold Davies, Mus. Bac., assisted by Mrs. Davies, and Mr. C. R. Hodge received the delegates. For some time the reception committee were kept busy shaking hands. Mr. Harold Wyde, F.R.C.O., gave a brief organ recital, and when the last guest had arrived, Dr. Davies heartily welcomed those present. He said he was delighted to see so many present, and sincerely hoped that the conference would prove a new development which should mark a great musical advance. By the end of the week he believed that it would be decided that such a gathering of music teachers should be repeated from year to year. He reminded his hearers that all the recitals during the conference (except only the orchestral concert on Thursday evening), were free, and hoped that many would avail themselves of the opportunity to attend them. Afternoon tea was served, and there was something pleasantly spontaneous about it all—the whole staff of the Conservatorium combining to make the guests thoroughly at home. A move was next made for the Prince of Wales Lecture Theatre. Professor Mitchell, speaking to the assembly, said he welcomed the members of the Music Teachers' Conference with very great pleasure, and hoped that they would enjoy the most comprehensive programme for the week. Dr. Davies had decided to make this effort to pull the whole musical profession together, and the University was heartily with him in the movement. He called upon the Director of the Conservatorium for his address.

### —The Place of Music in Education.—

Dr. Davies then addressed the gathering upon "The Place of Music in Education." He said:—I have chosen for the subject of my talk with you, "The place of music in education." It would, perhaps, have been better styled "The place of music in human life," for in so far as music is an essential factor in our lives, to such an extent must it be a part of our general education. As musicians we are accounted an emotional race, given to partial views; but, in this short survey of the function and place of music, I shall try to avoid rhetorical statement, and deal with the question as rationally as a musician may. You must forgive me, therefore, if, at the outset, I make a purely sentimental suggestion—that you consider for a moment what life would be without music! I want to throw the situation into high relief, and this is, perhaps, the surest means of bringing ourselves, as human beings, face to face with the real import of the matter. Imagine what it would be never again to hear the human voice raised in its most manifold and urgent appeal of song! Imagine, if you can, the sudden destruction of all instruments of music, so that henceforth our cathedra's and churches should be void of organs, our homes bare of the domestic piano and violin, our public ceremonies and parades without bands! Or think of any of the most familiar things in the literature of music. Fancy the sublimity of Handel's "Hallelujah," or the solemnity of his "Dead March" for ever lost to the human race, or the sweet lyrics of our folk lore, such as "Home, sweet home," or "Annie Laurie," consigned to limbo! Can any of us measure the extent of the loss, even to the least susceptible of our fellows? What a sense of dreadful dearth would overwhelm us all! What a blankness of silence would fall upon the world at large! At the risk of being inconsistent, I shall venture at least this one rhetorical statement, that there is no supreme crisis in human life, either of sorrow or happiness, in which music does not play its part; and the deepest emotions of which we are seized would remain for ever unvoiced were music for ever silenced.

### —The Better View.—

But, while its loss may be conceded as a calamity too grave to contemplate (continued the speaker), there are still, even among our intellectuals, many who refuse to view it seriously, who only allow it to be a pleasant diversion for the hearer, or a graceful accomplishment on the part of the performer, but hardly as a matter of great moment. Perhaps this low esteem of the art and its followers is a survival of days long gone by, when the musician was too often a mere vagabond, without social distinction or civil rights. One recalls that even so late as the eighteenth century, both actors and operatic singers were actually without the pale of citizenship, and there is more than a suggestion of contempt in Thomas Hearne's diary of that period, when, in speaking of Handel's visit to Oxford, he refers to him as "Handel with his lousy crew of fiddlers." I should tell you, though, that this was not always so, even in remoter times, for in the days of "Good Queen Bess," when, after all, the intellectual life of England was in some ways at its highest, music was a vital part of every educated person's career. In this twentieth century, however, there would seem to be more of the attitude of easy tolerance towards the art. There is perhaps no actual contempt, but it is doubtful whether our leaders of thought are, as a whole, enthusiastically disposed. Let those who enjoy music follow it, and pay for it themselves, is the more general view. In British communities, at least, museums, art galleries, and libraries are liberally endowed in the public interest, but music is usually severely neglected. I do not want to be misunderstood in this statement, which has some notable exceptions. The very building in which we are just now assembled is a tribute to the better view. And my own privilege in speaking to you at this moment rests upon the fuller recognition of music claims. There is good ground, however, for much of the indifference that exists among educated people. It is this, that a great deal of the music they hear is of the lightest and most frivolous kind, a sort of audible confectionery. It is of the same order as those endless floods of writing which are not literature, of illustrations which are not pictures, of cheap rhymings which are not poetry, of buildings which are not architecture. We cannot, however, absolve those who take a casual view of music, unless they regard literature, painting, poetry, and architecture in like wise. Such folk must be logical.

### —Art—the Splendid Adornment of Life.—

The times in which we live are always mirrored in the art of that period, and the general attitude towards art as a whole has always been largely determined by the conditions of life at any given time. With the prevalence of such wild and universal striving for this world's goods it is not surprising that gentler pursuits should languish, and that even our system of education should strongly reflect this spirit and lay chief stress—not on the humanities—but on those subjects which make for what is called efficiency in the affairs of life, in science, in industry, and in commerce as well as in war, which is the logical and dreadful end of such ambitions. As musicians we claim it to be the chief of the arts, and that is not an empty boast (continued Dr. Davies). There is a Latin proverb, "Ex nihilo nihil fit," but out of nothing music came, the sheer creation of man's imagination.

### —A Godlike Achievement.—

It is well to realize the full meaning of this—I mean the subjective origin of music, for it is that which for ever distinguishes it from the sister arts. Painting and sculpture have a natural, an objective origin; they rest upon the world of external things, and are primarily inspired by the actual vision of beauty. But the wonder of music is that it comes wholly from within. It is the pure creative art, and we would dare to say that even if Beethoven's 9th Symphony were the last word that music should utter, it would still represent the most godlike achievement of human genius. Can you tell me what chemistry of the human mind, what subtle soul-ferment could so operate as to give birth to a creation so transcendent? It is a mystery that passes our understanding, yet such is the nature of music. And of its import also we must be clear. I speak now of what we know as pure music, self-dependent, not associated with speech, or any form of programme whatsoever. It can only be thought of as a language, indeed as a language it should be learned, spoken, and

read by all of us. Rightly viewed, music is the sublimation of all human utterance. What we know as language may and does interpret quite adequately our ordinary thoughts and feelings. But where the thing to be expressed becomes more difficult, more exquisite, more elusive, or more exalted, speech rises to the higher level of poetry; that is, it takes to itself certain essential attributes of music, of rhythm, of melody, of euphony, and so organized it becomes a far more sensitive medium. It is well to grasp this, that poetry is the midway between speech and music, that it

combines the essence of both, the substance of words and the spirit of music. I imagine that those who find no special import in music would also deny to poetry any power of expression over and above prose. It is hard to appreciate this attitude. One thinks of so many haunting verses any one of which would belie such a view.

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,  
Tears from the depths of some divine despair,  
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,  
In looking on the happy autumn fields,  
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Is there not here an ethereal essence, a suggestion of mood, a wistfulness of spirit, which not even the best prose could capture? It is the music that you hear in Tennyson's lines which makes them so strangely appealing, and I would say again it is on the plane of great music that we reach the highest level of human utterance, where words of any sort fall short, where the state to be expressed and conveyed defies alike mental analysis or verbal symbols, however eloquent, however suggestive. To voice the uttermost depths of feeling, the soaring heights of rapture, to comprehend and portray every complex phase of human emotion, music only will suffice. It is always hard to answer the sceptic who challenges us to explain music, to say exactly in so many words what it means, what it is all about. Its meaning is inherent in itself, and cannot be reduced to other terms any more than one could translate a cathedral into Greek prose.

### —To Perceive, to Admire, and to Seek.—

To be acutely aware is to be all alive; but, alas! most of us are too busy doing things to find time for seeing. I would even venture to bring this nearer home, and affirm that many of us are too busy teaching music to perceive its beauty, and its mystery. I feel it to be a fundamental though much-neglected aspect of sound education. I hold that music, as well as painting, sculpture, architecture, and Nature study minister richly to our highest wellbeing. For all of us there are three logical steps to attainment. The first is to perceive; the second to admire; and the third to seek. Thus all our virtues are acquired; but we must realize that the incentive to mastery depends wholly upon the first two of these steps. We often wonder why so few of our students are successful. I am tempted to believe that it is because so few of them experience music to begin with; thus they never learn to love it, and our constant urging of them to practise the dreary round of technical exercises serves only to breed a distaste which is the sure precursor of failure. Then, apart from cultivating this elementary appreciation of music itself, there must be the persistent and orderly development of the sense of tonal relations. Aural culture should be the very foundation of all our work, and, combined with this, dictation and reading need to be regularly practised. How many of those who follow music can take up a score and mentally read and enjoy it, as we read and enjoy a book? Is not our first impulse with every unfamiliar work to take it to the piano in order, as we say, "To try it over?" But what a confession of weakness and inability this is. Such methods as these I have mentioned could be adopted by all teachers in the form of class work, together with chorus singing, as a further interest and general stimulus to musical appreciation. Do you not see in them the very embodiment of that vital principle of education we spoke of a moment ago, the development of faculty? We are all conscious in these days of dire stress of life, of its feverishness and haste, of its ceaseless struggle and futility. Does not the pursuit of Art as a whole, and of music especially, suggest a proper alternative for these unhappy conditions? What allurements there is for tired minds and weary hearts in the very thought of leisure and of calm, of contemplation, solace, of wonder and uplift in such a preoccupation. And what urgent need there is that this balm of quiet, of healing, and of concord should even now fall upon all men. I like to think of a sort of Wellesian vision of the future, when life for each of us shall be a song of joy, when all our social relations shall be ordered by that perfect rhythm, which is the deep underlying secret of unity and happiness.

early good. The best music could be of every sort, simple, complex, grave, or gay. They should not forget that in realising the scope of its influence. In no way could the greater refinement of life in that country be more effectually secured than by the fuller inclusion of music in the scheme of their common education. He dealt with the process of education, and referred to the "cultivation of perception" through the eye and the ear, with approval. He did not mean simply seeing and hearing things, "but perceiving them, consciously, intelligently, together with our relation to them, and then, as a natural consequence, learning to feel these things. That is developing a heightened sensibility." To be actively aware was to be all alive, but most of them were too busy doing things to find time for seeing. Many of them were too busy teaching music to perceive its beauty and its mystery. Music was essential to the full stature of their growth as human beings. The time would surely come when systematic ear and rhythm training would be an integral part of school life. The greatest need was to give the pupils at the earliest stages such an experience of good music as might be within their powers of comprehension. They must first be taught to hear it intelligently, appreciatively, with clear explanations on the teacher's part of its obvious contents, of melody, of harmony, both consonant and dissonant; of rhythm and cadence, as well as of the simplest principles of form. With such instruction there should be combined an appreciation of tone and touch, at least to the extent of distinguishing at the outset between what was ugly and what was beautiful. (Applause.) They should develop proficiency in sight-reading, so that a composition could be understood without first playing it over on the piano or some other instrument.

At the close of the lecture, which was listened to with evident appreciation, the professor was cordially applauded.

### Musical Programmes.

A splendid series of musical programmes has been arranged, the first of which was carried out in the Elder Hall on Monday evening with brilliant success. The large audience showed approval of each of the items by unstinted applause. Schumann's beautiful string quartet in A major, opus 41, No. 3, was presented with admirable effect, the artists being Mr. Gerald Walcott and Miss Nora Kyffin Thomas (violins), Miss Sylvia Whittington, A.M.U.A. (viola), and Mr. Harold Parsons, Mus. Bac. (violinello). The great artistic possibilities of the work, which is characteristic of Schumann's method, were well illustrated, the instruments playing with excellent tone, and giving sufficient emphasis to the figures of the different movements to enable the audience easily to follow the working out of the ideas. In the third movement the adagio molto, the pictorial poetic writing was treated with sympathy and grace, and the final allegro molto vivace was produced with expression and phrasing which won well-merited and enthusiastic approval from the audience. Equally meritorious was the rendering of Cesar Franck's Quintet in F minor, by the same artists, with the assistance of Miss Maude Puddy, Mus. Bac., who took the piano part. The work is massively conceived, and the parts are carefully woven. In the masterly performance each instrument contributed in full degree to the satisfactory result, balance and shading being throughout admirable. A vocal bracket comprising "The Almond Tree," "Tears of Joy," "The Green Ha" (Schumann), and the old English song, "Blackbird" (Hook, arranged and modernised by Corder) was presented by Miss Ada Wordie, A.M.U.A., who displayed well-developed technique added to artistic temperament and a truly fine soprano voice. Mr. Harold Wyde, F.R.C.O., accompanied the songs with his usual taste.

The conference will be continued to-day. This afternoon a vocal recital by Madame Clara Serena will be followed by a recital on the bassoon by Mr. W. H. Foote, A.R.C.M., and this evening there will be an instrumental concert by Messrs. Parsons, Wyde, and George Pearce.