

## EDUCATIONAL LABORS OF LOWELL MASON.

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LOWELL MASON, who is identified with the advancement of musical education in this country, was born in Medfield, Mass., January 8th, 1792. He early manifested a great love for music, and sung, and played on various instruments, almost instinctively. In early youth, he commenced teaching; for which, also, he manifested a strong inclination.

At the age of twenty, he removed from Massachusetts to Savannah, Georgia, where, although engaged in other occupations, the teaching of music, and the conducting of choirs and musical associations, both vocal and instrumental, were leading objects of his attention. During his residence in Savannah, he became deeply interested in Sabbath School teaching, and was, for many years, the superintendent of a large school,—the only one at that time, in the city; and in which all the different Christian denominations united. It was while engaged in this school, that he formed those habits of intercourse with children, which afterward proved so valuable, when teaching became the daily occupation of his life, in the wide sphere of musical instruction in our public schools.

In 1821, the Boston Handel and Haydn Collection of Church Music, of which Dr. Mason was the sole editor, was first published; and, a few years afterward, several gentlemen of Boston, who had been, for some time, engaged in efforts to introduce improvements in church music,—some of whom had become personally acquainted with Dr. Mason, and with the successful results of his musical labors, took measures to obtain his aid and direction in the execution of their plans. Proposals were accordingly made to him to remove to Boston, which were finally accepted; and in the summer of 1827, he took up his residence in that city.

Dr. Mason now commenced the extensive teaching of vocal music in classes, introducing, at once, that feature in musical teaching, which had been but little known before, but which he had successfully pursued in Savannah, the instruction of children; training their voices especially to the performance of the alto part in choral music. These efforts were highly successful: they resulted in the awakening of a

very general interest in musical instruction, and in preparing the way for the formation of the Boston Academy of Music, and for the introduction of music into schools, as an educational study.

Dr. Mason had already established a reputation as a successful teacher, both of vocal and instrumental music, in which he had now been engaged for sixteen or eighteen years, when an event occurred, which not only changed his whole manner of teaching, but which led him to a much wider and more comprehensive view of the subject of musical instruction, than he had before entertained, and to juster conceptions of the whole theory of education, as resting on a rational and philosophical basis. We refer to the fact that he had now become acquainted, for the first time, with the principles of instruction, as developed by Pestalozzi, which, although at first with great reluctance, he at length thoroughly embraced, and has, for nearly thirty years, constantly and faithfully adhered to, and happily and successfully illustrated.

For this clearer light on the subject of education, Dr. Mason was indebted to the enlightened zeal, energy, and perseverance, in all educational improvements, of the late William C. Woodbridge, so extensively known, not only as a geographer but as an educator, whose labors, in both capacities, mark one of the prominent eras of the history of education in the United States. Mr. Woodbridge, while in Germany and Switzerland, where he resided for several years, with the view of becoming acquainted with the best methods of instruction, although like Pestalozzi, he had given little personal attention to the subject of music, became, from his own observation of its excellent influence on the pupils of Pestalozzian schools in general, and especially in the institution of Fellenberg, at Hofwyl, thoroughly convinced of its importance as a school exercise and an educational influence. He accordingly procured all the information in his power respecting it, and obtained the most approved text-books of school or class voice-exercises and songs, as well as of elementary treatises on musical instruction. Among these were the admirable songs of Nægeli, and the treatise by M. T. Pfeiffer and H. G. Nægeli, published at Leipzig, 1810, entitled "*Gesangbildungslehre nach Pestalozzischen Grundsätzen.*" These books by Nægeli and others, which had been prepared with particular reference to the legitimate influence of song in moral culture and the training of the affections, Mr. Woodbridge not only placed in the hands of Dr. Mason, but was at the trouble, himself, to translate them, in part, and to furnish such explanations and directions as he had received personally from Pfeiffer, Nægeli, Krüsi, Fellenberg, Kübler, Gersbach, and others.

To those who know, from their own experience, how difficult it is

for one who has, for many years, been successful as a teacher, and has, therefore, great confidence in some method of his own, to substitute for it that of another, to those who have observed the slow progress which has been made in the true art and science of teaching, notwithstanding the greatly increased attention which has been given to the subject of education, for the last quarter of a century,—to those who know that, even at this day, the principles of Colburn's Arithmetic, which were derived from Pestalozzi, are still rejected by many teachers, it will not seem surprising that it was, at first, no easy thing to convince Dr. Mason that the new method was preferable to that of foregoing rules, signs, tables, and definitions, to be committed to memory from a printed tabular or book form, to which he had been so long accustomed, and in the use of which he had attained to such success. But the efforts of Mr. Woodbridge were untiring: they were persevered in with such a constancy, zeal, and good humor, that, at last, Dr. Mason consented to a proposed experiment of teaching a class, after the Pestalozzian manner, provided one could be found for the special purpose. Mr. Woodbridge and others who had become interested in the subject, succeeded in the formation of a large class, of about two hundred ladies and gentlemen, with the express view of bringing the new method to the test of experience. The lessons were carefully prepared, at first, with the assistance of Mr. Woodbridge, and were given by Dr. Mason, with a success vastly greater than had ever before attended any of his efforts. He was fully convinced of the practicability and the fitness of the new method, as a mode of instruction appealing to reason and common sense, not less than to theory and truth, on educational principles. The same mode of teaching he soon began to apply to juvenile classes, and with success corresponding to that in the adult class referred to above.

In 1830, a lecture was given by Mr. Woodbridge, before the American Institute of Instruction, on "Vocal Music as a branch of Education," in the State House in Boston. Illustrations were given by a class of Dr. Mason's pupils. A wider and more important field of instruction was now opened, than had before been contemplated. Dr. Mason's juvenile classes,—which had already been taught gratuitously, for several years; he furnishing not only the tuition but also the room, fuel, and all needful school apparatus,—now rapidly increased in numbers, to such extent that thousands of children, of both sexes, received more or less instruction in singing, and in the knowledge of music. These classes were taught on the afternoons of Wednesdays and Saturdays, so as to enable the children of the public schools to attend: two or three classes, sometimes numbering

altogether, from one to five hundred children, were accustomed to meet at successive hours on the same day. The first juvenile concerts followed. These were given by choirs of children, so numerous as to fill the galleries of the Bowdoin street church.

Dr. Mason was now joined in these labors by Mr. George James Webb; and here it is proper to observe that the whole amount received, as the proceeds of all the juvenile concerts, was given to some charity; neither of the instructors receiving any pecuniary compensation whatever for their labors, until after the formation of the Boston Academy of Music, which, in part, at least grew out of these efforts.

The subject of music in schools was now taken up in good earnest, by some of the best educators and teachers of Boston; and instruction in singing was introduced, almost simultaneously, into the Mount Vernon School, (female,) under the Rev. Jacob Abbott, the Chauncy-Hall School, (male,) under Mr. G. F. Thayer, and the Monitorial School, (female,) under Mr. George W. Fowle.

It would not be consistent with our present purpose to follow the progress and wider diffusion of musical instruction and its genial influences, either on the character of education, or on the improving and extending taste for music in the community at large. We can merely glance at the auspicious establishment of the Boston Academy of Music, and the subsequent introduction of music, as a regular branch of instruction, in the public schools of Boston, whence it rapidly extended throughout New England and the Union.

Under the patronage of the Boston Academy of Music, and under the immediate direction of Messrs. Mason and Webb, various measures were taken for the improvement of musical education, by the formation of permanent classes, the association of church choirs, the establishment of lectures, the periodical appointment of concerts, schools for instrumental music, and the yet more extensive introduction of vocal music in public and private schools.

We must not omit, in this connection, to state the fact that one of the very first regular Teachers' Institutes ever held in our country, was that held in Boston, in August, 1834, by the Academy, for "instruction in the methods of teaching music." In this class, which was annually continued up to the year 1852, the Pestalozzian method of teaching vocal music in classes, was regularly explained and illustrated. Similar classes for teachers were soon established in various places; and it is, perhaps, owing to this fact that Pestalozzian teaching came to be very extensively, though erroneously, regarded as merely a method of *musical* instruction, rather than one of universal application to all branches of study, in all stages of their progress.

In 1837, Dr. Mason visited Europe, for the principal purpose of making himself personally acquainted with the best systems of teaching music in actual use abroad. In Paris, he found Wilhelm's method in use, and popular as taught in the schools of its author; but this being based entirely on those principles which Dr. Mason had, some years before, reluctantly been compelled by his convictions to abandon, and being merely a carefully prepared course of *mechanical* training, could lay no claim to his attention. In Wurtemberg and the northern parts of Switzerland, he became acquainted with Kübler, Gersbach, Fellenberg, and others;—Pestalozzi and Nägeli were no more. The three first named pursued, to greater or less extent, the inductive method; and, from the observation of their modes of teaching, and from personal communication with them, he became more familiar with its practical application to music and to school studies generally.

On his return from Europe, Dr. Mason had ample opportunities for carrying out the principles of inductive teaching, in extensive application to the instruction of his numerous classes; and his methods may not unjustly be mentioned as more rigorously exact and philosophically just than even those adopted in the schools abroad in which they were originally introduced. Pestalozzi himself, though fully convinced of the value of music, as a means of intellectual and moral training, was as little systematic in the practical and executive part of teaching as in other branches, and attempted nothing beyond a rudimental outline, suggestive rather than methodical, and designed to be carried out by others possessed of a more patient spirit of application, or of greater tact and skill. The suggestive views of Pestalozzi, Dr. Mason has carried further, perhaps, than any other teacher has ever done; and, through his exertions, the soundness and practicability of these views, not less than their theoretic truth, have been brought to the thorough test of daily experience in his teaching, which was gratuitously conducted, as an experiment, for one entire year, in one of the public schools of Boston, previous to its general introduction, under his personal direction, in these schools, and in the classes of the Academy. Another sphere of extensive experience of the benefits resulting from Dr. Mason's application of Pestalozzian principles to the processes of instruction, has been that of the Massachusetts Teachers' Institutes, which he has attended, as lecturer and instructor in music, from the commencement, under the direction of the Hon. Horace Mann, the first Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, through the secretaryship, also, of the Rev. Dr. Sears, and, thus far, that of the present Secretary, the Hon. George S.

Boutwell. In this form of teaching, Dr. Mason peculiarly excels. His long continued experience as a practical teacher, his rare tact in developing the vital principles of instruction in the simplest and happiest manner, his endless variety of illustrations, his indefatigable perseverance in tracking and exposing errors in thought or in theory, his genial and humane humor, his playful sallies of wit, his kindly sympathy with youth and childhood, his gentle yet impressive monitory hints, and occasional grave reflections, give him an indescribable power over his audience; while the perfect simplicity and strictly elementary character of his instructions evince the depths to which he has penetrated, in tracing the profoundest philosophy of teaching. Nor is his success limited to the single department which, in the sessions of the institutes, falls nominally under his special care. His wide and comprehensive views embrace the whole field of education, and all its prominent subjects. The remark was justly made by the Hon. Horace Mann, that it was well worth any young teacher's while to walk ten miles to hear a lecture of Dr. Mason; for in it he would hear a most instructive exposition of the true principles of all teaching, as well as that of instruction in music.

In 1855, the University of New York recognized the value of Dr. Mason's labors in his more immediate professional sphere, by conferring on him the honorary degree of Doctor in Music;—the first instance of such a degree being conferred by an American university; and Dr. Mason being the first American who ever received such an honor from any quarter.

Dr. Mason owes his high reputation at home and abroad to the fact that he has pursued his long and arduous career as a teacher, not merely with an unparalleled success, which has justly raised him to eminence, but on broad and generous principles elevated far above all barely technical or mechanical skill, displayed in mere flexibility of voice or dexterity of finger. It is as an enlightened educator, who distinctly perceives and eloquently pleads for the value and the power of music, as an influence on human culture, that he stands prominently before his country as one of its noble benefactors. And most assuredly he has already reaped a large share of that reward of grateful feeling which future generations will yet more fully express, as the children in our common schools, and the worshipers in our churches, continue to repeat the strains of chaste melody and skillful harmony for which our whole community stands so deeply indebted to the labors of his daily life.

The services which he has rendered to the cause of education, in his instructive methods of developing the elements of all

culture, as well as of music, are deeply appreciated by the multitude of young teachers who have enjoyed the privilege of listening to his skillful expositions of theory and practice, in all their relations to the daily duties of the teacher's life. The method which he has pursued for the last twenty-five years has been of signal service in drawing out, to a degree unknown before, the proper distinction existing in the generic vocal principle of speech and song, and the relation which the two-fold form sustains to itself, in its component elements. He has been peculiarly successful in inculcating the beauty of a finished articulation in song, and that of true expression in the tones of emotion. While occupied with the claims of *sound*, however, he has always recognized those of *number* and *form*, as correlatives in the processes of culture. He has never pleaded the cause of music exclusively, but always set it forth in its happy influence on all other departments of mental discipline and development.

Dr. Mason's influence, through his published works, not less than his personal instructions, has been in the highest degree conducive to the cultivation of *purity of taste*, as an important element not only in the æsthetic relations of musical art, but in all those of high, moral culture and true elevation of character. The judgment and care with which, in this relation, his selections of school songs have been compiled, are beyond praise. He has furnished, in those unpretending little volumes, a treasury of the best simple melodies of many lands, as these have been presented by eminent masters who have condescended, (or rather risen,) to meet the heart of childhood in its thirst for song; and these beautiful strains of music he has accompanied with words which speak of nature, of life, and of God, in the purest forms of sentiment. To feel the full value of his labors in this department, we have but to glance, for a moment, at the low and degrading character of too many of our popular, and even our school songs. The noble office and mission of music, as an intended refiner and purifier of the heart, Dr. Mason has never overlooked. Well has he said,

"We fear that it is too often the case that music in school is regarded not as having any thing to do with study, but as a mere recreation or amusement. Valuable as it may be, even in this view, we feel certain that, when introduced into schools, music should be made a study, not only in itself considered, but as a correlative to all school pursuits, and occupations. Unless the pupils are made more cheerful, happy, kind, and studious, by the music lesson, it is not properly given; for these are some of the results which music was obviously designed to secure."