

MUSIC IN THE NURSERY.

BY MRS. HOWARD GLOVER.

MORE than twenty years ago, an article appeared in the "Parents' Review" about a Musical Baby, who could sing before he could speak, was able, at a tender age, to recognise different tunes, and who was brought up on classical music, as well as on nursery rhymes. It was argued that an appreciation of the best music was not only one of the most inspiring joys of life, but a valuable means of education, and quite as important as the technical instrumental instruction given in the so-called "music lesson."

This slight record of a child's musical training aroused much interest, but it was received with scepticism by those who had not realized the possibility of training the ear and providing an intelligent musical atmosphere from the earliest nursery days. Much water has flowed under the bridge since then, and it is interesting to note that ideas which were startling twenty years ago, have become almost commonplace to the present generation. The pioneer baby would no longer be looked upon as exceptional, but would represent the ordinary development in a naturally musical child. Let us prove the altered conditions by glancing at the signs of the times.

At the present day we find lectures and lessons on Musical Appreciation given all over the country; there are special concerts for children, with suitable explanations; lectures on the great composers, with illustrations, in the Elementary Schools; while concerts at many of our big Public Schools are now preceded by an afternoon of preparation, with excerpts from the programme. With the re-discovery of the Folk Song, these are being sought out and collected by enthusiasts in every county and every country,
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one result being that Folk Songs and others of real musical value have taken the place of the old Kindergarten song with its doggerel lines and worthless tune, in our Infant Schools. Last, but not least, the musical programme to be played to the children, forms an integral part of the term's programme in our own Parents' Union School.

The child has indeed come into his musical heritage.

Music should take its place in the nursery side by side with those other new impressions which exert such influence on the little child, whose whole time is spent on drinking in all the fresh sounds and sights and sensations, and in learning how to develop his powers. Happy the babe whose nurse can sing the traditional nursery rhymes and folk songs, and encourage him to hum them in his tiny voice even before the right words come, and lead the children in those singing games, which have come down to us from untold generations. More often it is the mother who carries out this joyous task, and should her own vocal powers be small, she will still have the most uncritical and easily pleased of audiences.

Sometimes the nursery itself may be proudly furnished with a piano, but if not, the children will be coming downstairs after tea, and then will be the time to play—marches and dances for their more active moods, and real music to listen to at the right moment. A child will often like to sit on his mother's lap while she is at the piano, place his small fingers on hers, and feel as if he were himself making the music. If the mother (or other relative) be a performer, even in a modest way, her opportunities are large. She has the great literature of music to choose from, from Bach and Beethoven downwards, and may also draw upon the scores of

operas, and illustrate them by the story, always taking care to name each composer and composition, so that they may become familiar friends. It is wise to play the same piece until it is well known and loved, and then to add something new, and experience will show what to choose and how much to play. One cardinal rule must be observed, that music should never be forced upon a child when he is not in the humour for it, nor resorted to except at his own wish and for his special delight.

The great musicians of the past so often loved children and wrote for them. We know that John Sebastian Bach in his happy home life gathered his large family around him to “form a concert,” and composed the Friedemann Album specially for his little boy of nine. Schumann has delighted generations of children with his “Children’s Scenes” and Album for the Young, and

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also made a special Song Book for the Young (Op. 79). Brahms wrote a book of Nursery Rhymes and dedicated them to the children of Robert and Clara Schumann, while Grieg composed an equally delightful book of Children’s Songs (Op. 61).

When we come to present-day composers, we find clear indications of a renewed interest in Child Life, though in some instances these modern productions are rather works written about children than for children. Debussy’s well-known “Coin des Enfants,” in spite of its atmospheric charm, is too subtle as a rule for children, though his duet, “La Boîte de joujoux,” may cause them some amusement. Béla Bartók sends us from Budapest his little pieces for children, founded on Hungarian popular melodies, and strange though they may sound at present to our ears, he is undoubtedly a master of simple melodic structure. Grovlez makes a far stronger appeal in his “Chansons enfantines” (Augener edition with English words), and in “l’Almanach des Images” for piano, where we may specially note the delicious “Berceuse de la Poupée” and “Petites Litanies de Jésus.”

Sévérac’s “En Vacances” gives us a series of attractive scenes of holiday life, and many other interesting contemporary productions come to us just now, especially from France. An article on Nursery Music cannot conclude without an appreciation of Ingelbrecht’s “La Nursery,” two volumes of piano duets for child and teacher founded on French nursery rhymes and folk songs, harmonised with great originality and skill, while never losing the simplicity of the tune. These are quite easy, and can be played by a mother and older child, to the certain joy of both babies and any older music-lover who may chance to look in.

After all, is not the ideal of what we would give to our children, in music, as in so much else, that fusion of simplicity and beauty, ever the attributes of the highest art, so difficult to reach, so inspiring when attained.