THE

Art of Teaching,

AND THE TEACHING OF MUSIC:

BEING THE

TEACHER’S MANUAL

OF THE

TONIC SOL-FA METHOD.

BY

JOHN CURWEN.

London:

TONIC SOL-FA AGENCY, 8, WARWICK LANE, E.C.

Price Five Shillings.
FOR A FULL INDEX AND TABLE OF CONTENTS SEE THE END OF THE BOOK.

REFERENCE IS MADE THROUGHOUT TO "STANDARD COURSE, WITH ADDITIONAL EXERCISES." PRICE THREE SHILLINGS.

LONDON:
PRINTED AT THE TONIC SOL-FA PRESS,
PLAISTOW, E.
MISS GLOVER. See page 380.

"This is Philosophy, to make remote things tangible, common things extensively useful, useful things extensively common, and to leave the least necessary for the last."—WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR.
PREFACE.

The object of this book is to do as much as a mere book can do towards increasing the number of teachers of the Tonic Sol-fa Method, and improving the quality of their teaching.

Our singing movement cannot accomplish its great object of making music a National habit without an army of teachers, both professional and non-professional. Schools, homes, and congregations all over the country are needing Teachers or needing to be shown their need of Teachers; schools are waiting for the cheerfulness and the moral influence which song can give; homes are waiting for the healthy recreation, the social pleasure, and the delightful study which music can afford; and congregations are waiting for "young men and maidens, old men and children" to learn to sing that they may "praise the Lord."

Who shall do this work? I look chiefly to the young men and young women of our Tonic Sol-fa Classes. But there are difficulties in the way. Some young people need to be kept back from the work, and others need to be pressed forward.

No one can calculate the injury which may be done to a method in public estimation by means of unintelligent Teachers. I used Miss Mayo’s Pestalozzian "Lessons on Objects" more than thirty years ago, and know by experience that when they are fairly used they are a powerful means of cultivating the observing powers in children and always delightful to them. But now the lessons have, in some places, fallen into disrepute. How is this? They have been shamefully abused. The objects instead of being handled and tasted and dealt with by every one of the pupils have merely been shown in a glass bottle at a great distance; the qualities instead of being discovered have been told, and the lesson has been made into a string of hard names and dull repetitions. No wonder we hear of children “not at all interested in the lessons, disgusted with them rather.” Mr. Herbert Spencer (in his book on “Education,” pp. 68, 70), says:—

"We are not surprised at this. The success of every appliance depends mainly upon the intelligence with which it is used. It is a trite remark that, having the choicest tools, an unskilful artisan will botch his work; and bad teachers will fail even with the best methods. Indeed, the goodness of the method becomes in such a case a cause of failure; as, to continue the simile, the perfection of the tool becomes in undisciplined hands a source of imperfection in results."

"The mistress of a dame-school can hear spelling-lessons; and any hedge-schoolmaster can drill boys in the multiplication-table. But to teach spelling rightly by using the powers of the letters instead of their names, or to instruct in numerical combinations by experimental synthesis, a modicum of understanding is needful; and to pursue a like—"
rational course throughout the entire range of studies, asks an amount of judgment, of invention, of intellectual sympathy, of analytical faculty, which we shall never see applied to it while the tutorial office is held in such small esteem. True education is practicable only by a true philosopher." * * *

"That tendency, constantly exhibited by mankind, to canonize the forms and practices along with which any great truth has been bequeathed to them—their liability to prostrate their intellects before the prophet, and swear by his every word—their prudence to mistake the clothing of the idea for the idea itself, renders it needful to insist strongly upon the distinction between the fundamental principle of the Pestalozzian system, and the set of expedients devised for its practice."

But let not the earnest pupil, however slow his progress and however modest his attainments, despair of becoming a good teacher. Archbishop Whately's son says, "My father used to call himself a first-rate mathematical teacher though only a second-rate mathematician; and he considered that he was the better able to teach mathematics from his slowness in learning it. Those who learn quickly are generally unable to appreciate the difficulties of ordinary learners, and therefore are less able to explain and remove them."

Neither let those be discouraged who feel themselves, at the present moment, deficient either in the knowledge of music or in the art of teaching it. Both can be attained by any one capable of a little self-discipline. The cases of Dugald Stewart and the Swiss Professor, quoted by our great engineer, Mr. Scott Russell, in his work on "Technical Education," are strikingly to the point:—

"It might be supposed that for excellence in teaching an art or science, no other training would be necessary than to have attained consummate excellence in the art or science to be taught. This is one of those partial truths which is neither true enough to be reliable, nor false enough to be readily refuted, and it is the source of many a grievous practical blunder. I remember to have studied mathematics under a professor who was a profound mathematician and a practical idiot. He pursued his own way with thoughtful painstakings upon the board, following out investigations of which he had neither explained to us the end nor the plan; and, after a few days of futile painstakings in attempts to follow him, we had to give up the hopeless task, and occupy the remainder of the course with reading our own books, making our own drawings, or such other amusements as most pleasantly passed our time, while the Professor continued to apply, in social solitude, his chalk and board. This man knew too much of mathematics, and too little of our minds, to be of the slightest use to us."

"But there came another Professor, the famous Dugald Stewart, himself a young man and a young teacher; he had to teach as much as he knew, but he had the wonderful ability of being able to teach all he knew. He explained the excellence of his teaching, by showing that he possessed the highest conditions of the art—heartly sympathy with his pupils, a thorough knowledge of their condition, and the peculiar difficulties of their subjects:—I teach well because I am only twenty-four hours in advance of my pupils; what I teach, I have just learnt myself."

"Each of these men may be said to have possessed exactly one-half of the requisites of a teacher. To give intrinsic value to the things taught, his own knowledge ought to be so profound as to confer high authority on all he says or shows. The second requisite is that he should know the stepping stones of the mind so thoroughly as to be able to guide his pupils step by step across a difficult stream of thought, without allowing them ever to strain their powers, or get beyond their depth. That is true teaching—to lead them an arduous way—so arduous that they must fail to find it without a guide."

"I know the case of a distinguished foreign engineer, who, after having executed for his country works of importance, felt a strong desire to devote his matured powers to the education of the rising race in his profession, whom he knew to be inadequately and feebly taught. With exemplary patriotism he abandoned his more lucrative profession, and accepted the ill-renumerated post of Professor of Civil Engineering in the technic university. His teaching proved a failure; he knew thoroughly what he wanted to teach, but found himself unable to teach it. Luckily for his university and for himself he was a man used to overcoming difficulties. He took to the study of Pedagogy, teaching as an art; he had formerly studied physical science and material nature, he now took to the study of psychical science, or human nature. This new study was as great a success as his former material achievements, and I found that he had become one of the most successful teachers, and one of the most beloved as well as esteemed of masters. He found his pupils, youths green from the inferior schools, and before leaving him he had enwrought them into youthful associates and practical assistants, employed in the actual construction and design of the details of public works afterwards executed."

The following article from the Tonic Sol-fa Reporter, April 1, 1868, shows the position of our Tonic Sol-fa friends in respect to this subject:—
THREE THINGS NECESSARY—KNOWLEDGE—PLAN—SKILL.

“A musical periodical in its answers to correspondents recently said that musical professors commonly do, and always will, discourage rising teachers. We have not this feeling to contend with in our Tonic Sol-fa movement. A mere professor will naturally wish the supply of teachers to be below the demand, in order to enhance his own value, but Tonic Sol-fa teachers encourage a more generous spirit. They wish to make the world sing. Some, however, are apt to forget their own first blundering efforts, and from a better motive are tempted to discourage beginners. They see what injury is sometimes done to our movement by incompetent and conceited men, and in discouraging such persons, discourage also the far larger number of modest, earnest, and devoted friends who are ready to commence the work of teaching. A friend wrote to me some time ago as follows:—

“I had found so much difficulty myself in becoming a passable teacher, that I began to think it was no use for the members of my class to teach for a long time to come. But thanks to your good circular I saw my error, and have already set three to work at small classes, and expect one or two more to begin presently.”

Probably there are other teachers who have had the same feeling. Let them go and do likewise. Mr. Proudman’s plan of taking four pupil teachers and giving them classes which he can visit in rotation, once a month, is an admirable one. The plan which Mr. Longbottom carried out in Bradford, of a monthly friendly meeting of all the classes taught by young teachers who acted with him, has proved of great service. Teachers who are beginning their work find such assistance, from those who know more and have greater experience than they, to be of priceless value. If our best Tonic Sol-fa teachers would enquire eagerly for Sunday Schools, Ragged Schools, Day Schools, Congregations willing to introduce the method, and offer to send them a pupil teacher, our work would progress with at least three times its present rapidity, and with tenfold satisfaction. It is often difficult for a pupil who has but little time at command, to decide how soon he is to give up self-improvement and commence to instruct others. In this matter he must be governed much by the circumstances in which he is placed. There may be a very strong demand upon him, some valuable opening offered which he cannot neglect. This may lawfully tempt him to begin teaching before he would otherwise have done so. Or his teacher may not be a very superior man, may really have taught all he has to teach. He will then discover that the only way to continue his self-improvement (if no superior teacher is at hand) is to commence instructing others. Under ordinary circumstances we would recommend our pupils to stay by a good teacher till they have taken from him the intermediate certificate with “theory honours,” then to begin teaching a little, but continuing their practice under a first-rate teacher, and not to esteem themselves acknowledged teachers till they have proved their power in the art of teaching, and possess the knowledge implied in the Teacher’s Certificate. When a man possesses that degree of knowledge and power, he ought to reckon it his vocation to do good in the world by Tonic Sol-fa teaching.”

For improving the quality of our teaching, three things are necessary. First, an increased knowledge and ability in the subject itself—Music; second, a clearer apprehension of the order in which the subject-matter of Music and its corresponding exercises are placed before the Pupil in the Tonic Sol-fa method, as well as the reasons for this order; and third, greater skill in the arts of communicating and training, or making pupils understand and do. With the first of these we have nothing to do in this book. It presumes that the reader has, at least, knowledge enough to take the Theory Honours of the Intermediate Certificate and skill enough to fulfil the practical requirements of that certificate. We have to deal with the second and third things required by the teacher.

As to the second—a knowledge of the teaching plan—it may be noted that many a good pupil of the Tonic Sol-fa method may pass through all its stages with profit and pleasure, may delight in its very name, and yet not understand its nature. But he must understand this if he begins to teach. It is the same with a traveller who rejoices in the railway which carries him along pleasant valleys, over difficult rivers, and through dangerous mountains, without knowing much about the construction of the road. But if the traveller is to become an engine driver or an engineer he must know something about the inclines, and the tunnels, and the viaducts, and the curves, and the points. This kind of knowledge may be given to a great extent by means of books. In chapter I. I have endeavoured to expound the main principles on which topics and exercises should be arranged beforehand for the work of the teacher, and I have brought illustrations from other methods, as well as from the Tonic Sol-fa method, in order that these principles may be looked at from all sides. Students can read this chapter, answer questions upon it, and discuss the truth of its statements. But no one can thoroughly understand a method before he has used it. It is only by doing that we know.

The third of the teacher’s necessities—skillfulness in the presence of his class—is by far the most
difficult thing to teach by book. In the second chapter I have set forth some of the most important principles which should be kept in view by those who would train themselves in practical skill, and I have illustrated them by examples from the best modern teachers on various subjects. These examples should be realized by the imagination as they are read. The class to which they are addressed being summoned mentally in the room, let these examples be read aloud, the reader looking into the faces of the spectral class and imagining that he hears their replies. If, after this exercise of thought and imagination,—this realising exercise,—the young teacher can get a friend or two to practise upon, he will then render the processes of his work more familiar, and feel himself very much more at ease when he comes to his class. The examples are placed here to be criticised, and some of them to be imitated. They are arranged under the principles which they chiefly illustrate in order to make those principles a part of the very thought and life, and not merely of the memory of the young teacher. I am afraid, however, that neither the book nor the lecturer on the art of teaching can accomplish much in this direction. Everything will depend on the interest which the young teacher takes in training himself, and on his willingness to practise and blunder, and read, and think, and practise, and blunder again.

Having established these general principles,—in order that they may find new illustration, and be brought more closely home to the work of the Tonic Sol-fa teacher I have devoted a third chapter to the exposition of his particular method with new illustrations. In selecting these illustrations I have availed myself freely of the papers which have been published in the Reporter and elsewhere by some of the experienced among our Tonic Sol-fa teachers. This chapter also will be for study; for the answering of questions on its various topics; for the criticisms of its specimen lessons; for the writing of these lessons from memory; for the imitation of them with a class; and for the suggestion of new ways of teaching the same topics.

This leaves untouched a great many topics of practical importance on which the young teacher will naturally ask advice. I have, therefore, added a fourth chapter containing additional hints to teachers. The following extract from my article in the Tonic Sol-fa Reporter, April 15th, 1870, will show how the interest in the art of teaching has grown among the friends of the Tonic Sol-fa method:

At the first meeting of our Council last midsummer, the question of a Teacher's Certificate was much discussed, and as an aid to the future consideration and settlement of the matter, I was requested to read two or three papers on "The Art of Teaching" at the present session of our College.

The employment of preparing these papers has been a peculiarly pleasant one to me,—sending me back to those early studies in Mental Philosophy which first interested me in the art of teaching,—reminding me of the various steps in the comparatively slow development of the Tonic Sol-fa method,—bringing vividly to mind many of my own teaching experiences whether of failure or success,—and giving me the pleasure of reviewing all the valuable suggestions in the old volumes of our Reporter, which have been gathered from the experiences of my fellow teachers.

I think it one of the most hopeful signs for the progress of our movement that there should be just now so strong a demand for more exact educational methods, and so eager an ambition for teaching skill. I remember the time when the case was quite otherwise among my helpers and friends. The "Grammar of Vocal Music," my first work, was found to be too educational in its arrangement. It gave the propositions Synthetically in large type, and showed how they were to be developed Analytically in small type, and supplied a series of questions for "revising" the work done at each stage. But my helpers at that time did not sufficiently appreciate the importance of taking the first steps so slowly, carefully, and thoroughly. They did not know how swift, easy, and pleasant it made all the after steps. I was obliged to change my plan—to suit the kind of teachers who offered their generous but not very skilful help—and we enjoyed no very marked success until I prepared the "People's or Working Men's Course" (Reporters Nos. 3 to 9), and the course in the "People's Service of Song." These provided a mere modicum of instruction, but brought the pupil as quickly as possible (and by somewhat roughly graduated steps) to the music of practical life—the songs and the Psalm-tones which people liked. Hundreds of benevolent men then began to teach music who had never tried to teach anything before. Some of them blundered into teaching by the help of good examples and natural instinct, but a considerable number alas! still remain as poor teachers but as loving philanthropists as ever. Probably no
method of teaching any subject of public interest ever numbered so many incompetent teachers among its supporters as ours did at that time. But the great foundation principles of our method (the prominence of key-relationship—the pictorial treatment of time—teaching by pattern—mental effects of tones in the scale and its transition) survived all the rough handling they met with. It was by such irregular means that our method first gained the popular ear. Some harm was done by bad teaching, but, in spite of it the broad principles necessarily put forth and practised did great good. Besides this, we were always happy in having among our teachers a goodly array of properly trained schoolmasters who were quite unable to go to work in the rough-and-ready style to which I have just referred. These friends kept our teaching standard from falling too low to be recovered.

Experiences of this kind, however, showed us the dangers which belong to a loose way of teaching, and we tried to recover ourselves by insisting on the examination of the pupils, and by issuing the old "Certificate of proficiency." Our teachers also had by this time become more experienced, and began to demand exacter hand books. So it was that when I had written the "Popular Standard Lessons," and the lessons for the "Sunday School Union Magazine," I found myself able to issue (with the advice of such friends as Mr. Gribbs and Mr. Sargi) the "Standard Course." This was cheaper than the "Grammar," and less minute, but in some respects better arranged for ordinary teaching purposes. At first its sale was very small, and I began to fear that it was too much in advance of the educational status of the teachers, but it was fairly tested by a number of kind friends, and soon won general favour. It did much towards the improvement of our teaching. It has remained the Standard Course ever since. But even this book was too expensive to be generally used by our pupils; and for many years they were chiefly taught from the lessons of the books like "Additional Exercises," "31 Course," "The Temperance Course," "Arranged Report," "Songs and Tunes for Education," &c.,—the teachers only studying the "Standard Course" and the "Grammar." But oral instruction is often missed by the pupils. A wandering thought or a roving glance at the moment, especially in popular evening classes, breaks the thread of the teacher's explanations, and there arises from the best teachers a strong demand for instructions along with the exercises (written in aid of oral teaching);—something to remind the inattentive pupil and to refresh the memory even of the attentive. In consequence of this wise demand, I prepared (with the advice of many friends—especially of Messrs. Ashcroft and Evans) the Secular Courses, and close following them the Sacred Courses, with their companions the "Scottish Course," the "High School Vocalist," and the "Church Czarist." Thus has it happened that our Tonie Sel-fa teachers have grown in their love of the teacher's art, and the lesson books have been constantly improving. Many of our friends who began as very raw recruits now delight in thoroughness of drill and fineness of execution as much as the best teachers I have met with. This marked progress in our teaching skill impressed itself on Mr. Ashcroft when, after a serious illness, he reviewed in the "Reporter" the work of the previous seven years: He says (vol. iv. p. 263):—

"Next I am impressed with a lively sense of the improvements in teaching. Our present pupils enjoy great advantages. Easy as our path was, theirs is easier. Far as we went, they are taken farther. I remember the long and patient exertion it took to master 'Hall, smiling men,' and especially 'Here in cool grove;' Handel's 'Halifuse' was indeed an achievement! I heard last year young pupils of eighteen months standing taking 'They loathed to drink' almost perfectly, and absolutely at first sight, and naively remarking that they found 'The people shall hear,' rather hard! Some of our best teachers will bear me out in the statement that their old pupils never reach the skill which the more recent ones possess, notwithstanding their former honest and laborious exertions. It was not possible to ground them so well in the elements as it is now. We did not know how. It will scarce be believed that, although taught by Mr. Read, I never had a lesson on the side columns and I never heard him give one.

But the present exceptional demand—that which animated Mr. Miller in his Paper at the Manchester School, and Mr. Stone in his recent Papers in the "Reporter," is a different one from all that have preceded it. It looks not so much to an improved educational arrangement of topics, to alterations in Text Books and Courses of Exercises as to the improvement of skill in the teacher himself, so that misleading errors may be avoided—precious time may be saved—the interest of the class kept up to the last—and the pupil always taught to teach himself. A correspondent of the "Reporter" (vol. vi. p. 267) who had visited a number of classes and studied their working notes, puts the point well by the help of two illustrations:

"Is not the bad teaching we have to deplore so much more the result of a want of system than want of knowledge on the part of those who are so unfortunate in their classes? I know one case myself, where a teacher got a class of about 300, and it dwindled down to about 20, and it could not be said that he was either unwilling or ignorant, but his system was bad, or rather he had no system at all.

"My friend Mr. Herriot, who is so successful as a teacher, manages to impart as much in twelve lessons as the majority of teachers will in eighteen, and I attribute his success in great measure to method and system. He has a certain number of things to tell a class each night, and of course they are arranged progressively. He reviews the work done on the previous evening in a brief manner, which refreshes the memory of those who were present, and in a measure compensates for their absence to those who were unable to attend, and while he does not load the memory with new material, he yet makes a point of telling them something new each evening, which is a great incentive to regularity of attendance. Those who are absent one night lose the full extent of what is given, but on the next night they receive the benefit of the reviewing of the same subject, and in this way they are able to carry all the links of the subject unbroken.

"Some friends go further than this in their views of the relative importance of teaching skill and written method. Mr. Fraser in "Reporter" (vol. iv. p. 263) says:—

"The value of books and systems does not depend, however, so much on themselves as on the use made of them by teachers. The really efficient grand text book must be the teacher himself. Without him the best of systems may fail, and with him, possessed of a taste to teach, systems or external forms of education are not only of inferior importance, but all of them may be made fruitful of great good. When we visit a school let us look at the living book, the teacher himself; let us see his works. Let us see the fruits of his labours, and if those be highly satisfactory, we may care little about the forms and systems he may use; it is he who must give them life, efficiency, and value."
It is evident that Mr. Fraser's extreme view of the sufficiency of teaching skill without a good method of progression, and even in spite of a bad one, cannot be maintained. The experience of our best teachers who used all their skill with old methods before they adopted the new would be against him. They know the difference which a good method makes. I, myself, employed all my moderate endowments of teaching power, and all the determination and zeal which can stir the heart of a young man seeking a noble object for several years, with the old methods as my implements of war; and I remember my joy when the new 'arms of precision' were put into my hands. It is no small matter to make an instrument of skill four times as useful as it would otherwise be. But both are required for our purpose—the instrument and the skill. So that we cannot escape treating the whole subject—the written method and the oral teaching.

I am so fully convinced that nothing but guided practice—that is, practice guided sufficiently, though as little as possible, by the trainer—can make a good teacher; that I have been anxious to establish a Central College with affiliated Institutes in all parts of the country for this purpose. And during the two years in which this book has been in preparation my good friends have incorporated "The Tonic Sol-fa College—a College for People's Music," and have commenced raising funds for College Buildings and Scholarships. The temporary offices are at Plaistow, London, E, where enquiries may be addressed to the Secretary. We shall, therefore, soon have our Modal Lessons, our Written Sketches of Lessons, our Practising Lessons, and our Criticism Meetings like any other training College. Doubtless the Tonic Sol-fa College will teach as well as train. It will add to the student's musical knowledge and skill, both vocal and instrumental, whether he means to be a teacher or not. But its principal work should be to train in the art of teaching. I think I see a host of the coming amateur teachers, band of hope leaders, Sunday School superintendents, precentors, choir-masters, school teachers, band-masters, village organists and conductors eager for such a College. Meanwhile, let the friends of our movement make themselves busy with the Certificates and their Theory Honours, which are the foundations of all good teachership, and I trust that this book will have some effect in spreading and stimulating the desire for good teaching. Nor shall we, in this, be caring only for singing and the Tonic Sol-fa movement, for the true art of teaching, once implanted in a man's mind and character, bears fruit in every sphere of his activity—in his daily work, in his Sunday School, in his family circle, and wherever he has to use influence with men.

JOHN CURWEN.


Note.—I have to thank Mr. Herbert Spencer for his kindness in permitting so many extracts from his work. To many other friends of education I am similarly indebted. The repetitions which these ample quotations necessarily occasion are intentional. Well educated men do not need repetition; but many of those for whom I write—men possessing a good musical faculty and a desire to teach—have enjoyed but few educational advantages, and for them "line upon line and precept upon precept" is necessary. I also think that the experiments, experiences, and suggestions so largely quoted from my Tonic Sol-fa friends indicate a consensus of opinion and a unity of action of which we may all be proud, especially because this agreement is born of perfect liberty. Moved by one impulse—we have been like those "little things" the locusts, who "have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands."

* I cannot help noting that a work of this kind, adapted to the great business of Sunday School teaching, is much wanted. There are some good books on the subject, but they need to be enlarged tenfold and to be filled with illustrations. Most of the principles developed in such a book would be the same as in this, but the subject matter to be dealt with, ranging over the whole field of religious truth and human nature, is so vast and varied that it demands the art of the teacher in its highest attainment. If the principles and illustrations of such a work could be thoroughly analyzed and put to practice by our young Sunday School teachers, the mental and religious exercise would be a grand education for them, and the result would be a more attractive and a far more useful Sunday School.