

## MUSIC TALKS *with* CHILDREN



**Thomas Tapper**

**TO THE CHILDREN AT HOME**

"Teach me to live! No idler let me be,  
But in Thy service hand and heart employ."

—BAYARD TAYLOR

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# PREFACE

A book of this kind, though addressed to children, must necessarily reach them through an older person. The purpose is to suggest a few of the many aspects which music may have even to the mind of a child. If these chapters, or whatever may be logically suggested by them, be actually used as the basis of simple Talks with children, music may become to them more than drill and study. They should know it as an art, full of beauty and of dignity; full of pure thought and abounding in joy. Music with these characteristics is the true music of the heart. Unless music gives true pleasure to the young it may be doubted if it is wisely studied.

Our failure to present music to the young in a manner that interests and holds them is due not so much to the fact that music is too difficult for children, but because the children themselves are too difficult for us. In our ignorance we often withhold the rightful inheritance. We must not forget that the slower adult mind often meets a class of difficulties which are not recognized by the unprejudiced child. It is not infrequent that with the old fears in us we persist in recreating difficulties.

There should be ever present with the teacher the thought that music must be led out of the individuality, not driven into it.

The teacher's knowledge is not a hammer, it is a light.

While it is suggested that these chapters be used as the subject-matter for talks with the children, they may read verbatim if desired.

**THOMAS TAPPER.**

BOSTON, October 30, 1896



## CHAPTER I: WHAT THE FACE TELLS

"And the light *dwelleth* with him."—*Daniel II: 22*

Once a master said to a child:

"If thou wilt study diligently, learn, and do good unto others, thy face shall be filled with light."

So the child studied busily, learned, and sought how she could do good unto others. And every little while she ran to the glass to see if the light was coming. But at each time she was disappointed. No light was there. Try as faithfully as she would, and look as often as she would, it was always the same.

I do not know if she doubted the master or not; but it is certain she did not know what to make of it. She grieved, and day after day her disappointment grew. At length she could bear it no longer, so she went to the master and said:

"Dear master, I have been so diligent! I have tried to learn and to do good unto others. Yet every time I have sought in my face the light *which you promised*, it has not been there. No, not a single time."

Now the master listened intently, and watching her face as she spoke, he said:

"Thou poor little one, in this moment, as thou hast spoken to me, thy face has been so filled with light that thou wouldst not believe. And dost thou know why? It is because every word thou hast spoken in this moment has come from thy heart.

"Thou must learn *in the first days* this lesson: When the thought and the deed are in the heart, then the light is in the face, always, and it is there at no other time. It could not be. And what is in thy heart when thou art before the glass? In that moment hast thou turned away from diligence, and from learning, and from the love of doing good unto others and in thy heart there is left only the poor curiosity to see the

light which can never shine when it is sought. Thou canst never see the light of thy own face. For thee that light is forever within, and it will not prosper thy way to want to look upon it. It is only as thou art faithful that this is added unto thee."

Sorrowing yet more than before the little child said:

"Master, I do not understand what thou hast said, yet I believe thee; but the wish is yet within me to see the light of my face, if only for once. Thou who art wise, tell me why it is denied me."

And the master made answer:

"It is denied to us all. No one may see the light of his own face. Therefore thou shalt labor daily with diligence that thy light shall shine before others. And if thou wouldst see the light thou shalt cause it to shine *in another*. That is the greatest of all—to bring forth the light. And to do this, thou shalt of thyself be faithful in all things. By what thou art thou must show diligence, the love for learning, and the desire to do good unto others, even as these things have been taught thee."

## CHAPTER II: WHY WE SHOULD STUDY MUSIC

"Music makes people more gentle and meek, more modest and understanding."—*Martin Luther*

It was this same music lover who said once, "Music is the fairest gift of God." Just these words should be a sufficient answer to the question which we have asked in this Talk, but a little more may make it clearer. Here we are, gathered together to talk about music. We know music is pleasing; to many of us it is even more than a pleasure; of course, it is difficult to get the lessons properly and we must struggle and strive. Often the way seems so rude and stony that we cannot advance. We are hurt, and hot tears of discouragement come, and we sit down dejected feeling it were best never to try again. But even when the tears flow the fastest we feel something within us which makes us listen. We can really hear our thoughts battling to tell us something,—prompted by the heart, we may be sure.

And what is music making our thoughts say?

"Have I not been a pleasure and a comfort to you? Have I not set you to singing and to dancing many and many times? Have I not let you sing your greatest happiness? And am I not ever about you, at home, in school, in church? even in the streets I have never deserted you. Always, *always* I have made you merry. But this was music you *heard*. Now you have said you wished to know me yourself; to have me come to dwell in your heart that you might have me understandingly, and because I ask labor of you for this, you sit here with your hot tears in your eyes and not a bit of me present in your heart. Listen! Am I not there? Yes, just a bit. Now more and more, and now will you give me up because I make you work a little?"

Well, we all have just this experience and we always feel ashamed of our discouragements; but even this does not tell us why we should study music. Some people study it because they have to do so; others because they love it. Surely it must be best with those who out of their hearts choose to learn about tones and the messages they tell.

Did you ever notice how people seem willing to stop any employment if music comes near? Even in the busiest streets of a city the organ-man will make us listen to his tunes. In spite of the hurry and the crowd and the jumble of noises, still the organ-tones go everywhere clear, full, melodious, bidding us heed them. Perhaps we mark the music with the hand, or walk differently, or begin to sing with it. In one way or another the music will make us do something—that shows its power. I have seen in many European towns a group of children about the organ-man, dancing or singing as he played and enjoying every tune to the utmost. This taught me that music of every kind has its lover, and that with a little pains and a little patience the love for music belongs to all alike, and may be increased if other things do not push it aside.

Now, one of the first things to be said of music is that it makes happiness, and what makes happiness is good for us, because happiness not only lightens the heart, but it is one of the best ways to make the light come to the face. The moment we study music we learn a severe lesson, and that is this: There can be no use in our trying to be musicians unless we are willing to learn perfect order in all the music-tasks we do.

In this, music is a particularly severe mistress. Nothing slovenly, untidy, or out of order will do. The count must be absolutely right, not fast nor slow as our fancy dictates, but even and regular. The hands must do their task together in a friendly manner; the one never crowding nor hurrying the other, each willing to yield to the other when the right moment comes. The feet must never use the pedals so as to make the harmonies mingle wrongly, but at just the right moment must make the strings sing together as the composer desires. The thoughts can never for a single moment wander from the playing; they must remain faithful, preparing what is to come and commanding the hands to do exactly the right task in the right way. That shows us, you see, the second quality and a strict one of music. It will not allow us to be disorderly, and more than this, it teaches us a habit for order that will be a gain to us in every other task. Now let us see:

First, we should study music for the happiness it will give us.

Second, we should study music for the order it teaches us.

There is a third reason. If music gives us happiness, do we not in learning it gain a power to contribute happiness to others? That is one of the greatest pleasures in learning. Not only does the knowledge prove of use and joy to us, but we can constantly make it useful and joy-giving to others. Does this not teach us how thankful we should be to all those who live usefully? And think of all the men who have passed their lives writing beautiful thoughts, singing out of their very hearts, day after day, all their life long, for the joy of others forever after.

In our next Talk we shall learn that pure thought, written out of the heart, is forever a good in the world. From this we shall learn that to study music rightly is to cultivate in our own hearts the same good thought which the composer had. Hence the third reason we can find for studying music is that it makes us able to help and to cheer others, to help them by willingly imparting the little knowledge we have, and to cheer them by playing the beautiful thoughts in tone which we have learned.

These are three great reasons, truly, but there are many others. Let us speak about one of them. In some of the Talks we are to have we shall learn that true music comes from a true heart; and that great music—that is the classics—is the thought of men who are pure and noble, learned in the way to write, and anxious never to write anything but the best. There is plainly a great deal of good to us if we study daily the music of men such as these. In this way we are brought in touch with the greatest thought. This constant presence and influence will mold our thoughts to greater strength and greater beauty. When we read the history of music, we shall see that the greatest composers have always been willing to study in their first days the master works of their time. They have strengthened their thoughts by contact with thoughts stronger than their own, and we may gain in just the same way if we will. We know now that there are many reasons why it is good for us to study music. We have spoken particularly of four of these. They are:

First, for the happiness it will give us.

Second, for the order it demands of us.

Third, for the power it gives us to help and cheer others.

Fourth, for the great and pure thought it brings before us and raises in us.

All these things, are they true, you ask? If the little child had asked that of the master he would have said:

"These things shalt thou find real because they make thee brave. And the pain and the drudgery and the hot tears shall be the easier to bear for this knowledge, which should be strong within thee as a pure faith."

## CHAPTER XXIV: HOW ONE THING HELPS ANOTHER

"Music washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life."  
—*Berthold Auerbach*

Just at the end of our Talk about Music in School, I said that music was the most powerful of all the studies for giving joy to others. In this Talk we shall try to learn what the studies do for each other.

Once more—and we must never get tired if the same thought comes again and again—let us remember that music is thought expressed in tone. Classic music is great and strong thought; poor, unworthy music is weak, perhaps wrong or mean thought.

Further, we have learned that thought may be good and pure, and yet that of itself is not sufficient. It must be well expressed. In short, to thought of the right sort we must add knowledge, so that it may be set before others in the right way.

Now, it is true that the more knowledge we have, the more we can do with music. We can put more meaning into it; we can better perform all the exacting duties it demands; we can draw more meaning from its art, and we can see more clearly how great a genius the composer is. Besides these things, a well-trained mind gets more thoughts from a subject than an untrained mind. Some day you will see this more clearly by observing how much better you will be able to understand your own language by possessing a knowledge of Greek and Latin.

All the school studies have a use, to be sure—a direct use—in giving us something to help us in life in one way and another. But besides this, we get another help from study; namely, the employment of the mind in the right way. For the right way of doing things which are worthy of the heart, gives power and good. It is the wrong way of doing things that causes us trouble. Some studies demand exactness above all this,—like the study of Arithmetic—others a good memory,—like History—others tax many faculties, as we have seen in our Talk about School Music.

Some of the studies are particularly valuable to us at once because they make us *do*. They may be called *doing* studies. In Arithmetic there is a result, and only one result, to be sought. In Grammar every rule we learn is to be applied in our speech. Manual training demands judgment and the careful use of the hands. Penmanship is a test for the hand, but History is a study touching the memory more than the doing faculty.

School music, you see at once, is a doing study. Not only that, it is full of life, attractive, appealing to the thoughts in many ways, and yet it is a hearty study—by that I mean a study for the heart.

If you have noticed in your piano music the Italian words which are given at the beginning of compositions, you may have thought how expressive most of them are of the heart and of action. They are *doing* words particularly. *Allegro* is cheerful; that is its true meaning. It directs us to make the music sound cheerful as we sing it or play it. What for? So that the cheerfulness of the composer shall be for us and for other people. And *Vivace* is not merely quickly, but vivaciously. Now what does vivacious mean? It means what its root-word *vivere* means, to live. It is a direction that the music must be full of life; and the true life of happiness and freedom from care is meant. So with *Modcrato*, a doing word which tells us very particularly how to do; namely, not too fast, spoiling it by haste, nor too slowly, so that it seems to drag, but in a particular way, that is, with moderation.

Music takes its place as a *doing* study; and as we have already discovered, its doing is of many kinds, all requiring care. Singing or playing is doing; reading the notes is doing; studying out the composer's meaning is doing; making others feel it is doing; everything is doing; and *doing* is true living, *provided it is unselfish*.

Let us see if there is not a simple lesson in all this. To seek it we shall have to say old thoughts over again. Music itself uses the same tones over and over again; it is by doing so that we begin to understand tone a little.

The school studies try the mind; with the tasks increased bit by bit, the mind is made stronger. Thus is Strength gained. By the tasks demanding exactness, the thoughts must not be scattered everywhere,

but centered upon the thing to be done. Thus is Concentration gained. By making the hand work with care and a definite purpose, Skill is gained. By demanding of the thoughts that they must seek out all the qualities of an object, Attention is gained. By placing things and signs for things before us, we are taught to See. By educating us in sounds, we are taught to Listen. When we have a task that admits of a single correct result, we are taught Exactness.

Now, from all we have learned in these Talks about music it must be clear that all these qualities are just what are needed in music:

I. Strength of thought for Real doing.

II. Concentration for Right doing.

III. Skill for Well doing.

IV. Seeing and listening for the cultivation of Attention.

V. Correctness for the Manner of doing.

We sought for a simple lesson. It is this:

Let us learn all we can that is right and worthy for the strengthening of the mind, for the cultivation of the heart, for the good and joy of others; for these things are the spirit of music.



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