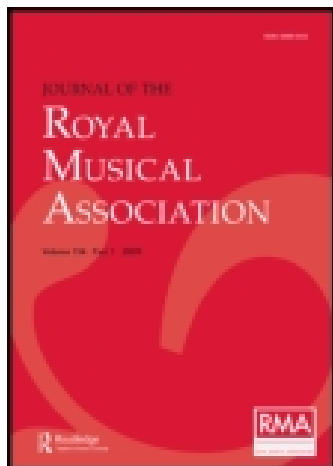


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Provincial Memories

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F. GILBERT WEBB, Esq.,

IN THE CHAIR.

PROVINCIAL MEMORIES.

BY LOUIS N. PARKER, F.R.A.M.

WHAT can I talk about that is likely to interest a scientific society such as the Musical Association? It is now twenty-six years since I was a practising musician, and I was never scientific. I have no business in a learned society, and certainly no claim to be addressing one. I can only speak about things I know, and have experienced, and remember. In my musical life I did not experience what you would call great things: my lines were laid in a pleasant but obscure place. Perhaps, however, it is true that the greatness of things is relative. The first hearing of a certain strain of music, even of a certain harmonic combination, may be for the hearer a psychological event. The first hearing of Schubert's C major Symphony may be as great an adventure to one man as the first ascent of the Matterhorn is to another, and a man may faint on catching his first salmon.

It is, then, a chronicle of small beer I venture to inflict on you. I have not discovered a new chord or dug up the root of an old one. I can only tell a plain unvarnished tale. It may serve as a warning to someone on the threshold of life: some others may sigh as they recognise a parallel of their own experience; none, I hope, will be able to accuse me of performing a solo on my own trumpet. Briefly, I propose to tell you the simple story of my nineteen years as a provincial musician. Not the story of a Riseley or a Best, however, but of an average poor devil, planted suddenly in the heart of a pastoral country, amongst a bucolic population; where he had to work hard and incessantly in order to make both ends meet, and where laurel-wreaths and eulogistic articles in the *Times* and the *Telegraph* were equally out of reach. It sounds, I confess, dull and dreary; but if I cannot be interesting, I promise you I will not be long, and it may be a new sensation to you to hear one who has done nothing describe how he did it.

And possibly some of the conditions under which I worked have changed—perhaps for the better (I began my professional career forty-five, and ended it twenty-six years ago)—but I doubt it. Life in agricultural districts changes very slowly, and even if there be a change it is only on the surface. Deep down the thought of to-day is very much the thought of yesterday, and of the day before. The social outlook, the social hierarchies, remain the same, or nearly the same; and the artistic instincts are as severely repressed to-day as they were a hundred years ago: more severely than they were four hundred years ago. The man who successfully grows a cabbage is still of far greater importance in the provinces than the man who writes a symphony.

I was exactly twenty-one years old when Sir Sterndale Bennett asked me whether I would like to go to a place called Sherborne, somewhere in Dorsetshire, to fill the post of music master temporarily in a big boys' school there. I was to be the guest of his son, Mr. James Sterndale Bennett, who was mathematical master and supervised the music. It was to be a matter of nine weeks, and the remuneration offered seemed to me Golconda. I have always acted on the spur of the moment, and I went—that same afternoon. I was in my fourth year at the Royal Academy; the average student; I played the piano glibly; the organ adventurously; I sang not disagreeably with a light baritone voice. I was especially addicted to *buffo* songs, such as "Largo al Factotum." "La Calunnia," Leporello's catalogue, "I'm a Roamer," etc., and I was rather great on "Ruddier than the Cherry." I had a bowing acquaintance with harmony and counterpoint as taught by Banister and Steggall; an acquaintance based more on respect than affection; and I had that appreciation of composition which one acquires by constant companionship with fellow students of far higher attainments, and by study under such a master as Bennett. On the other hand I knew nothing of English provincial life, nothing of English public schools, nothing even of boys from the point of view of the teacher. I was guileless, and believed everything everybody said. Also I knew nothing of the art of teaching, beyond having observed from my own masters that it was fairly safe to sit a little behind the pupil and have a nap.

Mr. James Sterndale Bennett was—and I am happy to be able to add, is—an accomplished musician. He had lately begun an experiment in Sherborne School, and when I say it was nothing less than the introduction of high-class vocal and instrumental music, you will, I think, admit it was a bold one.

A Public School of that period could not be described as a promising field for the cultivation of the fine arts. The boys were a genial but rather rough lot. They were distinctly young barbarians, and the masters were, if anything, rather rougher barbarians, old enough to know better. The boys came from homes where the names of the great composers were little, and their works less, known; where, indeed, no music ever was heard but the ballads of Claribel and Virginia Gabriel, and the tinkle of Brinley Richards & Co. The boldest flight outside this tuneful choir was, perhaps, an occasional "Song without Words," but even that was looked upon with some suspicion as savouring of the "classical." Let us, however, abstain from sneering. Similar houses still exist in their thousands: houses in which, after years of musical culture, you shall find—worse than Claribel and Gabriel and brilliant Brinley—*nothing* but the complete piano-scores of all the Revues in their naked horror.

It was among boys from such houses that Mr. Sterndale Bennett started his hazardous experiment, and his initial effort was a Handel Oratorio.

Fortunately, he was very popular, and his seductive humour and winning manner persuaded a few of the older boys to rally round him. These persuaded the younger—possibly by more vigorous measures. Anyhow, they formed a small choral force. But you must not imagine such a choir as you would consider a choir. I don't suppose there were two boys in it who could read vocal music, or could tell a sharp from a flat. The parts had to be pumped into them, drummed into them, subcutaneously injected into them; and between one practice and the next they were liable to evaporate, and the work had to be done all over again. Even then the alto was apt to slip up into the soprano, and the tenor to wander off at his own sweet will and become very like a wail. Bennett, however, had inexhaustible patience and unquenchable enthusiasm, and by dint of these virtues he managed to do wonders, so that when I arrived I found a rather surprising organisation in full working order. I had at first only a modest share in this part of the school music; I sat at the piano and thumped out the parts. This, and teaching the same instrument to boys who did not want to learn it, were strange experiences to a student fresh from the Academy, fresh from Crystal Palace concerts, fresh from consorting with people to whom music was meat and drink, and for whom technical difficulties did not exist.

I may as well confess that I never grew to enjoy the piano lessons; and I may add, that in the great majority of cases, teaching the average boy the piano is a waste of money, time,

and temper. Parents seem to think any boy can learn to play the piano. I believe it is more especially the mothers, bless them, who are to blame. I think when the dear souls first send their dear little boys to school they still cling to the hope that they may even yet turn out to be dear little girls. I believe if they had their own way they would have them taught plain sewing on the off chance. This is a natural and respectable instinct on the part of the mother. She has taught her darling "*Rousseau's Dream*," and she is quite sure he is a budding Mozart. As a rule he is not. She confuses the piano with music to such an extent that she invariably calls piano-lessons music-lessons. That is precisely what they are not. The piano is, in my opinion, the very worst medium for instilling a love of music into the average boy. The early stages of piano study as practised in school are the dreariest and most tedious form of drudgery, and the most remote from music. Consider: there is one half-hour lesson a week, and there is half-an-hour a day for practice; generally in a dismal room on a dismal piano. These half hours are stolen from the boy's scanty leisure, when he yearns to be, and ought to be, in the open air, occupied in gayer, more wholesome, and more innocent forms of devilry. A boy must have the sacred fire glowing very hot within him to lure him or urge him to this drudgery. At home he has imbibed entirely wrong conceptions of music and of piano-playing. If his master has a conscience he tries to wean him from these: tries to lay something of a right foundation, something of the rudiments, at least, of piano technique. Reduced to horrid fact that means five-finger exercises; the mysteries of fingering; a dawning sense of rhythm. But that is not what the average parent wants. The average parent wants Reginald to startle the Christmas party with a repertoire of at least three so-called "*pieces*," and those of the tuney kind which papa can understand, even after dinner. So there are sulks on the part of the unhappy boy, letters from indignant parents to the headmaster, and a dog's life for the teacher. For what is the latter to do? The state of his larder depends on the number of his pupils. He dare not refuse to teach any individual boy: he dare not advise a parent not to have his boy taught.

Of course, there are exceptions. Of course, there are boys with a gift for music. There are even boys who come furnished with a proper musical training. Then the music-master is happy. For a little while—until the headmaster receives another indignant letter, asking why if Jones major was trotted out at the school concert, his own boy, Smith minor, who has cut all his practices and most of his lessons, is left to languish in obscurity.

I think it would be much more sensible to teach a boy who showed any liking for music, not the piano, but the organ. The piano, after all, is a makeshift into which the musician's imagination puts all the colours of the orchestra, and even of voices. To the musician I think even—or especially—a Beethoven sonata has the colouring of a symphony. To the boy a piano cannot convey this. He only hears the impact of a hammer on a wire. Put him at the organ, and at once he would get something of this orchestral colouring, and something of the romance of varied tone. Moreover, he would at once get a correct notion of the comparative time-value of note signs. It is all very well to tell a boy that a semibreve is worth four crotchets; on the piano, the evidence, to his uncultivated senses, is against you. Unless he have an exceptionally good ear he only hears the first impact of any note, and that tells him there is no noticeable difference in duration of sound between one note and another, however their shapes may differ. On the organ the difference is clearly apparent. I confess that when, after a longish spell of piano study, I had my first organ lesson, I was very much surprised indeed to find that the shapes of notes had more than theoretical importance; and I confess that this discovery added immense interest to music.

But if a boy has any music in him, and any fragment of a voice, singing is, after all, the best and quickest way to awaken him to the beauty of the art. Put him in a choir and at once his interest is aroused. It increases as his own powers increase. Often it becomes an enthusiasm and affects his whole life for good. Not seldom a boy who has been a little while in a choir will want to know more about music apart from choral work; will want to be able to do something in the musical way off his own bat. Then he spontaneously takes to an instrument; and *then* you may indulge in the hope that you have started one human being on the way to becoming a not too deadly amateur musician, or, what is infinitely better, an intelligent listener; possibly, even a "patron" who may found a scholarship.

That, I think, was in Mr. Sterndale Bennett's mind when he founded the Sherborne School Musical Society, and so became the pioneer of choral music in public schools.

It was a small beginning, but it grew apace, and before he left the school concerts were a flourishing institution.

My preliminary nine weeks sped very quickly. At the end of them I was duly offered the post of piano-master, and—again on the spur of the moment—I accepted it. I had tasted freedom. I had tasted the joy of running up bills on my own account. I knew the meaning of an overdraft

at the bank. How could I go back and become a student again?

Yet there were crumpled rose-leaves. My work was all out of school hours. That meant that it began at a ghastly hour in the morning; that it was resumed immediately after the mid-day meal; and that it was resumed again in the evening, and went on until the official bedtime. Two hours in the morning, three hours in the afternoon, and three hours at night. You can imagine with what gusto boys who were learning the piano under compulsion left their football, their cricket, or their tuck-shop to come to their lessons.

In 1877 Mr. Sterndale Bennett left. His last programme was Mendelssohn's "St. Paul," whereby you can judge what strides music under his direction had made in the school. Upon his departure I was put in sole charge, with the magnificent title of Director of the Music in Sherborne School. At the same time a beautiful new big schoolroom was built. Then, also, Dr. Harper, the headmaster, resigned, and Edward Mallet Young succeeded him. No two men could have been more in contrast with each other. Harper was a burly giant, kind, hearty, simple; perhaps a little uncouth, and certainly indifferent to the graces of life. Young, on the other hand, was cultivated to the finger-tips; a lover of all the arts, a bit of a poet, a man of delicate, of almost ultra-refined taste; a man of high ideals. Especially he was a devotee of music, although, alas! his musical training had not been on very severe lines. He hurt my feelings at the start by sending me to a very famous school to hear a concert at which the boys sang popular songs in unison, and sang nothing else. In spite of this temporary aberration of an otherwise brilliant intellect, Young was a very good friend to Sherborne music. He allowed me to erect a permanent orchestra in the new schoolroom; he modified the plan of the unfinished building so as to include an organ chamber. Privileges were extended to members of the choir, he supported the Musical Society liberally out of his own pocket; in time a beautiful concert organ was built and a Broadwood grand purchased. As for me, I took care to proceed on the lines Mr. Bennett had laid down. The great point was to make the Musical Society fashionable among the boys. So I roped in the heads of houses, the captains of the games, the heroes of the sports, the Sixth Form generally. This very often involved having fellows in the chorus who had neither voice nor ear. Never mind. They had, what was better for my purpose, influence; and the younger boys followed where they led. It continued to be "the thing" to be in the Musical Society, and as the school increased and

our choral force grew stronger the independent bass of the earless members was overwhelmed. It became a sort of *faux-bourdon* which did no harm, but rather added richness to the super-incumbent harmony. We grew ambitious. I had an excellent lieutenant who taught the violin, and, indeed, every other instrument. We got together a band; we took in local amateurs. We started humbly with Romberg, and those mysterious composers who have written overtures to unknown operas, and whose names one never sees except in connection with elementary orchestras.—Hermann, Nehr, Brepsant, Parlou—heaven only knows who they were. Soon, however, we passed on to Haydn, to Gluck, and Mozart, culminating in Beethoven. We had six concerts every year. Three middle-term concerts of less importance, with glees, part-songs, madrigals, and vocal and instrumental solos; two end-term concerts with smaller cantatas, such as “Lauda Sion”; and one great concert at Easter, when we let ourselves go on an Oratorio, a symphony, and a classical overture. On these occasions we called in professional help in the orchestra—but in the orchestra only. The choral and solo parts were always sung by our own forces exclusively—by present and past members of the Society. We also had occasional extra concerts, to which we invited distinguished performers—pianists, violinists, and so on. Thus Monsieur Alexandre Guilmant came often to play on the schoolroom organ, and a delightful visitor he was. I will not bore you with a tedious recital of programmes, but appended to the programme of the 100th concert, given on December 19th, 1887, is a list of the principal works performed since the foundation of the Society, and that includes 33 oratorios and cantatas, among which are “The Messiah,” “Samson,” “Judas,” each several times, “Theodora,” “St. Cecilia’s Day,” “Acis and Galatea,” Haydn’s “Creation,” and his less-known “Seven last Words,” Spohr’s “Last Judgment,” Mendelssohn’s “Elijah” and “St. Paul” several times, “Athalie,” and many of his minor works. Several of Schubert’s Masses; Sterndale Bennett’s “May Queen,” and “Woman of Samaria” several times; Gounod’s “Messe Solennelle,” once with M. Guilmant, and again with full orchestra. Gluck’s “Orpheus”—the whole opera, for which I wrote a new text; Sullivan’s “Prodigal Son”; Stainer’s “Daughter of Jairus.” Among the orchestral works are three symphonies and several overtures by Beethoven; Mendelssohn’s Reformation Symphony; three of Mozart’s symphonies; eleven by Haydn; Schubert’s unfinished Symphony. And there are pretty nearly all the classical overtures. Between the hundredth concert in 1887 and 1892, when I left, the same sort of thing went on, but I

have not kept the programmes. We added Handel's "Semele," I remember, Barnett's "Ancient Mariner," Bridge's "Callirrhœ," another of Beethoven's symphonies, and more overtures. By that time I was severely bitten by Wagnerism, and we did scenes from "Tannhäuser," and "Lohengrin," and the Siegfried Idyll." When I left I was seriously meditating nothing less than an attack on the prelude and the second scene of "Parsifal." Our greatest, and one of our most successful efforts was Sullivan's "Golden Legend."

I must repeat that our music was to all intents and purposes home-made; that the only professional assistance we had was in the orchestra on state occasions, and then only where it was absolutely indispensable. Vocally, we relied entirely on our own resources, and it was seldom the school was without at least one good representative of each voice. I know of nothing more refreshing after the airs and graces of some platform singers, than to hear the soprano solos of, say, the "Golden Legend," sung exquisitely by a boy who has just come off the cricket-field, and is quite unconscious that he is doing anything at all out of the way.

I do not pretend for a moment that these performances were perfect, or that the London critic would have been satisfied with them. At the same time, we ourselves were so pleased with them that we invited Sir Frederick Bridge and Sir Arthur Sullivan to come and hear "Callirrhœ" and the "Golden Legend." They both knew better, but, at least, we had shown them we were not afraid of them.

The performances were not intended for London critics. Thank goodness, we made music for its own sake. The rehearsals and performances were a joy to us, and all that part of my work was a pure delight, and a rich compensation for the weary hours at the piano. It was not my ambition to turn out executants, but listeners, who, as far as our modest means went, had nothing but good models set up before them. The boys who went through the Sherborne School Musical Society were to know what was meant by a sonata, an overture, a symphony, a concerto; they were to appreciate the picturesque value of orchestration; to distinguish between a piccolo and a trombone; to follow the intricacies of a fugue; even to recognise to some extent the individual characteristics of the great composers. I was delighted to find that many, even of the non-musical boys, the boys who had droned that *faux-bourdon*, acquired a passionate love of music. I think we sent hundreds of young men out into the world with a knowledge that there is such an art as music; and that is more than many people can claim.

But the School did not absorb all my time. There was also the Town music, of which I had more than my fair share. Pupils for singing, pupils for the piano, pupils, even,—do not smile—for composition; and choral societies, and recitals, and concerts, and lectures. You know the sort of thing, and I need not enlarge on it. The point I want to arrive at is the effect of this work and this life on the individual musician. As to the school-work, nothing could be better for a young musician than this life of ceaseless activity in every branch of music. It makes him alert. It keeps him from rusting. It brings him up against all sorts of characters; for character comes out more strongly among unsophisticated boys than among grown-ups who have had their corners rubbed off. He learns to humour people; to wheedle and coax the best out of them; he learns how to avoid wounding susceptibilities, to chaff—if I may so express it—without insulting; for nobody is so sensitive as the boy. Work in a big school will keep a young man young long after his time, and the constant watch he is forced to keep on his words and actions will be of the utmost value to him in after life. But there are two serious drawbacks. The first is the delicate question of social position; the second is the lack of opportunity, and the discouraging prospect of an old age without any of that which should accompany it.

Of the first I will say little. When I went to Sherborne it was a shock to me to discover that there was such a thing as social status at all, and more especially that it depended on one's profession. I was a foolish young man, and I ran amok. I had no idea that I was not as good as anybody else; on the contrary I nursed a vain delusion that as a budding artist I was to be classed with the salt of the earth. I soon found that, in the school world at any rate, I was expected to readjust my outlook. Well, I refused to do so. Looking back on the fight from a distance of a quarter of a century I can afford to laugh at it; but while it lasted it had its serious aspects; it entailed a good deal of pain, it gave rise to much bitterness of feeling; it was an unpleasant illustration of man's inhumanity to man; and often it was only made bearable by the kindness, the sympathy, and the wisdom of the headmaster, Canon Young. It is all very well to say a man makes his own position. In the school world that is not true; or it is true only in a modified sense. He is heavily handicapped at the start, and making his own position is a long and tiresome job. I think the young musician who goes out into the provinces, and especially into a public school, should be warned of the difficulties he will encounter, and should in some way be armed against them.

The other drawback is far more serious, and its perils are far more insidious. In the case of a musician who loves his art, and has to exercise it in a small community, the lack of opportunity, the total absence of any beyond purely local recognition of his work, is apt, in time, to kill ambition, to stifle incentive. He is buried; he is cut off from the world; he has no outlet; publishers won't listen to him, won't even answer his letters; the big London firms ignore him; he is a poor little music-master, and that's all he can ever hope to be.

Let him compose? Certainly. Imagine, for a moment, that you are such a musician. Imagine that you have composed a cantata. A cantata is the only thing worth composing, because it's the only thing you can get performed. You can inflict it on your own choral society. Your own choral society will look on it with grave suspicion. It is new, and they don't like new things. They would much rather sing what their fathers and mothers and their grandfathers and grandmothers sang before them. It is by a local man, and they doubt a local composer, even as England doubts English composers. However, they have consented to do your great work, so as not to hurt your feelings, and because you buy your groceries from the leading tenor and your coal from the leading bass. After three months of practice—not less—you have got them to the point of being able to get through the choruses without disaster. The evening of the concert approaches. You have plastered the town with posters, but nobody looks at them. The plan of the room is at the local stationer's, as you carefully point out on the posters. But that fact leaves the town "more than usual ca'm." You visit the stationer's shop twice a day to see how the plan is filling up. It isn't. The same causes which made your choir dubious, make your public shy. Your committee, who also visit the stationer twice a day, meet you with long faces, which daily grow longer. It is as they had feared. They said so. If only you had done "The Messiah." The concert will result in a loss, and goodness knows how that is to be made good; for a choral society never has any funds. You want a harp, you want kettle-drums. You must pay for them out of your own pocket, or go without. You can, at best, have only one full rehearsal with your scratch orchestra and your imported soloists. The latter will probably jib even at that. I have not forgotten the letter I received from a *prima donna*—a very small *prima donna*—in answer to a call for a rehearsal of a work I knew she had never sung. "Dear Sir," it ran, "I am not in the habit of attending rehearsals. I will read the work in the train." I derived a melancholy satisfaction from

the fact that, at the performance, she dried up and broke down. The professional orchestra you have engaged assumes a lofty air of detachment and aloofness. They are all inspired with a profound disgust of the parts even before they have tried them. "What's this?" says the second flute, in a tone I cannot hope to convey. "Do you expect me to play this?" says the double bass. And they exchange glances of gentle resignation which imply a conviction that you ought to be in Colney Hatch. I do think that to face London orchestral players for the first time at a small provincial concert requires a courage on the part of the young conductor which entitles him to the D.S.O.

Well! you give your concert. You perform your great work. I will even concede that the members of your orchestra are favourably impressed and say so. And then what? Your audience—you know every individual member of it, and you know that not one of them has the smallest scintilla of an idea of what you have been driving at. Your committee were true prophets, and there is a financial deficit which has to be made good by a jumble sale. The Press? Oh, the small provincial press on the subject of music in general, and new music in particular! "Our Musical Representative" is the same man who does the cattle shows, and everything else. If he has unusual sense he says nothing about the concert, but devotes a column to what he calls the Gentry who were present. I confess, without a blush, that I generally wrote my own notices, but that had the disadvantage that for decency's sake I felt bound to slate myself severely. And that's all. You send your great work to your friends; but they have all written great works of their own which they are just going to perform, and they shelve yours and forget it. Perhaps, if you are exceptionally lucky, one other choral society, smaller than yours, does your cantata once, on condition that you present the copies—does it with piano and harmonium. Then you attend that concert, swelling with pride, and you sit and suffer in silence, and the pride oozes out of you.

Yet such occasions, coming rarely,—for even you cannot write a cantata every week—such occasions are the red-letter days of your career. They are your Birmingham Festivals, your Bayreuth—and they are Dead-Sea fruit. I have not described this tragi-comedy in order to summon the sympathetic tear on my own behalf. I was unconscious, or only partly conscious of my lost opportunities. I had too much to do to grouse, and while I was doing it I did not see the smallness and unimportance of it. Indeed, even now, I cannot acknowledge that the school part was entirely insignificant or without its influence.

When the School went through a great crisis in the late 80's, and, owing to the malevolence of a few busybodies, was so nearly wrecked that it has only lately recovered, I had to earn the bulk of my living outside. Among other things, that entailed day-long rides on a large white horse who sat down—*sat down*—whenever he was tired. During my last years in Sherborne I had six choral societies: one every night of the week. One in the school, one in the town, and four others in four more or less neighbouring towns. But even busy as I was, I did grieve and I did sometimes grouse when I thought of what all that amount of work might have achieved in other surroundings, and especially when I realised that there was no future for me, or for anyone in a similar position. One could go on like this until one was sixty, and then one would automatically get one's *congé* from the school and be relegated to the scrap-heap. I had seen an example of that. I had seen the case of one music-master, who had worked thirty-five years in a public school; worked, hard and conscientiously at all available hours; and punctually on the stroke of sixty he was politely bowed out with no solatium but the usual tea-service. He had the town to fall back on? Oh, dear, no. If you are too old for the school you are too old for the town. This particular man had the great good fortune of securing an engagement as solitary viola player in a theatre orchestra, where they played the same musical comedy 2,497 times in succession; and even to get that he had to buy a brown wig, as grey heads in the band depress the stalls.

So I say that when a youth has had five years of provincial life he has had enough. He has had time to work off his youthful ebullition; he has found his feet and smoothed his temper; he knows the worst that can happen to him in the way of pupils; he has had time to improve himself, to study, to discover the *art* of music beneath the layers of scholasticism under which his pedagogues had conscientiously buried it. Now he should go forth and dare the great adventure. This, of course, if there be anything in him. But, if there be anything in him, even five years is, perhaps, too long; for he has had regular pay and three solid meals a day, and that is unwholesome for an artist. He may have become smug. He may have acquired that awful reverence for his pastors and masters, and for the Gentry, which is the atmosphere he moves in. In that case he is lost to art. His dreams fade; his ambitions wither; his hopes die; his mind grows as grey as his hair. Music—that divinest and most spiritual of the arts—ceases to be anything to him but dry-as-dust technicalities. His soul is sick of sounds; his soul shrivels until a nutshell would hold it, with room to spare.

I am, I repeat, speaking of the small musician, making music in a small way in a small town; working ten, twelve, fourteen hours a day in an untractable medium. I plead for him. I wish his distinguished colleagues could do something for him. I wish he could do a little more for himself. I wish there were a window in his life which he might now and again open and let in a little fresh air, and let in a little of God's music. I wish somebody interested himself in his career. It is possible that things have improved since my time; I confess I don't know. I do know that I saw myself one of a long procession of nameless toilers—toilers is the word—wading along a dismal road of drudgery, through a life in which nothing happened; a road on which the milestones were disappointments, and the pavements broken hearts; a road which ended nowhere, or, at the end of which, loomed, at best, a cheap boarding-house. I probably discovered that I was not a musician, or that I was too fond of music. Anyhow I broke away. I took to evil courses. I took to play-writing.

This is a bitter note to leave off on. Where, you will ask, is the glowing peroration on the nobility of the teacher's profession, on the splendid work of teaching the young idea how to shoot? I don't know. I think I had all the ideals when I started. I think I kept them in connection with the choral and orchestral music. I think I kept them even in the case of exceptional pupils, of whom I had perhaps a dozen—but not a baker's dozen—in my nineteen years. You must remember that as soon as provincial pupils show the least intelligence or show the slightest progress, they are taken away from the provincial master and sent at great expense to a London professor. Then they end by selling coals on commission, or in the back row of a musical comedy chorus. These are the exceptional cases. The bulk of the work is deadening and stupefying. The man connected with a school has this advantage that he gets three enforced periods of vacation during which he can come to the surface and breathe a little fresh air. They may be his saving, at the cost of his savings. The man, or woman, not connected with a school, the parish organist, whose fixed salary a plain cook would not look at—what is there for them? Try as I will, I cannot burst into a dithyramb in praise of the joy of such lives. Theirs is a long and slow martyrdom. The constant dropping of water, I am told, is one of the worst forms of torture. Think of the constant repetition of Czerny through forty years!

DISCUSSION.

Mr. F. GILBERT WEBB : We have had a most vivid, pathetic, instructive, and interesting paper. Although Mr. Parker has given us such a dark picture of his work, has given us such a long vista of the shadows, I think it is evident that he did a great work at Sherborne, and that the young fellows there profited perhaps far more than he has realised from the ideals he set before them.

The moral value of teaching boys music can scarcely be over-estimated. It is the best preservative in many directions for the young fellow. We all know how the war has shown the practical value of music, and its enormous effect in brightening life and soothing the nerves; no less is it valuable in developing the most important part of our mind—the imagination. Which is the best instrument to teach a boy is worthy of careful consideration. The organ from its mechanical construction, is the most likely to interest a boy; but the difficulty is to get the organ, and then the instrument might suffer internally from too investigating minds. One great advantage with the organ, and any wind instrument, is that it impresses on the student the time value of notes—an important point. Possibly many of us have had some experience in teaching boys singing. A small minority do show interest in music. Undoubtedly it is an interesting and healthy pursuit for them. Of course, boys in choirs have the better chance of cultivating the taste for music. I happen to know Sherborne, and it certainly does not give one the impression of being a very promising place for music. Knowing this, I am very much surprised to learn that so much has been done. As regards the social status of teachers, I cannot help thinking the position is better now than it was. The possibility of a musician being a gentleman is surely admitted, even in the country, where class distinctions are so much more thought of than in London. However, I think Mr. Parker's advice that it is unwise to stay too long as school-master is extremely valuable. At any rate, Mr. Parker seems to have profited by his experiences, although he speaks in rather doubtful and dismal tones of his work. In this, as I have said, I do not think he is right, because I cannot help feeling that what he has accomplished has had far-reaching effects which it is impossible adequately to estimate. Moreover, it is not improbable that the success of his plays and of his work after he left Sherborne School was based upon the experience and knowledge of human nature which he derived as school music-master.

Mr. JOHN GRAHAM : It was my pleasure to visit Sherborne thirty years ago. On the whole, I have been much depressed in listening to Mr. Parker's paper, and I say this though I have much enjoyed its asides, and have been much interested in the under-current of stern truth which it conveys.

At the same time I must say that my memory of Sherborne music does not coincide with the modest picture which Mr. Parker has given us. It was an inspiring experience for me to hear and describe the school music of Sherborne. I consider that the work done there was the real pioneer of all the work that has followed in our public schools. Others, perhaps, may have gained more credit, as, for instance, John Farmer, who has been claimed as being an earlier pioneer. I had the pleasure afterwards of going round a number of other public schools, and reporting upon them, yet I saw nothing so fine during several years as I had seen at the first school which I had visited, namely Sherborne. The achievement, when one considers the circumstances, was wonderful. From among about 300 boys there was formed a huge Choral Society, which sang with splendid "vim." I think the work performed at that time was "Judas Maccabæus," which suited the boys to a tee; then also there was the Orchestral Society associated with it. Everything I saw and heard was excellently done. Even at that time, I may say, Mr. Parker was a man of importance at Sherborne, and, moreover, a man highly respected. He was there doing a work which probably no one else could have done; and he was doing it by his personality, by his musical ability, by his persistence, by his energy and his enthusiasm. Considering all this, I cannot agree that the position of music, or the position of music-master was so poor, or so little esteemed as Mr. Parker has given us to understand it was. Another point to be considered in this connection is that the circle has been widening since that time. Mr. Parker showed how music should not, and how it should, be taught in public schools, and, as a consequence, we know how it is taught in some of the larger schools to-day. His example has led them to follow. Thirty years ago, elsewhere than at Sherborne, there was no thought of having music taught on so large and important a plan. Mr. Parker's success, however, led others to attempt what he had accomplished. Among other good results we find that music-masters at great public schools are not now such nonentities as has been suggested to us this afternoon; their position has improved financially, socially, and in every other way; and some among them may be regarded as men of eminence. Correspondingly, music has come to take a place of more and more importance.

Dr. YORKE TROTTER : Speaking as one born and brought up in a rural district, I do not in the least see why of necessity musical matters should be in as bad a state as Mr. Parker has described. My own opinion is that the musical education in this country has been conducted on a wrong system. If children while they were young, were taught music in a rational way, they would love it from the appeal made by its rhythmical movement and beautiful tone, and the result would be that they would desire to learn to play upon instruments of music and to sing in choruses, and thus revive the art in our country. I do not see why we should not be able to revive the old English love of music that was found in the time of Elizabeth ; why there should not be in every village a little band of people practising the musical art ; why there should not be orchestral and choral societies all over England. With the coming into being of such organisations the art of music would soon revive. In this case, so far from the position of the teacher of music in a provincial town being looked down upon, he would be held to occupy a place of honour. There is an immense amount of talent in country places which is now lying dormant, because there has been no influence at work to bring it forward. We must first train our teachers in a rational way, and instil in them an enthusiastic love for the art, which they can hand on to these pupils. When this is accomplished, we may look for a recrudescence of the musical art.

A vote of thanks to Mr. Parker closed the meeting.
