

(December 3, 1928)

## On Teaching Children Music

BY MR. EDWARD JOHNSON.

PRESIDENT DALY:—Gentlemen, when we refer to the growing importance of Canada among the nations of the world we are apt to think more often in terms of wealth and science and trade and industry than in terms of culture and artistic achievement. No nation can have any more authoritative or more certain claim to recognition than the nation which gives to the world a supreme artist. It is true that in the case of a great singer the gods must smile upon him at his birth, but the hard and patient work, the intensive and prolonged training and cultivation of the mind and spirit without which excellence cannot be attained, these remain to the credit of the individual. It is a very great pleasure and a very great honor to have with us today Mr. Edward Johnson, who, through his powers as a vocalist, through the poetry of his acting, and through his superb creative and interpretive gifts has endeared himself to his fellow-countrymen and brought honor to his own name and to the name of Canada throughout the world. The very fact that Mr. Johnson has achieved such a pre-eminent position must of itself encourage and stimulate the study of music in this country. In addition Mr. Johnson has indicated in a generous and practical way his belief in the importance of the study of music in our schools as an essential part of general education. This movement in our schools is assuming increasing importance and later on, at the conclusion of Mr. Johnson's address, we shall have a song from the boys of Withrow Avenue public school, whom we are glad to number among our guests on this occasion. Gentlemen, it is with great pleasure that I introduce Mr. Edward Johnson.

MR. JOHNSON:—President Daly, members of the Canadian Club, and guests, I have great pleasure in being with you today and it is marred only by the fact that I must address you. Replying to your president's remarks, it reminds me of a story I heard the other day of two men, cultured men, discussing the question of greatness and celebrity, and they talked about great men of the world; they spoke of men of arts and letters and they spoke about celebrated people in the field of sport and other lines; and they thought they would like to have the reaction of some great mind to some of these names. So they thought for a moment and they considered Dempsey and Tunney and Babe Ruth, Miss Wills and some others and eventually they decided they would send a cablegram to Bernard Shaw and ask him his opinion of Babe Ruth. They were not long in getting a reply and it read in this manner: "Ruth who, and whose baby is she?"

A friend of mine, who is an awfully good golfer, plays in the 70's, asked me to take a round with him. I play in the 70's also. For nine holes. I thought it was very generous on his part and I enjoy the exercise and the country and I accepted. When we got to the third hole he stood back and looked at me for a moment and said: "Well Ed. as a golfer you are a darn good singer." It may be before I get through with my speech you will wish I had sung a song.

When we sing we usually are fully advised in advance and are prepared. My friends all know that I suffered dreadfully from stage fright when I sang in public. Imagine my panic when I was asked to speak before your assembly, comprising as it does the intelligentsia of the city of Toronto. No assistance in the form of a set composition, with words and music; no orchestra; no costume or make-up; no lights—that is a good point—no prompter. Panic! But I decided to go through because I had what I believed was a salvation point, a theme. And my theme is music. Not music, pedagogically speaking, but music in general, music in relation to living, music in our educational processes, in our schools, for our children.

It has been my experience as I go through the world that we are starting on the wrong end. Our clubs and our

societies and all these organizations that engage us to sing for them are usually adults. They are full-grown and mature and they have, so to speak, solidified their habits and (may I say?) prejudices, and it is pretty hard to make them get the angle that we who are presenting ourselves wish to give them. And I thought, how can we rectify this? I know that music is being taught diligently and well throughout the country and I know of no city (and I see most of them) where you have such wonderful possibilities as in your own. Toronto is without doubt one of the most musical cities in the whole of the North American continent today. You have also music in your schools so I may say in passing that any remarks I may make have no reference whatever to local conditions. I am unaware of them and I am speaking in a general form and with the intent of interesting business men, in other lines and other walks of life, in the particular line which I and my companions follow.

Children are most receptive and they absorb without knowing. Therefore it is a very easy matter to teach them the basic principles and the fundamentals of a science that becomes difficult as it progresses and which I think my friends will bear me out in saying we never get to the end of, and if we wait until we are more or less grown and mature, it is much more difficult to go back over that period. If children could be taken as little tots and instructed, without being conscious of the fact that they are being instructed, they would absorb all those principles that take us afterwards months and years to learn. Business men are apt to look at everything from a business angle, even art, and in a certain sense I think they are right. I am a bit of a business man myself. There is no profession today that gives you any better returns if you hit it right even in the average walk. The musician who plays an instrument and gets in an orchestra, or who fills in the concert field, if he has any luck at all, can earn as much as and perhaps more than the average white collar job. And some of them, you must read in the paper, like Caruso, Melba, Galli Curci, who pay enormous income tax, must therefore have made a lot of money.

Coming across continent, (I just came from Cali-

fornia), I sat in a smoker with men who were talking finance, stock market, General Motors, etc. A young man sat by, obviously an artist, a musician, and at a certain moment he heard some man say Kreisler was going to build a building in New York the highest in the world. And he said, "Goodness! I never knew violinists made so much money." Music is essential in human life. We cannot go anywhere that we don't find it at every step. Mechanical devices have brought it to everyone's ears. You may enjoy or not the jazz but you cannot avoid the most popular tune of the day. You may not be interested in classic but if you had read during the past week you could not have failed to learn that we were celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of the death of one of the greatest artists of all time in music, Schubert.

I have people ask me how young should a child be to begin to study. I answer, "Anywhere from two to twenty." You may think that rather exaggerated. It isn't. If you would look in the lives of some of the world's great artists you would find that they began very near to the first number. Mozart was three when he first showed interest in music and only six when he played at court. Joseph Hoffman was a boy-prodogy and at nine had travelled all over Europe giving concerts. Fritz Kreisler began to study at five and at seven had given a concert in Vienne. Heifitz, whom you must all know, began when he was four. And these all developed into renowned artists.

Now you may say that is the exception. But how do you know. I have a theory that any man who devotes his time and attention and gives up one night a week to go to a singing or choral organization must have in him a spark of music. With all the responsibilities and cares that he must have in his daily life he must love very much and must have a strong desire to learn music or he would not give up his time. Supposing that we had taken that man when he was six years of age in public school and we had given him the basic principles of this science of which we speak and we had taught him from the age of six until he was sixteen. Imagine what pleasure he would have gotten out of it from sixteen to thirty-six when he joined the choral society and how do you know that that little spark

which demonstrated itself only in his mature years might not have developed him as a child into being an artist. If we were to take all our children, and I don't know how many you may have in Toronto, but for an easy figure we will say 200,000—200,000 children taken over a period of ten years might produce two thousand people interested in music and desirous of making it something in their lives. Let us say for the next five or eight years these two thousand studied music seriously and out of them came twenty who were really very good artists and supposing out of those twenty we had two who became world-wide artists. It would only take twenty years, a generation, to have produced that and it would have given eternal honor and fame to your schools and to your city. As you see, I am reducing this more or less to business terms. It is all very well to be an artist but we have to be business-like. There are many features of that that escape average notice, and just by way of diversion and not to get our topic too serious, I am going to give you another story which becomes a bit personal.

There is a business angle in it from the side of the Anglo-Saxon that perhaps has more weight than is usually grasped. When I went to Italy the master asked me if I didn't think it would be wise to change my name. Well, I said, I don't know, what did he think about it? Well, he said, perhaps if I changed my name I could pass as an Italian and it might be of advantage to me in the theatre with a foreign name and a name that would be difficult for them to pronounce. There might be a subconscious or mental prejudice against a foreigner. And so it was agreed that I translate my name into Italian, and I became Edward, Son of John, in Italian, Edoardo di Giovanni. It was at that time I met my friend Edward Ferrari, an Italian, in your midst here, and one of my personal friends from Italy. We approached the impresario and he agreed it would be advisable. I carried on with that name during the years I was in Europe, some eight, and when the time came to come back to America, the American impresario said, "Oh, nothing doing on that foreign stuff. You have to get right down to a solid basis and get down to your own name." "Well," I said, "you know the game better

than I do. If you think so, all right." And so I returned with the name of Edward Johnson.

I had one or two rather amusing experiences. The first one was the more serious. My market value fell fifty per cent. Now you will say, why? Because for several generations art in the form of music has been brought to us from foreign lands. Foreign names made a greater impression upon the public and whether we were conscious of it or not the names that ended with something like "insky" had a little advantage for the business man. It was pretty hard to make the public believe that an artist could have a name like Johnson. Perhaps they were right. At any rate I am here to tell you that it took me five years to get back to the market value that I had in my profession when I left Milan. That was a rather hard knock. But I had other experiences. Two seasons ago we put on at the Metropolitan an old opera called *Vestale*. It was sung by one of our prima donnas—you all love Rosa Ponsella—and the tenor part cast for me—the story of a Roman general coming back from the wars victorious, riding in triumph through Rome. We had an enormous set and all the soldiers and high priests were brought in there until we had five hundred people crowded on the stage. The stage rehearsal was called with everybody in costume except the principals. At the set moment the victorious general was to be brought in in a beautiful chariot drawn by twelve Nubian slaves. They got the slaves up in upper 7th Avenue. They were standing by their chariot just back of the triumphant arch in order that when the scene was set all that they had to do was to swing into line. I stood by waiting for my cue and these swarthy fellows were sitting around naked to the waist. One fellow was looking me carefully over and he approached and said: "Scuse me, sah, is you the gen'lman what is going to ride in this heah chariot?" I looked at him for a moment and I said, *Si, Signor*. He was terribly surprised and he stepped back a moment and waited. Then he approached me again and said, "Scuse me boss, I'se not very good on foreign names but I'd like to know your name." I said, feigning a foreign accent, "If I tell you my name will you remember and tell me tomorrow?" He said, "Oh yes, sir,

I've not very good on foreign names but I'll try to remember." I said, "All right, if you tell me my name tomorrow I will give you a dollar." I said, "My name is Johnson." He said, "Good Lord, man, dat's the same as my name."

There is another little thing in music that I would like to bring to your attention and it is this. In modern life we are apt to go on a tangent and at the present moment we are developing the sense of seeing more rapidly than any other, perhaps than that of touch. The sense of hearing is left very much in abeyance. And of you who go to the movies, you know long before the caption appears what the picture is all about and can almost see what is going to appear to explain the picture. Your eyes are trained to telegraph to your brain very rapidly all that is going on about you. But is it so with your sense of hearing? How many people in modern life have what I shall call a good sense of pitch, to know when a thing is on key or off key, or as one of our friends expressed it one time, the whites or the blacks or the cracks? You have heard of such a thing as tone-deaf. We know of people who cannot carry even "God Save the King." It is painful to stand beside them. That should not be and medical science tells us today that that can be corrected, and they have all kinds of scientific methods of helping at least the children who are thus afflicted. With singing and with music the ear would be bound to attune itself to what was being done. The science of pitch would necessarily come to them almost naturally. If they didn't have it they would follow the others and it would come. Savages hear much more than we do. The Indian can hear the rustles and the music in the trees, the rippling brooks, the animals, the boars, the horses as they go by. Why? He has trained himself for that. How many of us hear even the dreadful noises that go on in our streets in modern cities? If we did we would go crazy. The ear has become in a sense tone-deaf. And that should not be. We ought to, and we may by training, cultivate a sensitiveness of hearing that would segregate and correct many of the evils later on in life. Besides there is the question, a very serious one for Anglo-Saxons, which is the question of languages. It is well known on the continent that Anglo-Saxons speak

usually only one language and that is their own. I do not see why that should be and yet I explain it as the question of hearing. It is not true that you cannot pronounce foreign words because the tongue cannot be twisted around the word. It is true, however, that you cannot say the word because you do not hear it. And if you were taught to catch the nuance of sound that we in music acquire you would have also the faculty of hearing a peculiar intonation and the peculiar little accent in French or German or Italian or any other tongue. What an asset this would be for the child in after life! Especially as we are every day approaching nearer and nearer that great community of nations, when we all are going to speak the same language or at least to understand each other. Also while the child is taking on this experience and this training in early stages, it would be play for him later on when he would wake up to the realization that, while he was studying melodies and little tunes and old airs, he had acquired, without ever having known it, the basis of all classical music. The great masters would have been born into his training without his being conscious that they were more or less what we in our day speak of as "high-brow." I have often found people who ask what is the use of going to that recital or symphony concert or the opera; "I don't know anything about it," they will say. We had an experience once in one of our concerts. We had sung half of the first group and a number of people entered the hall so we waited and when I thought they were all seated we were just about to start when I heard somebody obviously just coming to their seats and so we waited. And we heard a conversation like this: "I'm sorry, sir, you can't go to your seat. The concert has already begun."

"I got a ticket and I want to go to my seat."

"I'm sorry that the rule of the House says that when the concert has begun no one may be seated during numbers."

"Aw, what are you giving us? I paid for my ticket and I am going to sit down."

"I'm sorry, sir, but you cannot."

"Get out of my way."

"No sir, you cannot get in anyway, you are drunk."

"I know I'm drunk. I wouldn't be here if I wasn't."

The Superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools wrote an article in a Chicago paper recently and I kept this sentence: "Music is just as important in the life of a child as arithmetic." John Erskine, noted teacher and author says: "What this country needs is more good music teachers and fewer cheer-leaders."

I would like to bring one more point and that is the question of health. We are all interested in making our children strong and well, with good manners and a nice voice, the habit of speaking clearly and distinctly and well. I know no way in which the English language can be presented more clearly as to pronunciation and enunciation than in teaching children to sing and pronounce the words distinctly. It becomes a habit. And from a habit in singing it passes into the daily walks of life. I spoke with a gentleman yesterday and he said: "Mr. Johnson, I think you have brought back a bit of a foreign accent." "Well," I said, "it must be Irish." "No," he said, "it seems to have something a little sharper." "Well," I said, "it is a combination of the brogue and the ends of the earth." Is there anything more attractive than a young girl or boy who presents himself or herself to you, speaks to you in a manly straight-forward way and a voice which has a certain ring in it? It gives you joy to hear him. And that boy would get that if he would learn to sing. Half the trouble with us is that we produce our voices in our throats. The English language is by nature a bit guttural. But you don't need to accentuate it.

And besides all this there would be taught another essential that is very important in the life of a child—breathing. A doctor once told me that the average person only uses about a quarter, and some less, of the capacity of the body for utilizing breath. In other words most children breathe from the lungs. The lungs breathe anyway because if they didn't you wouldn't stand up. But there is another respirant which is called your diaphragm which is another good thing to rest on and when that is utilized and developed it becomes a real asset in life because it is the power that helps when you get into the position I am in today, to have to talk when it is really

not your business. When all this is done and when our children reach maturity they will have brought with them through the years the quality, the training and the intelligence. We would have what is the most satisfactory thing to any artist, an audience which appreciates and understands. And they are not so many. When I hear people say, "Oh, so and so has a magnificent voice. I think he ought to study and perhaps he might get to the Metropolitan some day." So he might. But why take that attitude. And that is the reason I speak to you in this particular line, that that is the wrong attitude and the wrong angle because that spark of art or that urge or whatever it is that drives you through all kinds of hazards and difficulties and pain to arrive, that urge is the only thing that will make you anything. You cannot make a boy an artist because he happens to whistle a tune or a girl a singer because she happens to have a pretty voice. Other things are necessary. But instead of taking the attitude that we are going to make of that girl or boy a professional musician, rather say we are going to give that child music because it will develop an inner life and culture, something that will be for beauty and for enjoyment all through his or her life. And that is what I want to pass on to you: that you will insist that your child get music, not because you think it is going to be a good job or he or she is going to get fame, or they are going to be professional. You are going to do it because you are giving them a gift that will open up a new world, that will make for them an entire new life of joy and beauty.

And in closing I want to read a few lines I read here the other day. I don't know whether you have ever attended a symphony concert. I know you have an orchestra in town and I know of Mr. Von Kunitz and his great efforts to carry it on, and I know the difficulties because I have worked with such orchestras in all the big cities. I know the cost in money and effort. But if you have never heard a symphony orchestra, you go. You will hear a certain quality of sound that you will not get anywhere else, the unity of sound that comes from the violins, from the wood winds, the brasses—it is something unique and if you don't get it the first time, go back and sit down and

listen to the strains of the symphony, close your eyes and through your ears make pictures. Let your imagination work. Because I believe that art is in everybody. Art is merely creation. You may not be able to draw or put down notes on paper and make music. But you may draw pictures through your eyes and through your mind, and what a joy it is. So you sit down and listen to the symphony orchestra and make pictures and you will have one of the best times you ever had in your life.

I went the other night as I came through New York. I was so sick and tired of listening to a tenor sing, and I went to hear the orchestra. My friend says I should not use that expression because there is a saying in our profession that when the Lord gave a man a high voice he didn't give him any brains. My friend John McCormick offsets that by giving me a slap on the back and saying, "Well, Eddie, we are not tenors, we are men with high voices."

These verses I want to read are along the line of what I have just been speaking. I heard the Boston Symphony Orchestra the other night giving a magnificent program and I was thrilled with it and in reading I found these lines and I am going to pass them on to you as a message.

What is this quality of sound that peals through the air  
When winds, strings, brasses blend in some rare old symphony,  
That vibrates, animates and sings of joy or dire despair?  
Lo, some fantastic instrument, beyond man's power or conception,  
Of quality that makes the ears seem eyes, so strange are the senses

stirred,

And thereby doubles emotion:  
That makes who hears full of reflection, what was intended on  
inception.

Eyes not physical, but of the soul, which of themselves create,  
And in imagination visualize, live in hidden meaning, deep, real,  
immaculate,

That only those attuned can truly feel and understand.  
Of quality that lightly is not found, except in music, anywhere.

PRESIDENT DALY:—Gentlemen, in my opening remarks I omitted to mention one fact. I think you will agree it is a fact, Mr. Johnson is not only a great singer, but a great orator. The cause which he has advanced today could have had no more interesting or eloquent advocate. I would just like to say that nowhere, except perhaps in the city of Guelph, is there such genuine enthusiasm

for the triumphs Mr. Johnson has enjoyed, or more sincere good wishes for his continued success, than in this city of Toronto. Mr. Johnson, I thank you very kindly indeed for coming here today and addressing us.

We will now be favoured with a song from the boys of Withrow Avenue Public School.

After the Withrow Public School boys quartet had sung two numbers, President Daly said:—

Mr. Johnson will kindly express our appreciation to the boys for this honor.

MR. JOHNSON:—I just want to congratulate you and compliment you and tell you how happy I am to hear you sing. You know, it is a long while—I would hate to tell you how many years—since I was doing just what you are doing and I just want you to continue and when I am an old fellow tottering around you will say to me some day, "Mr. Johnson, I sang for you when you were at the Canadian Club."