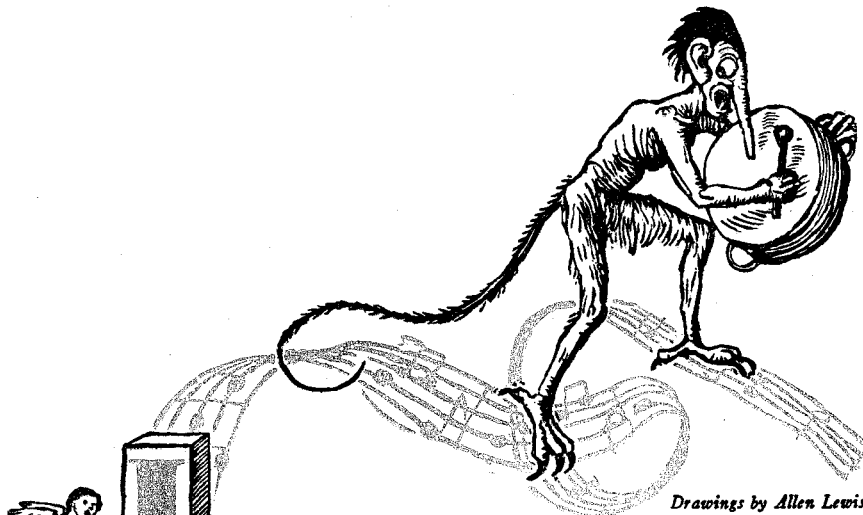


# Your Child and his MUSIC



by **FRANK H. RICHARDSON, M.D.**

IF YOUR EARS are assaulted by the notes of some infant demon picking his tortuous way through the maze of a scale in B flat, do not fancy that his tiny soul is being wafted to the heights of lyric tranquillity on the wings of song. On the contrary, it is likely that he is going through torments far worse than your own, as a result of which he will probably be found in a doctor's office a few months hence, suffering from some mental or nervous trouble. It may be an annoying twitch or grimace, it may be a conduct disorder, or it may be something as serious as St. Vitus' Dance, from which it will take him months to recover — if he ever does recover completely.

From this it may be seen why I, as a doctor, have presumed to intrude on the æsthetic preserves of the music lesson. Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast only when it is applied judiciously. If it is rammed down the young savage's throat, as it has been for years, the effect is anything but soothing. The popular hot-house method of forced musical development produces more nervous disorders than infant prodigies, and even where it has no unfortunate physical effect, it is at least likely to cause the victim to shy at a musical instrument forever after. Those who

have come through the old one-two-three school of discipline and still retain a love of music, may be said to have done so in spite of the lessons rather than because of them. From the point of view both of the doctor and the musician, then, there seems to be a sour note somewhere in musical education.

Naturally, I am most concerned with its harmful effects on the mental and nervous system. Why should anything apparently so simple frequently result in emotional breakdowns? If the adult who studied music in the good old days will search his memory honestly and carefully, he will have little difficulty in answering this question. He may remember, first of all, his disappointment when, in approaching what he anticipated as the delightful experience of making tunes come out of a piano, he was brought up against the amazing realization that taking music lessons did not mean any such delightful thing. On the contrary, it meant cramming his head with all sorts of unfamiliar and quite meaningless facts about little dots and straight lines that held no earthly interest for him. It meant cramping his little fingers into painful positions and using them in unfamiliar ways until they ached. It meant the repetition of anything but de-



lightful half hours at the piano, making unmusical and altogether undesirable sounds — an endless repetition of stupid scales and idiotic little exercises that seemed to have no relation to the tunes he knew and the songs he liked to sing. Was it any wonder that he grew to hate everything connected with music lessons — perhaps even music itself, which he had looked forward to with such joyful anticipation?

Just what had happened? A psychologist would say that he had been “conditioned against” music, just as surely as if his parents and his teacher had conspired to make him loathe it, instead of honestly wanting him to love and appreciate it. They had accomplished this by associating with it a number of disagreeable sensations and by excluding all of the pleasurable experiences in which music is naturally so rich. Or, to express it another way, he had been suffering from that bane of all good pedagogues, “divided interest” — want-

ing to do one thing while being forced to do another. His interest, being split between the two, was consequently diminished in each. The result was failure and an enormous waste in time, effort, and expense, if not actual emotional harm.

The average child is not sent to a music teacher with the idea that he is to become an expert performer. In this day of excellent but inexpensive music through mechanical means — such as the phonograph, the radio, the player-piano — the ability to be “the life of the party” no longer has the inducement it once had. What most sensible people want for their children is musical appreciation — the very thing, as I have shown above, that the old music lesson did its evil best to condition him *against*.

Certainly it must be possible to teach music without defeating our purpose at the very start. However, before developing a new method, it is first necessary to discover the specific

faults in the old one. To me the most glaring error appears to be the illogical manner in which children are first launched on their musical careers. What instrument shall Junior play? Most parents answer instinctively, "Why, the piano, of course." A few, for some sentimental reason, choose the violin. It almost never occurs to them to suggest any other instrument.

Now as a matter of fact, the instruments chosen are the two least adapted to the uses of the child. The piano is undoubtedly the most artificial, the most mechanical, the most complicated of our musical instruments; it interposes more mechanism between the player and the music he produces than does any other instrument. And the violin is conceded to be the most difficult, technically, and the one that offers the most possibilities for the production of distinctly unmusical sounds. Further, in choosing these we have been guilty of the pedagogic sin of jumping to the complex, ignoring the simple steps which should lead up to it. We have overlooked the host of simple instruments naturally adapted to the child and have prescribed something designed for adult hands and adult abilities.

No one will deny that musical skill and appreciation develop as a growth, an unfolding, a building up from the simple into the complex. Before one can be expected to play by note, he ought at least to know what he will produce; in other words, he ought to be able to speak before he is asked to read. And surely he cannot be expected to speak through the medium of an instrument before he knows how to sing and is familiar at least with some simple melodies. He cannot sing without a sense of rhythm; and a sense of rhythm is expressed, and for that matter is best learned, by movements of the body such as dancing, or marching, or beating time. Not a hint of this simple, logical, self-evident progression is to be detected in the orthodox teaching of music.

The modern music teacher takes the child when he is very young and begins by teaching him matters more fundamental than singing or dancing; even these are too advanced for the infant novice. She first teaches him rhythm by the obvious method of letting him *feel* rhythm by walking, running, and skipping to music. She plays for him simple melodies that call for a variety of pulses, and progresses from

the simple to the more complicated as rapidly as he is ready for the advance — but no more so.

The next step — though it may coincide with the study of rhythm — is the teaching of simple melodies. Folk songs are especially suitable for this — our negro melodies, the Stephen Foster tunes which are so popular, old German, English, and French songs of the soil. In singing and dancing these, the child finds real enjoyment while, in accordance with a sound pedagogic principle, he is learning through the channels of hearing and feeling (or, to be more exact, through his muscle sense). The result is a double appeal, as compared with the usual method of learning through only one of the senses.

When the child has developed a sense of rhythm and melody, he is then ready to take up an instrument — but only the very simplest. Suitable for a child at this stage are the primitive rattle and drum of the savage, the triangle, the cymbal, and the humble "bones" of the minstrel. These are not to be sneered at, for the expression of rhythm by means of an instrument, however lowly, is a distinct advance over the rhythmic dance; it is the first bit of real "instrumental" music that our future performer is ready for.

It is not too soon to call the child's attention to the differences in tone produced by some simple instrument. This may be illustrated by means of a two or three-toned set of "musical glasses," which are easily made by filling tumblers with the proper amounts of water to produce such a succession of notes. Let no one laugh at what such an instrument can produce; "Three Blind Mice" rendered on home-made glasses may be sweeter than a sonata of Beethoven's extracted from the radio! If a more elaborate instrument is desired, the xylophone or "orchestra bells" may take the place of glasses.

It will be seen that these "percussion instruments" are a distinct advance over the simple drum or cymbal, in that they combine tone with rhythm; but they are still fairly primitive as a class. A more sophisticated family is that of the wind instruments. The toy flageolet, or penny tin whistle with its six holes, can produce perfectly true and distinctly sweet tones. The fife is decidedly harder to blow; but its six stops yield similar



changes in tone. The piccolo is not so far above the fife as to deny it a bowing acquaintance, and from that to the dignified flute is not a difficult step when the time comes. Because their evolution is so similar, it is not necessary to trace the progression by which the more exalted of the reed instruments and the brasses of high degree derive from humble antecedents. Among the stringed instruments one may ascend from the depths of the ukelele, through the mandolin, banjo, and guitar, to the dizzy heights of the violin or piano.

In this breathless survey of the vast number of possibilities from which the teacher and pupil may choose, the reader may have wondered just what connection this has with music lessons. The connection is not as purely theoretical as it may at first seem. In the preface to her book, *Creative Music for Children*, Mrs. Satis N. Colman says: "Somewhere along the path of Music's development there lies an instrument suited to the capacity of every child." She points out that many of the great musicians and composers of the past have played not only the embryonic pianos of their time but every instrument in the orchestra as well. The child who has developed along the lines indicated so sketchily here, passing through experimentation with many instruments in succession, has a knowledge of music far greater than that of his less fortunate father and mother for whom the piano or violin was chosen arbitrarily, with no consideration of inherent tastes and abilities. Many a child who goes through this evolutionary form of instruction finds an instrument much better suited to him than either the violin or piano. It may be the flute, one of the horns, or a reed instrument. Whatever it is, why should he not be allowed to perfect himself in it, rather than go through the motions of learning to perform on something that holds no appeal for him and gives him no inward satisfaction?

All this sounds so very theoretical and even visionary that it may surprise the reader to

learn that the method outlined is already in operation. It has been incorporated, with considerable success, in a definite programme of teaching at the Lincoln School in New York. Through a variety of experiments the children discover that music exists all about them; that it can be walked, marched, danced, sung, and played on a multitude of instruments. They are encouraged to make their own simple instruments and to improvise tunes. There is nothing stilted or made-to-order about their compositions; their freshness and spontaneity give them a value that is lacking in many more mature efforts. To these children, music has become a familiar language, and when they have something to express in it, they are able to do so easily and naturally.

But neither a school nor a professional teacher are necessary with this method. It can be carried out successfully by any parent, and

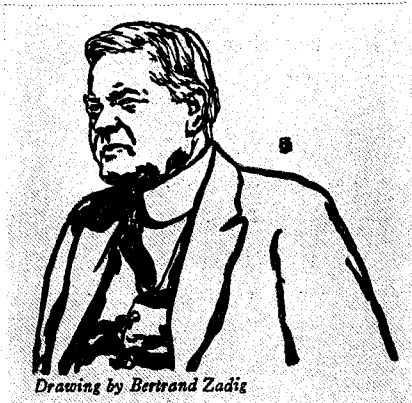
with far less effort and greater hope of success than under any of the more orthodox, but less logical, systems of teaching. The idea of present evil in preparation for future good, which never appealed to any child, is supplanted by constant enjoyment as the lessons progress. For a child so inducted into the realm of musical appreciation, the future takes care of itself; it is the present in which he is interested. No hounding will be necessary to get him to practise half an hour a day, for he has an incentive in doing what seems to him eminently worth doing; and

because it has captured his whole-souled interest, he will work far harder at a difficult bit than he knows he must master than the most hard-hearted teacher would ask.

Under any circumstances, the mastery of a musical instrument is a difficult task. When lack of interest is added to the difficulty, there is little hope of accomplishing anything. Music can be made a joy to everyone who approaches it; and when it is not, it is the teacher who must answer for it. The child will respond if given the right stimulus.



# A NEW Latin-American Policy



by **RAYMOND LESLIE BUELL**

**T**HE PREDICTION that Herbert Hoover would make no conventional President has already proved true. He has paid a visit to Latin America — a unique occupation for a President-elect, and one from which great good may result. His journey took him to Costa Rica, which has recently expressed concern over the Monroe Doctrine; to Nicaragua, where we have lately supervised an election; to Peru and to Chile, where several years ago we attempted unsuccessfully to hold a plebiscite; to Argentina, which has been a centre of anti-American feeling, largely because of our tariff policy; and to other Central and South American countries that have been vitally affected by the foreign policy of the United States.

Mr. Hoover's notable voyage has made possible a new understanding with Latin America. His speeches have breathed good will, and he has formed personal contacts with the leaders of governments with whom he will soon deal officially. But if a new understanding is to be permanently realized, it must be based upon a reorientation of our Latin-American policy. The political, economic, and cultural differences between the United States and Latin America are too deep-seated to be wiped out merely by an exchange of official courtesies. President Coolidge went to Havana to open the last Pan-American Conference, and he

took with him an exceptionally strong delegation. While the Cubans outdid themselves in covering the President with hospitality, his visit did nothing visibly to lessen the intensity of the debates at that conference, nor perceptibly to change the relations between the United States and Latin America. Since that visit Argentina has disavowed the Monroe Doctrine and has declined to participate in the Pan-American Arbitration Conference; Costa Rica has asked the Council of the League of Nations for an official interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine; the A.B.C. powers have failed so far to adhere to the anti-war pact because of fear that, by some indirect means, it involves recognition of the Monroe Doctrine. If Mr. Hoover's journey is to be more fruitful than Mr. Coolidge's, we must match our words with deeds.

The United States and the republics to the south have a common political origin: all achieved freedom from European masters a hundred years or so ago. Nevertheless the United States and the Latin-American countries have a radically different cultural and racial background. The United States is predominantly Anglo-Saxon; South and Central America are predominantly Latin. And where has the one culture really understood the other? Except for the Civil War, the United States