

**RUDIMENTS OF MUSICAL GRAMMAR:
THE SUBSTANCE OF LECTURES,
DELIVERED IN ST. MARTIN'S HALL AND
THE TRAINING INSTITUTIONS OF THE
NATIONAL SOCIETY**

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The Substance of Lectures

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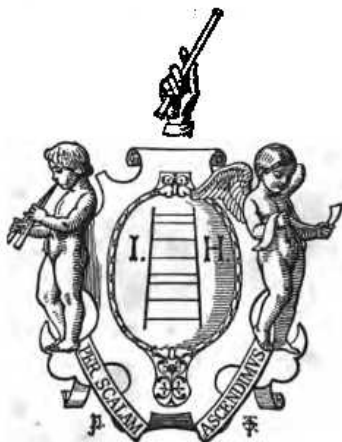
AND

THE TRAINING INSTITUTIONS OF THE NATIONAL SOCIETY.

BY

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PREFACE.

THE title of the following work will, it may be hoped, render any explanation of the object with which it has been written unnecessary. The mode of treatment of the subject, and the order in which the different branches of it are brought before the student, differing essentially from most other works of the same kind, require, however, a few prefatory remarks.

The syllables *Do, Re, Mi, &c.* are used throughout, instead of the letters A, B, C, &c. It might be considered some apology for the adoption of the former nomenclature that in Italy and France no other is, or for ages has been, in use, and that an Italian or French musical work, scientific, historical, or æsthetic, would therefore be absolutely unintelligible to a reader conversant only with the latter; and that in Germany the *solfa* syllables, though not exclusively used, are universally understood. This, however, would perhaps, of itself, hardly have justified their introduction among our own people, had not the advantages attendant on their use been such as must be obvious to reason, and easily proved by experiment. For most theoretical, and some practical purposes, *any* one set of names for the first seven sounds of the natural scale may serve as well as another. In writing, reading, or talking about music, everything expressed by *Do, Re, Mi, Fa*, may be as well expressed by A, B, C, D,—by 1, 2, 3, 4,—by *Fee, Fa, Fo, Fum*,—or any other syllables equally short and easy of utterance. But in reference to the overcoming of one, and that the greatest, difficulty in the study of music, the adoption of one set of names—and *one* only—for the notes, is of the greatest importance. The first object of every musical student should be to acquire that knowledge, the possession of which, more than any other, constitutes a musician—the knowledge of the *sound* of what he *sees written* before him, and, inversely, the power of *expressing* in musical characters what he imagines, or *hears*. Assuredly the most rapid and certain method of attaining this knowledge and this power is the practice of *singing* every fresh passage, so far as it may be singable,

that comes before him. In doing, or trying to do this, he will of necessity give the notes *some* names. No one, it may be safely said, ever habitually sung to the letters A, B, C, D, &c.; and the general result, with those familiar only with those letters, is the adoption of a habit of *humming*, or a practice of uttering the sounds on all kinds of indistinct, unformed, and unmeaning vocables. The former practice is extremely injurious to the voice; and every time the latter is resorted to an opportunity is lost of identifying the sound sung with the note which represents it, and thereby cultivating that association between the one and the other which is, as has been already said, the distinguishing characteristic of a musician. This sympathy between the ear and the eye, in its perfection, is referable to, and depends upon, many causes. In the earlier ages of music, it might have been enough for the musician to know the sound of one note *by comparison with*, or in its relation to, another; and the old methods of solfaing were all devised with the view of enabling him to attain this knowledge. But the requirements of modern music are so much greater, the number of scales in actual use has so largely increased, modulation has become so much more frequent and abstruse, the chromatic genus is so daringly and plentifully used, that the modern musician must know, not merely the relative, but the *absolute* pitch of the notes he sees, before he can, with readiness and certainty, hear them with his mind's ear. It is not to be denied that even the *solfa* system—with all its advantages over the alphabetical—is still an imperfect contrivance; inasmuch as *Do* sharp and *Do* flat are both of them sung to the same syllable as *Do* natural; and it must be admitted that some means of inflecting the names of the *altered* notes is greatly to be desired. It has been proposed to call *Do* sharp *Di*, *Do* flat *Da*, &c., but the entire septenary does not admit of analogous alteration; and a complete cure of the evil could only be made by sweeping the recusant syllables away, and substituting others for them,—a change which, it need hardly be said, there is no means of forcing on the musical world, and which, even if not resisted, would be many years attaining universal acceptance.

It is common to find the earlier chapters of rudimentary works, whether on music or any other subject, occupied, not with attempts to convey ideas of the *things* to be first studied, but with explanations of the *symbols* which represent them,—many of these latter, perhaps, not being called into requisition till an advanced period in the study, when they have to be learned a second time. Thus, under one *régime*, the beginner is made to exhaust the subject of the *stave* before he is in

the least informed as to the nature of the *scale*; and, under another, may be called upon to consider the peculiarities of *five-crotchet time*, while as yet he has no practical acquaintance with the first principles of *rhythm*. In the following work no attempt is made to introduce the student to the *alphabet* of music till he has learned something about *music*, or, more properly, the musical *system* itself; nor is he instructed in the different kinds of *measures*, nor even made aware of the existence of *bars*, until he has acquired some idea of the limits of a musical *phrase*, and the nature of a musical *foot*,—things which are altogether independent of any forms by which they may be represented, and which, as they certainly existed ages before the invention of the present musical alphabet, will as certainly exist ages after that ingenious contrivance has become matter of history, or even of speculation.

The history of an art or science may often be brought to bear practically on the process of teaching it; and the order in which discoveries or improvements have been made will often suggest that in which a knowledge of them may best be communicated. So that the consideration even of exploded theories and obsolete forms may not be without its use, as keys to those which have superseded them. The musical student, for instance, will never appreciate the special merits of modern, unless he have learnt something of ancient, tonality; nor would it be easy to devise any shorter or more simple method of explaining the nature of a *mode*, than through acquaintance with the fact that, though but *two* modes are used by modern musicians, the number of modes *possible* is only limited by that of the sounds of the natural scale. This latter fact is briefly alluded to in an early chapter, and more fully treated in a later one the object of which has been rather to excite than to satisfy curiosity on a very interesting branch of musical science.

The chapters on the *Alto and Tenor Staves*—part of a subject treated elsewhere* by the writer more fully—will, it is hoped, be found sufficient to meet the practical wants of the student. It seemed likely, about a quarter of a century ago, that those ingenious contrivances would, so far at least as *vocal* music was concerned, have become obsolete, and that the practice of writing alto and tenor parts an octave higher than they were to be sung would everywhere supersede the older and more simple one of writing them at their proper pitch. More recently, the tide has turned; and many cheap editions of popular classical works

* A Short Treatise on the Stave. J. W. Parker and Son: London.

have issued from the press, of which the notation is as correct as the typography is beautiful. Whether this fashion prove permanent or not, the student may rest assured that, unless he make himself familiar with at least two of the four different staves headed by the *Do* clef, a very large proportion of the works of the greatest writers must remain sealed books to him.

It can hardly be necessary to say, that the following work, though dealing for the most part with first principles, is not adapted to the use of *beginners*, save in connexion with musical practice of some kind, under the direction of a teacher. Music is an art as well as a science; and no art can be learned wholly from books. Nor is it likely that even first principles should ever be so simply stated, or so clearly expounded, as to be intelligible to those who make no attempt to put them into practice. To two classes of persons such a book as this may be of use. (1) To those who, having attained some skill in the practice, and acquired some knowledge of the theory of music, may desire to have a connected view of those parts of the latter which are indispensable to the former:—and (2) to those—a very large and increasing class—who, familiar with other subjects, and accomplished in other ways, with little hope of becoming practical musicians, may still desire to make some acquaintance, if not with the syntax, at least with the orthography, etymology, and prosody of the only grammar which can fairly be called universal. “Were I to begin life again,” said the late Sydney Smith, “I would devote much time to music:” and “not six months before the death” of Samuel Johnson, he said to Dr. Burney, “Teach me at least the alphabet of your language.” The author is not altogether without hope, that in putting together the following pages, he may have done something to enable those who have not had the advantage of early training to devote, with pleasure and profit, some time to music, without “beginning life again,” and to acquire something more than the alphabet of the language of musicians.

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