

"The Advertiser"
2nd August 1898.

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THE ELDER CONSERVATORIUM.

To the Editor.

Sir—If the statement that the reply of Professor Ives to the teachers' memorial furnishes "a complete and satisfactory answer" is official, it is apparently intended as a rebuff to those members of the musical profession who have ventured to express their opinion on a subject about which they are rightly concerned, whether their motives be personal or artistic. Is it not possible for individuals as well as institutions to act disinterestedly? Motives are mixed in both cases, and the rebuff is therefore undeserved and ungenerous. The clergy are supposed to have a voice in ecclesiastical matters, doctors in medical matters, lawyers in legal affairs, why not musicians in musical affairs? Unfortunately the musical profession, like the Christian Church, is afflicted with unhappy divisions, or probably every prominent member would have subscribed to the document in question, in which case the innuendo of the phrase "certain members" could not have been used as a shield. The members of the musical profession should not be considered as necessarily antagonistic to the Conservatorium. They are in their own sphere as loyal to the cause of music as an institution or even a chair of music. It is an acknowledged fact that the chair of music has very largely owed its continued existence to the fees derived from the public paid for examinations. Thus in one way it has occupied a less meritorious position than the ordinary members of the profession, who have sustained their positions on their merits either as teachers or practical exponents of their art, not on money derived merely from the examination of the work of other people—and that with a hazy standard—too much like a net with a mesh small enough to capture the little fish as well as the big. The easier the standard the more the entries, the more the entries the larger the income. This represents a position more undignified and dangerous than has been occupied by the teachers.

The trouble appears to be due to three causes; first, the late Sir Thomas Elder made a princely gift to music—in fact, the sum was out of proportion to our population. A proportionate sum left to London would amount to nearly a million pounds. This in itself created a difficulty. Second, the suggestion made by the director and decided on by the University authorities was to found an institution on the same lines as the Guildhall School of Music, not like the Royal Academy or Royal College of Music. If Adelaide was to be made, as was rather vaingloriously suggested, the musical centre of Australia it will be by aiming for quality rather than for quantity in connection with the University scheme. Third, not only were the opinions and advice of the musical profession in Adelaide ignored as a whole, but so far as is known not a single prominent member of the profession was consulted. Fancy spending £20,000 on theology, law, medicine, science, literature, or painting without a word to or from those already in the field locally.

The Conservatorium, like a philosopher, must pass through its babyhood; and this memorial, if it be repudiated now, will have its effect nevertheless, for the mill of experience grinds slowly but surely. Sometimes it is true friendship that reminds us of our shortcomings. The University professor has more than once made the statement that the better class of teachers would not suffer, when a little consideration would have shown that they were precisely those who would be most likely to suffer if the Conservatorium were organised on the Guildhall plan. The hint that the memorial originated on account of the "private interests" of the signatories having suffered is an unworthy suggestion. Have not all the professional members of the Conservatorium staff, from the director downwards, their own "private interests," or do they work gratuitously for the love of their art alone? Let him who is not actuated by "private interest" cast the first stone. In any case an insinuation is not an argument.—I am, &c.,

EDWARD HOWARD.

University. In a similar manner, doubtless, if pupils were admitted to the Elder Conservatorium indiscriminately many of them would be content with being able to subscribe themselves as students of the University of Adelaide in the science and practice of music, and would not take the higher courses at all.

The immense commercial advantage possessed by a University which condescends to put itself into direct competition with the intermediary teachers of any subject is apparent at a glance; but the effect is only temporary. If the public found that some persons who styled themselves University students were little more than beginners the final result would not so much be to enhance the estimation in which the pupil was held as to lower the status of the institution which did not confine itself to its legitimate mission. We do not wish to strain the argument in any way, but there seems to us to be little force in Professor Ives's suggestion that the teaching of pupils of advanced years presents special difficulties to the Conservatorium. No pupil need be of advanced years under the conditions which we have advocated. Then his reference to the urgent need for correcting "bad habits" in technique would lead to the inference that when any other University examiner finds serious mistakes in the practice of candidates he is bound to start an elementary school in order to counteract them. On the contrary, he should systematically "pluck" the erring candidates, and point out the mistakes they had made. The Senior Public Examination has been constituted the entrance qualification for those who desire to study for degrees in arts, science, medicine, or law. For some years past the practice has been to admit what are called non-matriculated students to certain courses of lectures, but any one who imagines that such a system establishes a precedent for lowering the standard of a University school is reasoning on an entirely false analogy. The fundamental understanding in connection with the admission of non-matriculated students is that no modification shall be made in the standard or range of the lectures on account of their presence. On one or two occasions when there was even the slightest danger of this happening the University authorities very properly insisted that the claims of those who had passed the Senior Examination and were studying for degrees must be paramount. If boys and girls having only an elementary knowledge of some particular subject have sought entrance to a class primarily intended for graduating students they have been shown that the University exists for the purpose of the higher education, and that no lowering of the standard to suit unprepared capacities will be permitted. Such a rule, indeed, is essential in the interests of non-matriculated students themselves, because they can learn the rudiments elsewhere.

The authorities of the Universities admitting such students always expressly stipulate that they shall not be allowed to attend any course of lectures unless they can prove that they have attained a sufficient degree of proficiency in the subject to enable them to profit by the lectures designed for graduating students. In short, every University which desires to secure a satisfactory status must plainly and undeniably show that the aim and scope of its work in each department relate to the higher education. We hope that no idea of making the Conservatorium pay its own way has influenced the inauguration of the system under consideration. Nothing could be further from the motives which have always actuated the public-spirited founders of institutions designed for promoting the highest education. The very reasons for the endowment of a University Chair are (1) that the imparting of certain high-class education has been desirable, and (2) that it would not pay a teacher or professor unassisted to devote himself to such instruction as that contemplated. Indeed, it is stated that the set purpose of Sir Thomas Elder in giving the money by which the Conservatorium has been established was to place the University beyond the necessity of arranging its musical department upon a commercial basis. Could any one imagine that when Sir Thomas endowed the Chair of

Mathematics his design was, to establish classes in elementary arithmetic and algebra, and—by introducing a new and endowed element of competition—to injure all the private schools which were already performing that work satisfactorily? Such a suggestion only requires to be stated in order to demonstrate its absurdity.

If, then, the large sum given for the promotion of mathematical study was intended entirely to encourage the cultivation of a higher grade than any which had already been attained in the colony, can it be supposed that when the same donor bequeathed an exactly similar amount expressly for the endowment of a Chair of Music his purpose was to provide cheap elementary music lessons as well as high-class instruction?

Critics may object that, in placing the matter before the University authorities and the public, Adelaide teachers of music are actuated partly by interested motives. No doubt they are; and yet they have a perfect right to make their protest on the assumption that the evidence to which they allude cannot be gainsaid. In view of the Elder Bequest many music teachers have been looking forward to attending classes of real University standard in order to perfect themselves in the science and art of their profession, and thus better fit themselves for training their pupils. Such men and women would be bitterly disappointed if they found that the plain intentions of the testator had been perverted, and that—in place of an institution at which they might gain instruction, to be afterwards profitably used—they were face to face with a formidable endowed rival in elementary music-teaching. The complaint with reference to the slight educational value of the popular concerts given under the auspices of the Conservatorium has already been made in "The Register." The last programme, however, showed a noticeable improvement, and there is probably good ground for supposing that a high standard will gradually be attained. The main request of the memorial is that, in the musical as in other departments, an entrance examination of true University standard should be established; and the arguments in favour of such a course are very strong. There are many reasons, affecting the status of the University, why an analogy with the arts course should be maintained. If it be a fact that there has not been any set intention to admit pupils at a comparatively elementary stage of their studies, and that any authenticated instances to the contrary are merely the result of a little confusion which can scarcely be avoided at the inception of a new institution, then there need be no real ground of contention on the matter. Let a definite entrance test be fixed—it should be from the very beginning, at least the passing of the Junior in both theory and practice; but the substitution of the Senior in the near future should be aimed at, so as to bring the Music School into line with other departments of the University.

THE UNIVERSITY AND THE CONSERVATORIUM.

A memorial has been signed by leading members of the musical profession in South Australia and presented to the University Council as a protest against the system which they believe to be adopted in the Elder Conservatorium of Music. The main contention in the document has already been insisted upon in "The Register." Without in any way disparaging Professor Ives—indeed, while commending his ability and his zeal—we are bound to restate the fact that the University exists for the promotion of the higher education, and its classes are not supposed to be open to those who have not thoroughly well mastered the rudiments of the subjects which they propose to study. This rule is absolute, and is rigidly observed in all Universities except those which have earned an unenviable reputation for the granting of cheap degrees if not bogus diplomas. What brought discredit upon so many Universities in America was the systematic attempt to invest mere elementary knowledge with dignity by means of the imprimatur of a so-called University. Large numbers of pupils flocked to the institutions which stooped to this practice—not for the purpose of pursuing a course of hard study, but simply in order to be in a position to proudly assert that they had received their education at a

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