

**FIFTY STEPS
IN SIGHT-SINGING**

**FIFTY STEPS
IN SIGHT-SEEING**

by

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P R E F A C E

It is slowly beginning to be recognised that to be unable to read a single line of music at sight is, after all, rather a sign of ignorance. This is encouraging, and should be made the most of by all who have at heart the spread of musical education, and the consequent advancement of music in this country.

In our elementary schools the teaching of sight-reading forms part of the curriculum; and although good results are only obtained in places where enthusiasm backs the requirements of the Board of Education, there is no reason why a much wider and more thorough knowledge of this subject should not be fostered, if teachers could only realise the fact that the teaching of sight-reading is not a subject demanding special artistic gifts, any more than the teaching of reading requires a special knowledge of literature.

But putting aside the elementary schools, where, in many places, excellent work is being done in this direction, if we turn to the secondary schools, it is here that we find the subject, except in a few cases, totally neglected.

In most of them singing is rarely treated *educationally*.¹ The singing-class, where there is one, exists mainly for the practice of music (learned for the most part by ear), for a school entertainment. It is true that the members of the class usually hold the music in their hands; but for all the value it is to them, books of the words would in most cases supply all that is needed.

In boys' preparatory schools the subject is even more generally neglected, with the result that practically no boy who goes on to a public school can read music at all, unless he happens to have picked

¹No subject can be treated educationally in the time usually allowed—from half an hour to one hour per week.

up the barest smattering of the subject by learning an instrument; and even then, unless he is, musically, unusually intelligent, it is of little value to him when he comes to sing a part in a choir. Nor does there seem to be any attempt in these schools to foster a love of or veneration for music.

When the boys pass on to a public school they usually find that the music master is not only a first-rate musician, but an enthusiast. But the work of such a man is greatly hampered by the fact that the large majority of boys come to him, not only ignorant of what music is, but totally unequipped for the study of it. Those who are put into the choir gradually pick up a vague idea of reading; but the time wasted in grinding through and through a piece of music, in order to teach the bare notes, is heart-breaking; while the fact that the boys never learned *when young* to read at sight makes it practically impossible for them ever really to acquire the power to do so.

This is a point which cannot be urged too strongly upon parents and teachers; for experience shows that the younger a child is (within reason) when he begins to learn sight-reading the more easily will he master the subject. I have often heard whole classes of children under six years old singing from the staff in the key of C; and I know one school in West Norfolk where every child over twelve years old can sing almost anything at sight, because they have been properly taught from infancy. The time given to music in this school is ten minutes a day.

Many parents are now beginning to see the folly of allowing the younger generation to grow up ignorant of a subject so easily taught in childhood, and are asking that this state of things, at least as regards their own children, shall cease to exist. And so numerous have been the enquiries from different sources for a book which will be a guide in working out a scheme of sight-reading lessons that I am, to a certain extent, trying to meet this demand by publishing some of the results of my own experiences with a class of small children.

Teachers must use their own discretion as to when to go on from one lesson to the next, for, in the case of some children, the same lesson may have to be worked through several times, and frequent

recapitulation of back work will be found advisable. A short time (say fifteen minutes) spent on these lessons every day will be found more valuable than a longer time once or twice a week.

The important question of the training of the child-voice, the learning of songs, and the class of music to be learned have not been touched upon; but with regard to the last, it should be remembered that to teach a child, or perform for his “delectation,” a piece of bad music, is as unpardonable as to recommend “*Scraps*” as an example of literary art. It is unfair to make anyone grind at a subject such as sight-reading, without at the same time giving some idea of what the drudgery will eventually lead to; therefore it behoves parents to see that their children are introduced to a good class of music alongside the sight-reading lessons; exactly as most children learn poetry and have stories read to them while they are learning to read.

It is commonly asserted that “good” music is difficult, and that herein lies the impossibility of giving children any knowledge of it in families where no one plays the piano well. But there is a huge storehouse of good music, classical in every sense of the word, which is not only not difficult, but, on the contrary, delightfully easy to learn—the traditional songs of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. These can be learned and sung (many would say with advantage) without pianoforte accompaniment; and it is hardly necessary to point out that children have a right to this great national and natural heritage. Those who have never tried to teach these songs will be astonished at the ease and pleasure with which children pick them up; and there is no doubt that a large acquaintance with them forms the best and most normal foundation upon which to build, in later life, a knowledge and appreciation of music in its greatest forms.

NOTE TO THIRD EDITION.—The attention of teachers is particularly called to the two Appendices at the end of the book.

ARTHUR SOMERVELL

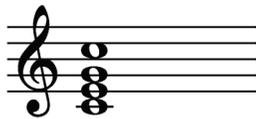
KENSINGTON, 1904.

A P P A R A T U S

- (i) A pointer or small baton.
- (ii) A Tonic Sol-fa Modulator (seven keys).
- (iii) A blackboard, blank on one side and ruled for music on the other.
- (iv) A note-book for each child.
- (v) An MS. music-book for each child.

THE STAFF MODULATOR

A staff should be drawn upon the blackboard with lines about three inches apart whenever a new key is being first explained. It is not necessary to write in more than the chord of the Key.



or



FIFTY STEPS IN SIGHT-SINGING

STEP I (SOL-FA)

- (i) The class should learn the mental effect of *doh soh doh*¹ and afterwards the *me* may be added. The hand-signs should also be taught, and the class learn to sing these notes in any order, the teacher either pointing to the notes on the modulator or giving the hand-signs.
- (ii) The following or similar passages should be written on the blackboard and sung slowly by the class.

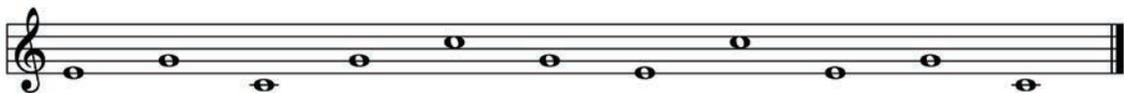
Example:—

d m d s m d d' s d' s m s d s d' s m d' m s d

- (iii) *Ear-tests.*—One of the four notes should be sung by the teacher to the syllable *laa*, and the class, or individual children, should then sing any one of the other three asked for. This is a most useful exercise.

STEP II (STAFF)

- (i) A short recapitulation of the first part of Step I.
- (ii) A large staff should be drawn on the blackboard, and middle C written in and called *doh*. The class should then count the scale degrees on the Tonic Sol-fa Modulator from *doh* to *doh*¹, and then the lines and spaces on the staff from middle C upwards. The place of *doh*¹ can thus be found, and in the same way the places of *me* and *soh*. The class should then (using the Sol-fa names) sing these notes in any order as the teacher points to them on the Staff Modulator.
- (iii) The following or similar passages should be written on the blackboard and sung slowly by the class:—



- (iv) *Ear-tests.*—The teacher should sing very slowly a passage formed from these notes, *using the Sol-fa names*, and the children must write them down in the staff notation in their MS. books. Afterwards a similar passage should be sung slowly to the syllable *laa* and taken down by the children. It will be found advisable to sing the *doh* between every two notes.

STEP III (SOL-FA)

- (i) The class should learn the mental effect of *ray* and *te*, and should sing from pointing on the modulator, as well as from hand-signs, passages introducing the six notes already learned. *Ray* and *te* should not at first be taken by skip (e.g., *soh ray*, *soh te*, or *me te*).
- (ii) The following or similar passages introducing the new notes should be written on the blackboard, and sung slowly by the class:—

Example:—

d r m s m r d s d' t d' s m r m s d' t d' s m r d

- (iii) The following or similar ear-tests should be given for the class to write down in their note-books. The chord of the key must be played or sung between each test, and each test given twice.

Examples:—

d r d m m r m s d' t s m &c.

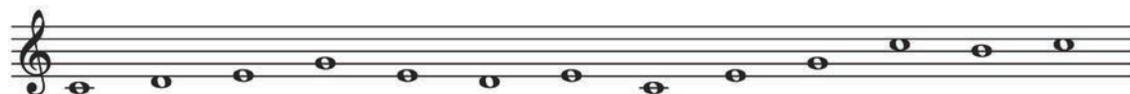
STEP IV (STAFF)

- (i) A short recapitulation of the first part of Step III.
- (ii) The staff modulator having been drawn on the blackboard and the chord of C written in, the places of *ray* and *te* may easily be found by the children by reference to the Sol-fa modulator. When found, these may be written on the blackboard as small opaque notes to the right of the chord.



The class should then sing the notes already learned as the teacher points to them.

- (iii) The following or similar passages should be written on the blackboard and sung slowly by the children.



- (iv) *Ear-tests.*—The chord of the key having been sung or played the teacher should sing to the syllable *laa* any two of the notes already learned, and the children should write them down in the staff notation in their MS. books.

STEP V (SOL-FA)

- (i) The class should learn the mental effect of *fah* and *lah*, and should sing from pointing on the modulator, as well as from hand-signs, passages introducing all the notes of the octave. *Fah* and *lah* should not at first be taken by skip (e.g., *r f f r f l m l d' l &c.*)
- (ii) The following or similar passages, introducing the new notes, should be written on the blackboard, and sung slowly by the class.

Example:—

d r m r m s f m r d d' t l t d' s l s f m s l t d' s f m r d

- (iii) The following or similar ear-tests should be sung to the syllable *laa* (or played) for the class to write down in their note-books. The chord of the key must be played or sung between each test, and each test given twice.

Example:—

s f m f s l d' t &c.

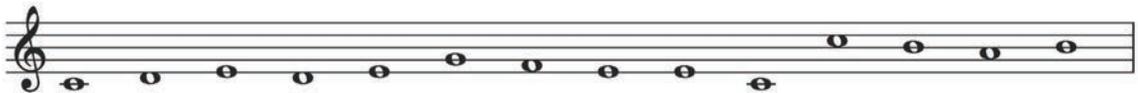
STEP VI (STAFF)

- (i) A short recapitulation of the first part of Step V.
- (ii) The Staff Modulator having been drawn on the blackboard with the six notes already learned, the places of *fah* and *lah* may easily be found by the children by reference to the Sol-fa Modulator. When found, these may be written on the blackboard as small opaque notes to the right of the chord of C.



The class should then sing the notes already learned as the teacher points to them.

- (iii) The following or similar passages should be written on the blackboard, and sung slowly by the children.



- (iv) *Ear-tests*.—The chord of the key having been sung or played, the teacher should sing to the syllable *laa* any two of the notes already learned, and the children should write them down in the staff notation in their MS. books.

STEP VII (SOL-FA)

- (i) Practice on the modulator.²
- (ii) Two-beat measure should be explained to the class, and examples of well-known tunes in this time sung, both teacher and class beating time.
- (iii) The following or similar time tests should be written on the blackboard and sung first to the time-names³ and afterwards to the syllable *doh* or *lah* (in some ways *doh* is better than *lah*, as it is an easier sound to articulate sharply:—

{ | d :— | d :— | d :d | d :d | d :— | d :d | d :d | d :— ||

- (iv) Exercises 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 in the “Criterion Sight-reader” (Part I) should be sung, with teacher and class beating time:—

^{KEY} **G.**
{ | d :m | s :f | m :r | f :m | r :m | d :r | t₁ :l₁ | s₁ :— }

{ | s :f | m :r | d :t₁ | r :d | l₁ :t₁ | d :s | f :r | d :— ||

^{KEY} **F.**
{ | m :f | l :s | f :m | r :d | r :m | s :f | m :r | m :— }

{ | d :r | f :m | r :m | s :f | m :f | l :s | f :r | d :— ||

^{KEY} **E^b.**
{ | d¹ :s | m :f | s :d | m :r | t₁ :d | r :m | f :m | f :— }

{ | m :f | l :s | f :s | t :l | d¹ :s | m :f | m :r | d :— ||

²Each lesson should now begin with a short practice on the Sol-fa or Staff Modulator, according to the notation in use at the lesson, when the more difficult intervals may be gradually mastered.

³See Appendix II.

KEY **C.**
 { | s :s | d' :d | r :m | f :l | s :d | s :f | m :f | r :— }
 { | r :m | f :l | m :f | s :d' | s :s | d' :d | r :m | d :— ||

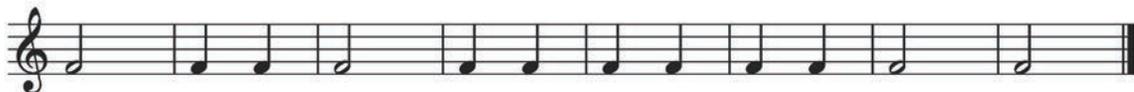
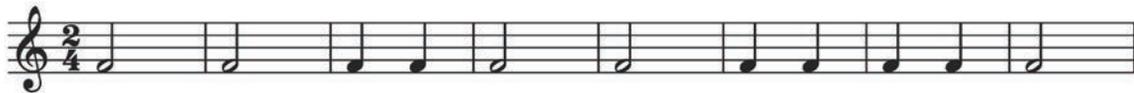
KEY **D.**
 { | d :m | s :f | m :r | d :— | m :s | d' :l | s :f | m :— }
 { | s :m | d :r | m :f | s :— | d' :s | m :f | m :r | d :— ||

KEY **F.**
 { | d :t₁ | d :r | m :f | m :— | s :l | s :f | m :f | r :— }
 { | m :f | m :r | d :m | s :— | s :l | s :d | r :m | d :— ||

- (v) Ear-tests of two notes (as in Step V) should be sung or played and written down by the children in their note-books.

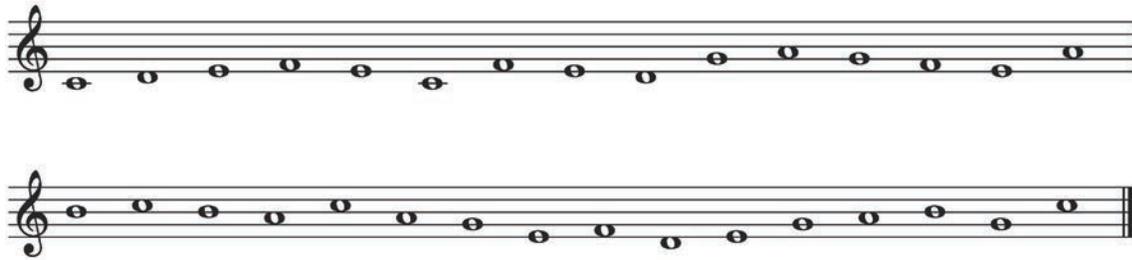
STEP VIII (STAFF)

- (i) Practice on the modulator.
- (ii) 2/2 and 2/4 time should be explained to the class and examples of well-known tunes in this time (simple duple) again sung, both teacher and class beating time.
- (iii) The following or similar time-tests should be written on the blackboard, and sung first to the time-names⁴ and afterwards to the syllable *doh*.



⁴See Appendix II.

- (iii) The following or similar exercises should be written on the blackboard, and sung slowly by the class.

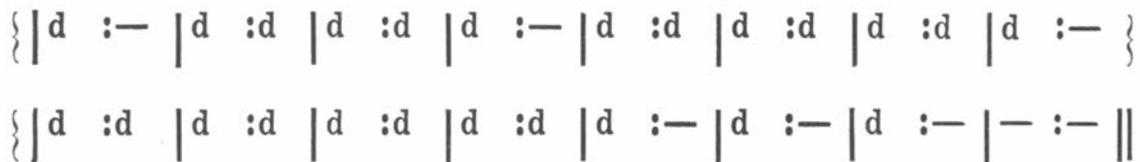


- (iv) Ear-tests of two notes should be taken down by the class in the staff notation.

STEP IX (SOL-FA)

- (i) Practice on the modulator.
 (ii) A simple piece of two-beat rhythm should be written on the blackboard, and sung by the children:—

Example:—



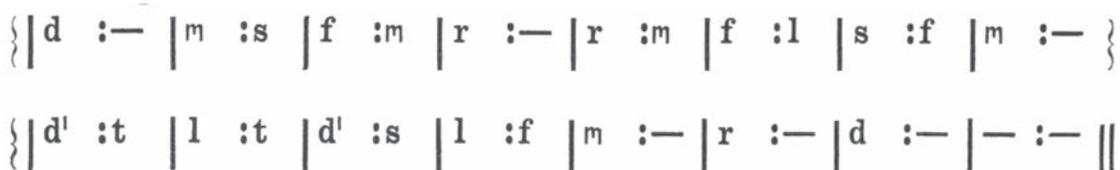
followed by a passage in tune only:—

Example:—

d m s f m r r m f l s f m d' t l t d' s l s f r d

When these have been read through a few times, they should be combined:—

Example:—



- (iii) As the children improve in writing the ear-tests correctly the difficulty may be increased, occasionally tests of three notes being given.

Example:—

d m r s l s d' t l m s f &c.

STEP X (STAFF)

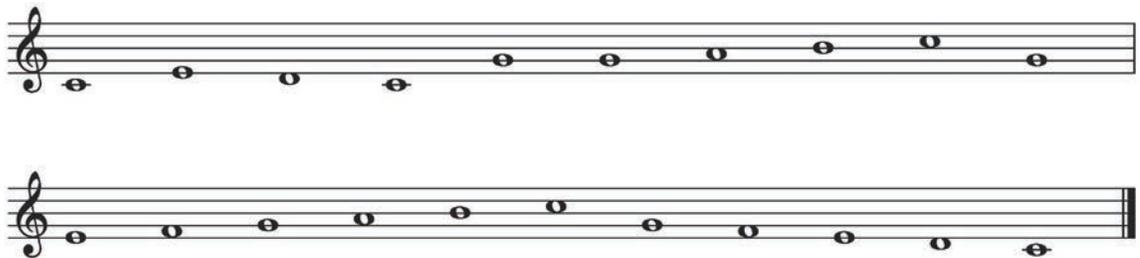
- (i) Practice on the modulator.
 (ii) A simple piece of 2/4 rhythm should be written on the blackboard, and sung by the class first to the time-names and afterwards to the syllable *doh*.

Example:—



Then a passage in tune only:—

Example:—



When these have been read a few times, they should be combined:—

Example:—



- (iii) Rather more difficult ear-tests may be given for the class to write down in the staff notation in their MS. books.

STEP XI (SOL-FA)

- (i) Practice on the modulator, introducing the notes *fe* and *ta*.
 (ii) The following or similar exercises to be written on the blackboard, and sung slowly by the class.

Example:—

d m s fe s m f r d s fe s d' ta l t d'
s fe s l t d' ta l s l t d' s fe s d

(iii) Exercises 26 to 32 in the "Criterion Sight Reader," Part I:—

^{KEY} **G.**

{ |^m :r.m|r :d.r|d :t_i |t_i :d |r :d.t_i|l_i :d |t_i :— |— :s_i }
 { |^m :r.m|f :m |l_i :— |— :l_i |r :d.r|m :r |s_i :— |— :s_i }
 { |s_i :s_i.s_i|s_i :s_i.s_i|s_i :s_i |s_i :s_i |^m :r.m|r :d.r|d :t_i |t_i :s_i }
 { |f :m.f|m :r |s :— |— :s_i.l_i|t_i :s_i |— :l_i.t_i|d :l_i |— :t_i.d }
 { |r :t_i |— :d.r|m :r.m|r :d.r|d :t_i |t_i :m |r :-.s_i|s_i :r }
 { |d :-.l_i|l_i :f |^m :s_i |s_i :s_i |s_i :s_i |l_i.t_i:d.r|m :r.m|r :d.r }
 { |d :t_i |t_i.d:r.m|f.f:f | : |^m.m:m | : |r :s |r :s }
 { |r :s_i |r :s_i |s_i :s_i |s_i :s_i |d.d:d | : ||

^{KEY} **A.**

{ |^m :s_i.l_i|s_i :s_i.l_i|s_i :d |d :r.m|f : |f : |f :— |— :f_i }
 { |^m_i : |^m_i : |^m :s_i.l_i|s_i :s_i.l_i|s_i :d |d :-.t_i|l_i : |d : }
 { |s_i : | :s_i |l_i :s_i.l_i|t_i :l_i.t_i|d :t_i.d|r :d.r|m :s_i.l_i|s_i :s_i.l_i }
 { |s_i :d |d : |l_i :r |r : |t_i :m |m :m |^m :s_i.l_i|s_i :s_i.l_i|s_i :d |d : }
 { |t_i : |l_i : |s_i :-.s_i|s_i :-.s_i|s_i :s_i |s_i :s_i |s_i :s_i |l_i.t_i:d.r }
 { |^m :s_i.l_i|s_i :s_i.l_i|s_i :d |d.r:m.f|m : |r : |d : | : ||

^{KEY D.}
 { :d | d :r.m|f :m | l :l | s :d' | r :-.m|s :f | m :- | - :f }
 { | s :d | d' :- .t | l :d' | s :f.m | r.m:f | m :-.r | d :- | - ||

^{KEY B \flat .}
 { | s₁ :m₁f₁ | s₁f₁:m₁ | f₁ :r₁m₁ | f₁ :- | s₁s₁:m₁ | f₁f₁:r₁ | m₁m₁:r₁ | r₁ :- }
 { | m₁f₁:s₁ | l₁t₁:d | t₁d:r | r :- | m :r.d | t₁d:r.d | t₁t₁:l₁ | s₁ :- }
 { | s₁s₁:s₁ | s₁s₁:s₁ | s₁ :l₁l₁ | s₁ : | l₁l₁:l₁ | l₁l₁:l₁ | r.r:r | r :- }
 { | d :d.d | t₁t₁:t₁ | l₁ :l₁l₁ | s₁ :- | f₁ :s₁l₁ | s₁l₁:t₁d | r :t₁ | d :- ||

^{KEY D.}
 { | d' :d | d :d | d.r:m.f|m.r:d | r :r | r :r.m | f :s | m :- }
 { | m :-.d f :- .r | s :-.m | l :- .f | t :- .s | t :- .s | d' :d | d :d }
 { | d.r:m.f | : | : | m.r:d | m.r:d | d :- .m | r :- .f | m :- .s }
 { | f :- .l | s :- .t | l :- .d' | t :- .r' | d' :d | d :d | d.r:m | : }
 { | f.s:l | : | s.l:t | : | d' :- | - :- ||

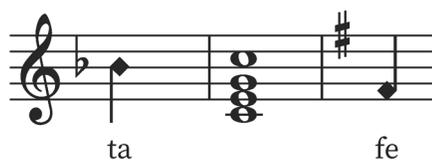
^{KEY D.}
 { :m.f | s.l:s.l | s.l:s.f | m.f:m.r | d :r | m.r:d.r | m.f:s.l | l :- | r :m.f }
 { | s.l:s.l | s :m.f | s.l:s.l | s :l.t | d'.t:d'.l | s.m:d.f | r :- | d ||

^{KEY G.}
 { | d.s₁:d.r | m :r.d | s :- .s | s :- | f.s:f.m | r :- | m.f:m.r | d :- }
 { | d.s₁:d.r | m :r.d | f :f | f :- | m.s:d.m | s₁d:m.s | m :r | d :- }
 { | t₁ :l₁t₁ | d.r:m | r :- .r | r :- | d :t₁d | r.m:f | m :m | m : }
 { | s.m:d.s₁ | d.r:m | f.r:t₁s₁ | t₁r:f | m :s₁ | m :s₁ | m :r | d :- }
 { | d :- | d :- .d | d :- | :d.d | d :d | - :d | d :- | d : ||

- (iv) Ear-tests to include *fe* and *ta* only when taken stepwise (e.g., **s fe s, d' ta l**).

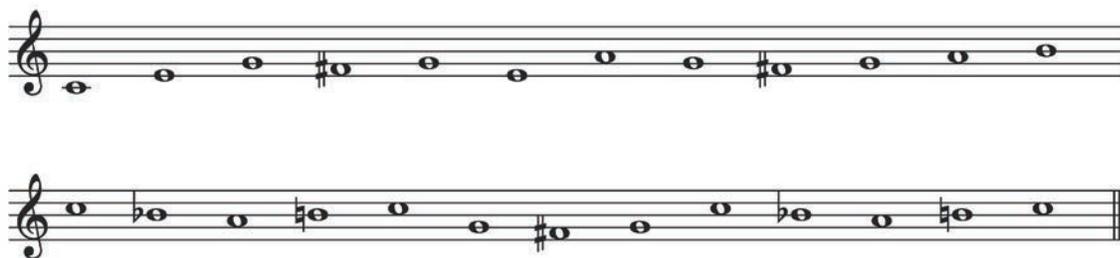
STEP XII (STAFF)

- (i) Practice on the modulator, introducing the sharpened 4th and flattened 7th of the scale. Perpendicular lines should be drawn on each side of the chord of the key, the F being sharpened to the right and the B flattened to the left of the lines. In pointing for the class F to the right of the right hand line is always F[#] (*fe*), B to the left of the left hand line is always B^b (*ta*).



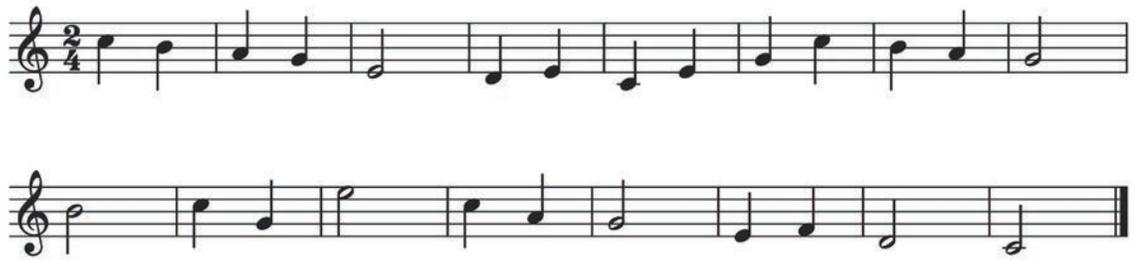
- (ii) The following or similar exercises should be written on the blackboard, and sung slowly by the class.

Example:—



- (iii) Easy exercises in Time and Tune:—





(iv) Ear-tests introducing F[#] and B^b only when taken stepwise, e.g.:—

IMAGE ZPAGE011B



STEP XIII (SOL-FA)

- (i) The class should now learn to sing from the modulator, in the open key, using the syllable *laa* instead of the Sol-fa names. Practice must be slow at first to ensure the realisation of the mental effect of each note before it is sung.
- (ii) The following or similar exercises should be written on the blackboard, and sung to the syllable *laa*.

Example:—

d m s m r m f s l t d' s l s f m
 r r s f m s l t d' s l d' m r d

- (iii) A few easy exercises from the “Criterion Sight Reader” (Part I, Ex. 16-23) sung to *laa*:—

^{KEY B^b.}
 { | s₁ :l₁ :t₁ | d :— :t₁ | l₁ :— :t₁ | s₁ :— :— | s₁ :f₁ :m₁ }
 { | r₁ :— :f₁ | m₁ :— :r₁ | d₁ :— :— | d :— :— | d₁ :— :— ||

^{KEY G.}
 { | d :— | d :— | d :— | — :— | r :d | m :r | d :— | — :— }
 { | s :— | s :— | s :— | — :— | f :m | r :f | m :— | — :— ||

^{KEY F.}
 { | m : m | s : - | d : d | m : - | f : m | r : m | f : l | s : - }
 { | s : s | f : - | m : m | r : - | d : s₁ | l₁ : t₁ | d : d | d : - ||

^{KEY A_b.}
 { | d | r : s₁ : r | m : - : d | m : s₁ : m | f : - : f | s : s₁ : s }
 { | f : l₁ : f | m : s₁ : r | m : - : - | m : s₁ : r | d : - ||

^{KEY G.}
 { | s : f : r | f : m : d | m : r : l₁ | t₁ : - : d | r : m : f }
 { | s₁ : l₁ : t₁ | d : s : f | r : - : - | d : m : r | d : - : - ||

^{KEY E.}
 { | d : - | t₁ : d | r : - | d : r | m : r | d : m | r : - | - : - }
 { | m : - | r : m | f : - | m : f | s : f | r : t₁ | d : - | - : - ||

^{KEY C.}
 { | d' : d' | s : s | m : m | d : d | r : r | m : f | s : l | s : - }
 { | d' : d' | s : s | m : m | d : d | r : m | f : s | l : s | d : - ||

^{KEY C.}
 { | d : m | s : f | l : s | t : l | d' : t | s : l | f : s | m : - }
 { | m : s | d' : t | r' : d' | l : t | s : l | f : s | m : r | d : - ||

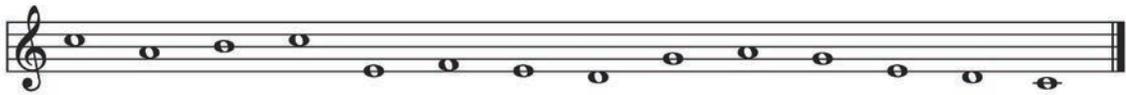
(iv) *Ear-tests.*—From this point the tests should always comprise three notes.

STEP XIV (STAFF)

(i) The class should learn to sing from the Staff modulator in the key of C, using the syllable *laa* instead of the Sol-fa names. Practice at first must be slow.

(ii) The following or similar exercises should be written on the blackboard, and sung slowly by the children to the syllable *laa*.

Example:—



(iii) A few exercises in Time and Tune sung to *laa*:—



(iv) Ear-tests of three notes.