

This farm boy is qualifying for his rural school choir by singing ten songs correctly with the phonograph

**S**PIC and span in freshly starched dresses and new overalls, the children in a little one-room school of Muscatine County, Iowa, were trying their best to sing America for the new teacher. Their eagerness made their discords the more pathetic.

*My heart with rapture thrills  
Like that above*

they sang.

"Well, maybe it does," the teacher thought to herself, "but I doubt it."

By the end of her first week she was convinced that the school was musically hopeless, and that seven of the children who sang everything on just one dismal note were "absolutely impossible." She knew when she took the school that it was notoriously unmusical, but she hardly expected to find it this bad. And being unable to sing herself, she wondered how she ever *would* be able to teach such a group.

But that year something happened in her school world that has since caused her to believe in miracles. When County Superintendent E. D. Bradley took me to visit this school, not long ago, we heard the children sing with buoyant rhythm, good tone quality, and evident appreciation of the music; they had a *choir* of eight or nine members, and as for the seven "impossible" ones, all sing well now, several are members of the choir, and two who were found to have more than usual ability are taking music lessons!

What happened in that school has been happening to some extent in 6,800 rural schools and class rooms of Iowa, where more than a hundred thousand farm boys and girls are now taking music lessons from nationally known artists.

These children are coming into a two-fold inheritance which is rightfully theirs: the ability to sing well, and the ownership of some of the finest music that the race has accumulated. They are getting a real taste of the joys, inspirations and satisfactions that good music can bring. Consequently they will be richer throughout life, their homes will be happier and their rural communities more satisfying.

The thing that is making all of this possible is a simple plan for teaching children to sing by phonograph, in accordance with a method which Prof. Charles A. Fullerton, head of the music department at Iowa State Teachers' College, has been perfecting for seventeen years.

Five years ago the plan was ready to try on a large scale, and two counties, Muscatine and Emmet, ventured it. The next year it was adopted in twelve, last year in twenty-six, this year in seventy-four, and it is believed

state, and this fall he will demonstrate it to 1,500 teachers in Maine.

The idea came to him one day as he sat in a little one-room school of Blackhawk County, Iowa, where, as so often happens, the teacher was unable to teach music successfully. Mr. Fullerton's trained ear detected that the children had good voices, but their singing together was a mere jumble of sound.

"The plight of that school is much more common than is generally realized," he told me. "You wouldn't believe, would you, that half of the children above the third grade in the rural schools of Iowa can't sing the tune of America correctly?" I admitted that I certainly wouldn't. But he showed me the results of a survey which the College recently made among 1,109 teachers who have charge of more than 9,000 children. These teachers say that only

# For Every Child A Gift of Song

By CARROLL P. STREETER



Max-well-ton's braes are bon-nie

only a matter of time until it reaches the other twenty-five counties of the state. This extraordinary development has been largely due to the extension service of the College, which has employed Mr. Irving Wolfe to demonstrate the method to teachers, parents and children, and to lead the county choruses to which reference will be made later.

The plan is so easy that it can be used by any rural school and it is so successful that it is now attracting nationwide attention. As this is written Mr. Fullerton is in North Dakota demonstrating the method at the teachers' colleges of that

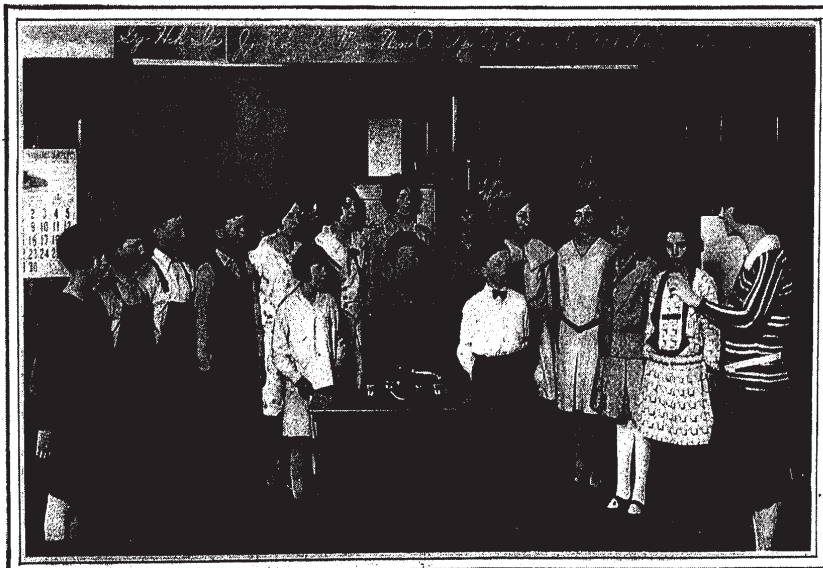
three out of five children above the *fifth* grade can sing *any* melody correctly.

Mr. Fullerton's thirty-five years' experience in teaching music to thousands of farm boys and girls bears this out. But on the other hand he has discovered that *ninety-five per cent of all children can sing if properly taught.*

Challenged by this situation he set out to find a way to teach them. The first thing to do was to get something to teach, which led to his compiling a song book especially adapted to rural school use. He spent several years and considerable of his own money in a search for the best available songs, getting them from all over the world. They include folk music of many lands, Kentucky mountain songs, sea chanteys, Negro spirituals, American Indian songs, music from many of the great composers, and folk songs whose composers have long been forgotten. Many of the songs are old favorites that your grandmother, and her grandmother, knew, and all have lasting beauty and worth.

**N**OW teachers were needed. And there was the old problem that has always balked music instruction for country children, for the average rural teacher has had but little training in music, and besides, she has some unusual problems to meet.

Mr. Fullerton solved the teaching problem by getting musicians of national fame for the job! He arranged with a phonograph company to have many of the songs in his new book put on records which would sell cheaply (75 cents each). These "teachers" are not only unusually expert, but they are available whenever and as often as you want them, nor do they charge for their music lessons by the hour.



The children in this Muscatine County, Iowa, school choir have won the right to sing in the County and State Fair choruses

Only one or two verses of each song were recorded in most instances, which means that each record contains from four to ten selections. For example, five of the most used records have more than forty songs on them. Since the average school can get along with three to five records a year, their total cost is only \$2 to \$4. Most schools have portable phonographs, or buy larger used machines at present-day bargains, perhaps spending \$15 to \$35, while the music books cost them 75 cents each, postage prepaid.

Now that the children are ready to learn the songs, they start out with a selected list of ten (although in some schools they have learned fifty or sixty). First they hear the record played several times, then they sing some of the easiest phrases and finally they are able to sing the whole song, both with and without the accompaniment. The listening part is the keystone of the whole plan, for according to Mr. Fullerton, "we learn music, like we learn words, by imitating what we hear. Just as children speak the kind of English they hear, they generally sing about as well, or as poorly, as the model they have to follow. The phonograph puts an excellent 'model' in a rural school where otherwise there is often a poor one, if any."

AND now enters one of the most interesting features of the whole plan—the rural school choir. Each child above the third grade takes an individual test with the phonograph, and when he sings the ten selected songs correctly he becomes a member of the choir. In this test he competes against no other children, but only against himself. And the fine thing about it is that if he keeps at it the chances are all in his favor to win out.

"The songs are easy enough to allow the great majority of children to learn them," Mr. Fullerton says, "for we agree with the sentiment of the old Negro song about 'putting de cookies on de lower shelf where de chillun all can reach.'"

One of the big rewards of belonging to the choir is the right to sing in the county chorus, which consists of a hundred to five hundred children and which sings at the county graduation exercises, sometimes at the county fair and on other occasions. Most of the counties now have such choruses.

This year there will be the added honor of singing in a huge chorus of 2,500 to 3,000 rural school choir members at the State Fair. Meeting as strangers, the children will be able to sing a dozen or fifteen songs in front of the big grandstand with only one brief practice, because they have all learned the same songs from the same records. With these incentives it is no wonder that children sometimes stay in at recess or after school for extra practice with the phonograph.

These things seemed of so much interest to readers of THE FARMER'S WIFE that I visited some typical rural schools in Muscatine County to see how the plan actually works out, and how other communities might use it. County Superintendent Bradley told me, as we drove from one school to another, how parents had helped the plan succeed there. When Mr. Fullerton first came to the county to explain the use of the phonograph, back in 1925, they attended the meetings along with the teachers, despite some of the worst roads and blizzards of recent years.

They saw Mr. Fullerton teach their children to sing without going through the tiresome drill of *do, re, mi*. The music was the thing, not the mechanics. Those who had been teachers noted that the method accomplished much in little time—an important item in a rural school where music is allotted only ten or fifteen minutes a day.

Parents who had supposed themselves unmusical were surprised to find that they were learning the songs, too. They saw the value of the idea and straightway went home to see that their own schools had the equipment to use it.

School boards bought most of the phonographs, although others were purchased with money from box socials, chicken dinners, home talent plays and other community entertainments. Now practically every rural school in the county has a phonograph and the necessary records.

The first result has been the ability of the children to sing. In every school we visited the teacher told me of children who had been considered unmusical but who had become at least reasonably good singers once they had a fair chance. Equally important, however, is *what* they are singing.

"We believe that every child has the right to inherit some of the fine music of the ages," Mr. Fullerton explains. "Give him good songs in his youth and they will be a joy to him through life. Perhaps I can best illustrate from my own experience. When I was one of a family of eight boys living on a frontier farm in Canada, and later on a farm in Iowa, our mother conducted an informal family singing school every Sunday evening. No memories of home are more vivid now than those evening sings."

"Many years later our parents celebrated their golden wedding anniversary and the eight boys met again. We sang an impromptu concert for the guests (it happens that our voices are divided just right to make a double quartet), but later the eight of us and mother had a private concert of our own. Without practice we sang the old songs we had learned as boys in Canada, starting out, I remember, with that old hymn, 'I think when I read that sweet story of old.' For an hour or more we kept at it, singing songs that we had not sung together for more than a quarter of a century. Well, the point is, we had carried those songs with us since we were boys. They had become a heritage from our mother. Likewise, the music we are teaching school children now will be a lasting and valuable possession."

IT IS also worth noting that in acquiring these fine songs, our boys and girls are improving their musical taste, and that's an accomplishment in a jazz age such as this. From experience with thousands of children I'm thoroughly convinced that when the average youngster has a fair chance to choose between good music and the trashy kind he will 'hold fast that which is good' almost every time. I don't mean that he won't be attracted by jazz nor enjoy it, but I do mean that he will give good music a more important place. Why, I wouldn't be afraid to challenge Paul Whiteman to send his jazz records into a rural school along with ours and see which ones the children would event-

ually choose." A modern Elijah challenging some new sort of Baal, I thought!

But although teaching the children to sing and appreciate fine songs is the most important result of the Iowa phonograph plan it is not the only one by any means. Another is better school work of other kinds. According to County Superintendent Bradley the joy, enthusiasm and pep that good music brings into a school improves the Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic by more than enough to pay for the time and expense that the music involves.

NOR are the results limited to schools. In some homes nowadays mothers are using the easiest records to teach pre-school children to sing. They are establishing good singing habits before the children drift into bad ones. In other homes the school song book is in use, even if the phonograph isn't. I visited one such home, which has three children in the school choir, where family singing of evenings has actually put the radio out of business. It isn't even hooked to the aerial any more. No doubt, this was an extreme case but the same thing has been happening to a degree in many homes.

Nor is *this* all. Noting the success of the phonograph as a music teacher, county choruses of teachers, groups of farm women and an increasing number of 4-H clubs are now using some of the advanced school records to lead their own singing.

The phonograph is not the only means of teaching music in rural schools, of course. In some states, notably Ohio, some counties are employing county music supervisors who co-operate with the local teachers in giving music instruction. In other counties there are "circuit riding" music teachers who have direct charge of the music instruction in a number of schools, visiting each one regularly. In one Wisconsin county the cost of a year's teaching of this sort was about \$80 a year per school. Sometimes, also, class instruction in instrumental music is offered, these various activities often leading to county choruses, bands, and orchestras.

The phonograph method, however, is one with which almost any individual school, no matter how isolated, can start. It can add some of these other plans later if it wishes, and if other schools will co-operate.

But how start? Suppose, for example, that a parent-teacher association in Pennsylvania, or an individual mother in Kansas, should want phonographs used in their schools, how could they go about it? I asked Mr. Fullerton these questions.

"If they will write me a letter stating the circumstances," he replied, "I will give them some practical suggestions, and the service will be free. Generally, however, it will be best for them to work through their county superintendents. If they will interest the superintendents I will be glad to tell them about the actual teaching methods that we have found best."

"If there's any place where folks think that their rural school children can't learn to sing we'd like to be led to it, for we believe that the phonograph plan, if given a fair trial, will succeed in the most musically benighted neighborhood in America. If it is given that trial about the only thing that can keep the average child from learning to sing is poor hearing."



The typical farm boys and girls, above, are taking music lessons from nationally known teachers; below, a one-room school learning a song from the phonograph; in the oval, Professor Charles A. Fullerton, who planned a new way to teach music to rural children