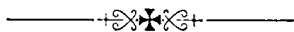


HISTORY OF ENGLISH MUSIC.



CHAPTER I.

BEFORE THE INVENTION OF COMPOSITION.

INTRODUCTION.—THE RESPECTIVE ATTITUDE OF THE ANGLO-SAXON AND KELTIC RACES TOWARDS THE ARTS.—THE INTIMATE CONNECTION BETWEEN POETRY AND MUSIC IN ALL AGES TILL THE INVENTION OF COUNTERPOINT, AND EVEN LATER.—EARLY ALLUSIONS TO KELTIC SKILL.—ECCLESIASTICAL MUSIC DURING THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD.—INSTRUMENTS DELINEATED.—PROOFS OF THE HIGH ADVANCE OF MUSIC IN THE 12TH CENTURY.—“SUMER IS ICUMEN IN.”—OTHER REMAINS OF THE 13TH AND 14TH CENTURIES.—MEDIÆVAL THEORISTS.—POPULAR MUSIC.

THE art of musical composition is an English invention. From the earliest dawn of history the necessary materials had been accumulating; but the secret of using them so as to create a structural art more than equal to any other art in its emotional power still lay hidden. In the Middle Ages the ecclesiastics of Western Europe began to perceive that something of hitherto unknown capabilities might be created; but during three or four centuries they could not exactly discover how to set about what they intuitively felt might be done. They were groping for a new art of which they had an inkling only. At last the secret was discovered in England by John Dunstable, who, by making each voice-part independent, raised music to the rank of a *structural* art, about 1400-20; and there is some reason to believe that we owe this

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to the patronage of the hero-king Henry V. Instrumental music first became artistic a little later, and this was accomplished by making it a specialised independent art, expressing what vocal music cannot express; and here again the achievement was one of English invention. Something had indeed been apparently attempted in Germany for the organ; but the specifically-instrumental florid style was, as far as we know, first adopted by Hugh Aston about 1500-20.

Of the many glories of England, the creation of artistic music must be reckoned among the highest. Since it has not been well followed up, especially after 1700, the fact has been little known; and though the evidence is more than sufficient, it was doubted at a recent period, but careful research has dispelled all objections, and musical historians now admit that the ancient statements were correct. A History devoted solely to English music is therefore necessary, to throw light on the origin of the whole art of composition, as well as for the record of subsequent deeds. Musical history may be divided into three periods, each of 161 years. The first (1400-1561) was the English period, although the Flemings surpassed the English in the middle portion; the second (1561-1722) was the Italian period, beginning with the composition of Palestrina's "Impropria;" the third (1722-1883) was the German period, lasting from the completion of Bach's "Wohltemperirtes Klavier" to the death of Wagner. These rough divisions of course admit of modification in detail; thus in the Italian period, the English were still superior in instrumental music for many years, and afterwards Purcell was greater than any contemporary Italian composer; yet my divisions are in the main sufficiently descriptive. Since the original invention was English, the history of English music is longer than that of any other nation, and all through the period of Italian supremacy

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it remains important; but in the 18th and 19th centuries it is of little interest except as regards the performances of foreigners' works; and a General History of Music might after 1700 omit the compositions of Englishmen almost entirely.

Since England was distinguished so early, but afterwards fell behind, it has happened that a great deal of early music has remained quite a household possession. Not to mention hymn-tunes, some of which date from the Reformation, there are Rounds known to every child, which were nevertheless printed in Shakspeare's lifetime, or under the Commonwealth. Some of our most familiar folk-tunes are still older. And in a higher style, there are sacred and secular works (anthems and madrigals) which are over 300 years old, yet not antiquarian matters, but as alive as Shakspeare's words; while our choirs daily sing the harmonies of Tallis, and all our patriotic tunes, though later than these, are yet much older than the tunes of any other nation.

I may here mention that I do not in this work use the words "England" and "English" with scientific accuracy; by England I sometimes mean the forty English counties, sometimes England and Wales, sometimes all the British Islands. It is a fact not without political significance, that there is no special name for the entire cluster of islands, nor for their inhabitants. There is no word which includes Englishman, Welshman, Scotchman, and Irishman, them all, and them only. In the previous paragraphs I have used England in the most restricted sense of the word, even excluding Wales. These considerations naturally lead to the question of ethnological differences among the various inhabitants of the British Islands.

The earliest inhabitants of Ireland were apparently Basques, and there are not wanting thinkers who suggest

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that the bulk of the population is still Basque, and that the Kelts were conquering intruders who formed an aristocratic caste. Cæsar found various nations in Britain; we may suppose they were principally Keltic. During the great movement of the Teutonic nations in the fifth century, successive invasions of Danish and Frisian immigrants drove the Christianised Keltic inhabitants of Southern Britain into the western and northern mountains, while many were forced over the Irish Sea, and others crossed the Channel to Brittany. After about 150 years of turmoil, we find Angles and Saxons possessing the fertile plains, and divided into several kingdoms. Christianity was introduced at the end of the sixth century, and prevailed everywhere before the end of the seventh. How far the English and Kelts intermarried is unknown; but there is evidence that Kelts abounded in the northern and south-western counties, besides their special mountain refuges in Wales and Scotland. In process of time the races doubtless intermingled, and their descendants have to this day a higher average of musical gifts than the more Teutonic inhabitants of the eastern and southern counties.

The two races, English and Kelts, who thenceforth shared the British Islands, are in many respects singularly opposed in temperament and capabilities. Many competent authorities hold that they are far more mingled than is usually supposed, and that the differences are climatic rather than racial; but for convenience I here take the rough popular line of demarcation which assigns England and the Scotch Lowlands to the Anglo-Saxons; and Wales, the Scotch Highlands, and almost all Ireland to the Kelts. As regards music, and indeed all culture, the difference is very perceptible, and may be stated as follows: The Kelts all have a decided gift for music and poetry, and even in earliest times were celebrated for it; the English are usually much less gifted, but

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when they possess the gift they can cultivate it to a much higher point than any Kelt ever can. It may be assumed that, as a rule, a high general average does not produce the highest genius; and the Teutonic race, both in England and Germany, is distinguished especially by the individuality and isolation of its constituents; while the Kelts—in France as in our islands—follow a general type, and are social, coherent, cultivated, easily polished into similarity. Thence proceeds the result that the average Englishman—especially of the south and east—is, in culture, inferior to the average Scotchman or Irishman; but our great geniuses, even the greatest men the world has ever produced, come from the English. Shakspeare, the top and crown of the human race, came from Warwickshire; Newton, the greatest of all philosophers, from Lincolnshire; Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton from London; Shelley from Sussex. The rest of the world can show no poet equal to Shakspeare, no philosopher equal to Newton, although the average Englishman has talent neither for poetry nor for abstract reasoning. The idea should be completely apprehended by all my readers; and it forms “a good working hypothesis” in all branches of study. Many mistakes in practical matters have been made through a supposition that where there is occasional high genius, there is necessarily also a high general average; anyone who supposed that a countryman of Shakspeare necessarily has the poetic and dramatic sense would certainly be mistaken, but not more so than those who imagine that every compatriot of Beethoven is musical. A visit to London killed all Heine’s enthusiasm for England, because he found the average Englishman quite deficient in the qualities distinguishing the greatest Englishmen. I allude, be it remembered, to intellectual qualities only. The contrast between the English and the Kelts need not be pushed too far; nor

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should we forget that the Kymric Kelts vary somewhat from the Gaelic Kelts. The Welsh have not the dramatic gift of the Irish. But the various tastes of the races must not be overlooked. In particular the delight of the English in the forest and the ocean solitude finds no counterpart among the Kelts. As our ancient ballad has it—

In summer when the shawes be sheen,
 And leaves be large and long ;
 It is full merry in fayre forèst
 To hear the fowlès song.

Nothing of this feeling is perceptible in the Keltic nature. Our love for the sea, though not marked before the Reformation, has been the greatest characteristic since, and is likewise quite unshared by the Kelts. "I have loved thee, Ocean," said Byron, and spoke the nation's voice; and our songs utter the same note. With all its commonplace of thought and clumsiness in expression, Byron's "Address to the Ocean" at once fixed itself in the national heart as the utterance of the English feeling, "I have loved thee, Ocean;" while the Irish imagination shrinks from the destroying power.

A comparison between the different races should not omit reference to their popular heroes, who embody at least one side of the national ideal. England has evolved a certain legendary Robin Hood, who lived with his merry men under the greenwood tree; there is, indeed, a story of his death by treachery, but it does not interest the popular mind, which remembers only his happy life. Sharply opposed is the Keltic hero, Ossian, with the typical line: "They went to the war, but they always fell." Every Irish national hero has failed, and died picturesquely.

We may sum up all the foregoing disquisition in the result that the Teutonic races favour individuality often pushed into eccentricity; while the Kelts endeavour

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to conform to a fixed standard. The class distinctions loved by the English, and their multitudinous religious sects, as opposed to the equality and Catholic unity in France, are all symptoms of the tendency; also the dwelling in separate houses instead of flats. One Frenchman is fundamentally like all other Frenchmen; each Englishman is fundamentally different from every other Englishman in intellectual matters, all the separate units being fused into a nation by the consciousness that England expects each to do his duty.

It is, therefore, not a surprising fact that the English invented the art of musical composition, and the Germans carried it to its highest point; while neither the English nor the Germans are, as a rule, specially musical. In each nation the work done has been rather the deeds of separate individualities than the outcome of the general artistic life, and this has been so even more in Germany than in England, as far as our knowledge shows us. But while the adding of the loftiest spires—the German share of the edifice—is done last and in full sight of the world, the laying the foundations was done first and in silence; so that we have almost no particulars of the earliest stages, and must count ourselves extremely fortunate in not having lost all traces.

The ancient Kelts were passionately fond of poetry recited to harp accompaniment. Let it be remembered that lyric and narrative poetry were originally always sung, or rather chanted; in consequence, the criticism of poetry has been very much confused and entangled with musical terms. The words “melodious,” “tuneful,” “singing,” “harmonious,” are applied to the structure of verse in a sense quite different from their meaning in the tone-art; it is only since Dunstable invented polyphony that music has acquired an *independent* life of its own, and any references to music in previous ages must be taken

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to mean, not an art of sounds, but an art of delivering words effectively. The connection between poet and musician has been sundered since the 17th century; till then they were not only closely connected, but were even identical in most cases. I shall have occasion to return to this matter repeatedly; it is of the greatest importance in literary as well as musical history, but has hitherto been overmuch neglected. Probably it will not be possible to discover the connection between music and the various forms of poetry used in the Middle Ages, as regards the constructive influence.

The bards of Wales and the Scottish Highlands, and their counterparts in Ireland, were held in the highest respect. The Irish bards had a legal right to free quarters; and both in Ireland and Wales a slave was not allowed to play the harp. O'Curry (in his "Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish") argues that the earliest forms of Irish lyric verse exactly fit certain Irish tunes, which had therefore a contemporary origin. His contention is plausible, though we have no indication of the oldest form of the tunes. The Welsh also claim that some of their tunes are of extraordinary antiquity, one, *Morva Rhuddlan*, having been traditionally produced just after the battle of *Rhuddlan* in 795. Whether traditional or even written evidence refers to poems or tunes is always doubtful. The oldest document dealing with Welsh music (now in the British Museum as Additional MS. 14,905) was written 1620-30, though professedly copied from a rather older MS.; it contains an account of the congress of bards, summoned in 1040 by *Griffyd ap Conan*, and mentioned by *Giraldus Cambrensis*. The Kelts used a peculiar stringed instrument called in Ireland the "Crut," in Wales the "Crwth," and in mediæval English the "Crowd." *Venantius Fortunatus* (a bishop of *Poitiers*), writing about 600, mentioned it

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in the famous lines: "Romanusque lyra plaudat tibi, Barbarus harpa, Græcus achilliaca, *chrotta* Brittaina canat." At a later period, the Crwth was a bowed instrument; but in earliest times it was apparently a harp of some kind. W. K. Sullivan, in his elaborate introduction to O'Curry's work, says that the allusions to the instrument in ancient Irish MSS. suggest that the Crut "was a true harp, played upon with the fingers and without a plectrum." The ancient Irish also had an instrument called "Timpan;" at what period it was in use does not appear. W. K. Sullivan calls it a bowed instrument; in an Anglo-Saxon MS. the "Timpanum" is a bagpipe. The Irish and Welsh harps were played by the pointed fingernails. The names used by the two branches of the Keltic race are quite unlike, the Irish and Scotch Gaels calling the harp *Clairsach*, while the Kymry in Wales, Cornwall, and Brittany called it *Telyn*. The earliest known illustration of the Irish harp shows no front pillar; but later delineations all have this important addition. The folk-music of the Irish has been justly celebrated, though we know nothing of it before the English conquest; it was famous all over Europe during the Middle Ages. Writers should not forget that Erse (*ersche*) does not mean specifically Irish, but Gaelic generally.

Of the Anglo-Saxon appreciation of music we hear less. A MS. of the eighth century (formerly at St. Blaise, but burnt in 1768) contained a representation of the "Cythara Anglica," which had fortunately been copied, and was published in Gerbert's *De Cantu Sacra*. It shows a true harp; the "Cythara Teutonica" being a psaltery. But we know almost nothing of the life of our pagan forefathers during their settlement here. After the Christianising of the Anglo-Saxons in the seventh century, ecclesiastical music occupied nearly all attention. In 668

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Theodore of Tarsus and Adrian of Naples came to England and taught the Ambrosian plainsong. The story of Bishop Aldhelm's singing like a minstrel on the bridge at Malmesbury, and Bede's account of Caedmon's escaping from the revel as the harp was passed round, show a certain practice of the bardic art. In *Beowulf* the harp is called "the wood of joy." Since the Anglo-Saxon name *hearp* is the same as the Teutonic (which has been adopted by the Romance nations), there may have been some independent origin of the Clairsach, Telyn, Hearpe, and Cithara. The Horn was a favourite with the Anglo-Saxons.

Some of the earliest Anglo-Saxon MSS. have representations of musical instruments. The Psalter from Canterbury, written about 700 (now in the Cottonian MSS.), has a representation of David playing a psaltery, with other performers blowing horns and dancing. Another drawing of David playing a psaltery is in a MS. at Durham, by tradition the work of Bede's own hands. The wonderful Lindisfarne Gospels of the same date afford us only a hornblower standing behind the figure of St. Matthew. Yet when St. Boniface was in Germany, the abbot of York wrote asking if the missionary could send him a player "on that kind of harp which we call *rotta*," as he had an instrument, but no performer. There is here a very fair proof that the "*Rote*" was not a bowed instrument; nor a hurdy-gurdy, as Burney supposed it was. The word *Rotta* is probably a form of *Chrotta*, or *Crwth*; and it is only reasonable to suppose that the old name would be retained even after the bow had been used for the vibrating agent.

The Anglo-Saxons were at a very early period acquainted with organs, which are mentioned even in Aldhelm's poem, "*De Laude Virginitatis*." Not long after Aldhelm's death (A.D. 709) was written the celebrated