FORD ERNEST

A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLISH MUSIC

Ernest Ford

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Ford E.

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Содержание

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PREFACE

This book is not, in any sense, technical.

It is an attempt to give a simple and rational, though in a volume of this size, necessarily incomplete, account of events that have led to the complex state of music existing in England at the present time.

Should it offer nothing to the musician or historian, I hope it will be found of interest to the general reader.

The desire to make each chapter as complete, on the subject with which it deals, as space would permit, has necessitated a certain amount of repetition, but I trust that the object will condone the fault.

THE AUTHOR.

CHAPTER I
MUSIC BEFORE AND DURING THE REFORMATION

England at one time musical and "merrie" – England before the Reformation – Out-door life – Natural dramatic instincts – Isolation of country districts in early days – Performances of itinerant minstrels – Ban of the Church – Gradual improvement – Effect of the wars of the Roses – Early perfection of sacred music – Difficult times after repudiation of Rome by Henry VIII. – His policy and that of Queen Elizabeth – Edward VI. and his sisters – Popular anger against the monks – Dissolution of monasteries natural result amongst uneducated people – Tallis entrusted to write music for reformed services – Orlando Gibbons and Henry Purcell – Early secular music – Old-time music occasionally traceable now in country districts – Ancient instruments – Effect on English music by those returning from the Crusades – Effect on criminal population – The status of the musical composer compared with that of the "musician" – Conclusion.

England was musical – once upon a time.[1]

At least, if it be not too great a strain on our credulity, we must believe so.

England was "merrie"[2]– once upon a time. At least, we read so.

It must have been long ago, and the art long lost.

And yet there was, undoubtedly, a time when England was both musical and "merrie." Yes. When music and "dauncing" were as essential to the life of the people as ranting and canting apparently became in those dismal days after the Reformation, when the spirit of Calvinism stalked abroad, strangling all the rational joys of life. Yes. Those were, indeed, the merrie days of England.

The pageants and plays, which arrived at such a pitch of splendour and magnificence in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, were but the successors of more primitive ones whose history is lost in the long and silent past.

It is, however, quite clear that, like nearly everything else of healthy vitality, we must look to the Church, if not for their origin, at least for the shape and form they came to assume during the Christian era.

Throughout human history there have ever been men gifted with a dramatic temperament who, through sheer natural instinct, not only dramatise their own experiences when they would relate them, but dramatise with equal avidity, any material which may come to their hands for the entertainment of others and the relief of their own exuberant vitality.

A combination of such gifted, congenial spirits would be, not so much probable as inevitable. Hence the bodies of strolling players, regarded by the guardians of the law, doubtless with much excuse, as rogues and vagabonds, who toured the country districts, and were to all appearance, in a state of constant conflict with the "Dogberrys" of the day.

It is difficult, if not impossible, for us to realise the isolation of small communities in mediæval times, but it is not difficult to imagine the excitement that a visit from one of these troupes would arouse; not only on account of the amusement they would afford, but for the news they would bring of that outside world which was, probably, at once a source of curiosity and dread.

It must be recorded that the kind of entertainment given by these itinerant players, was frequently of such a nature as to give a shock to the simple countrymen it was designed to amuse.

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[1] A country that has taken its music at the hands of the foreigner for three centuries can scarcely be called musical.

[2] In its original meaning, the term implied a cheerful and righteously joyful sense of living. Its popular significance after three centuries of Puritanism, rather inclines to alcoholic elation.

Coming directly from the coarse amusements and excitements of London, that included about every possible species of vicious depravity, most of which cannot be written about, and the more innocent, including bear-baiting, drinking contests and cock-fighting, it is not to be wondered at that their displays caused something akin to amazement.

One result was inevitable.

The Church stepped in, banned the performances, and threatened to exclude all who were engaged in them from her sacraments.

However, with the wonderful intuition which seems so clearly to eliminate the purely human theory, she seized upon this elementary instinct to purify it and dedicate it to the highest ends. From that time through many ages the performances were given with the direct sanction of the Church, and were not infrequently utilised on festival occasions, in the precincts of her sacred buildings.

It must not be assumed, however, that in the early stages of the cleansing process any very high standard could be insisted upon. Such an attitude would have put the clergy out of touch with the primitive people, and wholly destroyed the possibility of effecting any lasting good.

Biblical subjects of a simple kind were chosen for portrayal, the story of Adam and Eve being a particularly popular one, and presented with a crude exactitude that would cause considerable astonishment to a modern spectator.

But gradually subjects of a more elevating character were introduced, and at last the most moving incidents in the life of Christ were represented. Thus it is obvious that the Church had no desire to stifle the dramatic instinct; she simply used her power and authority to direct it to a nobler plane of thought, and help it to become a source of healthy education, instead of a form of moral degradation. Indeed, the most sacred and inspiring service in her liturgy, the Mass, is a dramatisation of the fundamental truths of Christianity.

The Englishman of the Middle Ages was coarse in speech and manner, but he was eminently susceptible to the call of art in whatsoever guise it came, religious or secular.

The beauty of the cathedrals with their noble altars and gloriously coloured windows and, perhaps most of all, the call of the music which played so large a part in all the functions, would, at least, help to combat the gross spirit of the outer world, and tend to an amelioration of the prevailing tone of the age.

There had been, however, many companies of players who had defied the Church's ban, and continued their performances of unbridled licence, trusting to the general lawlessness of the times to evade the consequences; but with the passing of the Wars of the Roses and their attendant misery, bloodshed and abrogation of civil law, a period of brutality, rapine, and all the consequent horrors of a fratricidal conflict came to an end, and the power of the law, both ecclesiastic and civil, was once more able to actively assert itself. A reign of peace and the confirmed power of the Crown began to inspire a general sense of security. Such wealth as the country possessed, instead of being squandered on the machinery of war, could be spent to ensure the blessings of peace.

Education, even the most elementary, was a boon to a man who, beside the manual work necessary to enable him to feed himself, had hitherto learnt nothing but the use of the pike or some such weapon of warfare.

Thus a better state of things was being inaugurated, and by the beginning of the sixteenth century, was in full progress and the results already apparent. The appearance in the dramatic firmament of that immortal group of writers, of which Shakespeare was the Sun, marked the glorious opening of a new era.

Through all these centuries the art of sacred music had been slowly, it is true, but gradually developed, mainly by the monks, but wholly in the service of the Church.

It had arrived at such a pitch of perfection by the middle of the sixteenth century, that then began the short era that was afterwards to be known as "The Golden Age of Ecclesiastical Music." It was the time of Palestrina in Italy, and Tallis, Byrd and Orlando Gibbons in England.

The Mass for five voices, written by William Byrd about the year 1588, is one of the most beautiful productions of that extraordinary period, and is sufficient in itself to prove that music in England, like her literature, could then challenge comparison with that of any country whatever, either for beauty or originality.

It may be mentioned here that Byrd never swerved from his allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church. It has been said that there is no proof that Tallis changed his faith, but the fact that he was requisitioned to set music for the new services to English words seems to me perfectly conclusive that he did acquiesce in the new order of things.

In those troublous days there were comparatively few who dared openly to adhere to the Catholic Church – that is to say, to the Church as it was before Henry VIII. repudiated allegiance to the Pope – the many submitted to the behests of the day and declared themselves definitely on the side they thought would eventually become ascendant, always, however, endeavouring to secure a loophole of escape in case they should find that they had, to use the famous Marquis of Salisbury's well-known phrase, "put their money on the wrong horse."

These words may suggest a more sinister idea than they are intended to convey, but their significance will soon be made clear. It must be remembered that when Henry cast off the supremacy of Rome – for reasons it is not necessary to enter upon here – with one or two exceptions, no repudiation of the general tenets of the Catholic Church was insisted upon. In fact, like his wonderful daughter, Queen Elizabeth, he was averse, with characteristic Tudor caution, to cataclysmic changes which might once more divide his kingdom into two great opposing camps, such as it had only recently escaped from.

On the contrary, having achieved the personal ends he had in view, he desired nothing better than that things should calm down and proceed on the same lines, as nearly as possible, as they had before, without the masses of the people recognising or understanding the true import of what had taken place. Had he been succeeded by Elizabeth, this policy might have been successful, and many a disastrous page of history would probably never have had to be written.

His dominating personality sufficed to avert any open rebellion to his will, but on his death the succession to the throne of a sickly boy, whose fanatical spirit had been fired by still more fanatical advisers, was the signal for an outburst of Puritanical frenzy.

Dominated as the young King, Edward VI., was by hatred of his elder sister and deep distrust of her actions when she should be called to the throne (an event which he knew full well to be a matter of only a few years), he lost no time in doing whatever lay in him to further the cause of Protestantism, and render it impossible for her to obliterate and make nugatory the work he had so much at heart. Edicts were issued ordering the clergy to abstain from priestly functions which hitherto had not been inhibited, and everything possible was done to instil into the minds of the common people a distrust of them that centuries of devotion to their interests were unable to dispel.

A possible explanation of the success of these tactics may be found in the undoubted distress among the peasantry at this time.

With the suppression of the monasteries came the resultant loss of the succour they had for so long been accustomed to rely on at the hands of the monks, in case of illness or other trouble. To them they had looked to supply, when in need, the necessities of life, and so, on the sudden cessation of these benefits they, in their ignorance, visited their astonished anger not on those who were the cause of it, but on the victims who were no longer in a position to continue their benevolent offices.

During this reign the services of the Church were in a constant state of change and confusion, and no cause suffered more than the cause of music.

Its use in the new liturgy was sparingly permitted, and the little that was tolerated soon lapsed into desuetude in the great majority of churches.

To Tallis was entrusted the writing of such music as was to be allowed, and all musicians owe him a debt of gratitude for the beauty of his work, which remains to-day, as the highest type of Church music, of which he has often been called the father, so far as relates to that of England.

Of Byrd we have written.

With Orlando Gibbons we come to the third of that great trio of Church composers whose work may be termed the Apotheosis of Catholic music, so far as England is concerned. Although when Gibbons began to compose, the Latin language had been superseded by English in the Church liturgy, his music retains absolutely all the essential characteristics of the ancient Ecclesiastical style, and is as pure from outside influence as that of Byrd himself, who doubtless lent him aid and encouragement, being as he was, a comparatively young man when the latter died in a green old age.

Gibbons was a copious writer, and his works are one of the greatest treasures of English sacred music.

With him the glorious school of Catholic music may be said to have become extinct in England.

Henry Purcell, the last and greatest of the old school of English musicians, was born in 1658. At the time of his birth the Reformation had long been an accomplished fact, and the country had accepted it, perhaps not entirely realising in all its bearings, the full extent of the consequences. Orlando Gibbons had only been dead about thirty years, so, happily for music, sufficient time had not elapsed to allow of the entire suppression of the ancient spirit of Catholic music.

Hence Purcell, whose early training came from those who were born and nurtured in its atmosphere, was fully equipped, on arriving at manhood, to deal with the position as he found it: that is to say, a firmly established body of foreign musicians basking in the favours, and enjoying the protection of a largely foreign Court.

With the assimilative power of genius, he was quick to seize upon anything he thought politic. But whatever he borrowed he soon turned into gold. He was a veritable alchemist.

It is only necessary to say here that for many centuries he has been universally accepted as the greatest of all English musicians, and that he was the last of that original school of English music whose origin goes back to the dark ages, and can only be sought for in the solitude and seclusion of the cells of ancient and long forgotten monasteries.

We must now retrace our steps and endeavour to follow, as far as scanty records allow, the progress of secular music along those bygone ages. Something at least is known of the ancient music of the East, and the probability is that Greek music, from which that of the Latin Church descends, is but the offspring of the far older art of Egypt.

The question, however, is one for the antiquarian. It may with safety be affirmed that such music as existed among the people of England at the time of the Norman Conquest was not only considerably affected by that event, but still more, probably, by the Crusades not long after.

The music of the French Troubadours shews undoubted Eastern influences, and it does not require any great effort of imagination to realise, to some extent at least, the result of the constant influx of returned soldiers and camp followers after years of travel and residence in the East, not only on the music, but the morals of a comparatively primitive people.

So far as music is concerned, it is natural to assume that whatever was brought from the East, whether in the shape of novel rhythms and melodic features, or strange (probably percussion) instruments, was speedily absorbed by or brought into the service of, the native musician, and doubtless proved an incentive to renewed creation.

English music would appear to have an ancestry as complex as that of the people themselves.

The earliest specimens go to confirm this, for whereas some of them are extremely bucolic and uncouth, others are refined and even sensuous in character. Alternating in grave and gay, the music suggests diverse origin. Musical notation, as we know it to-day, is a comparatively modern invention. It is the result of centuries of research and experiment. It is doubtful if the music that Gurth, the swineherd of Cedric the Saxon, may have hummed to himself in his long and solitary vigils could

indeed be expressed in it. The scales then in popular use were different in essential respects from ours, and that there are even yet vestiges of the old peasant music still remaining I feel persuaded. For instance, many years ago in an outlying district of Sussex I heard an old man singing a folk song to a roomful of approving companions.

I listened with the interest of curiosity, but beyond the fact that it seemed to be in a minor key I gained little.

Of the language I failed to understand one word. One thing, however, struck me, and this was that even in the final cadence there was no leading note[3], and that the style of note-succession reminded me of Scotch music.

As nearly as I could approximate it, the key suggested G minor, and the final notes sounded like the following: —

This, of course, may have been the idiosyncracy of the singer, but each verse, as I heard it, was consistent one with the other.

Doubtless such an authority as Mr. Cecil Sharp would be able to give an explanation of so interesting an experience.

It should be borne in mind that music, for long ages, was transmitted from one individual to another through the ear alone. The invention of a musical notation, even of the most primitive kind, being comparatively recent. The art of reading from it, in the Middle Ages, was practically restricted to the monks, whose creation it was.

Even to this day musical sight-reading is only mastered by comparatively few of a large population.

On this important point, the majority of the people of England are certainly not musical.

We shall later on deal with the earliest known examples of English vocal and instrumental music. For the moment we will consider the means at the disposal of the music-minded in mediæval days.

To the human voice we need not refer, since it is little susceptible of change from age to age.

Musical instruments were few in number and of a crude order in general. The bagpipe, hornpipe and others of a similar kind, together with stringed instruments in the earliest stage of development, being in most general use.

The viols, lute, virginals, recorders, and many others, belong to a much later period. The violin, as we know it, only arrived at perfection in the seventeenth century, when Stradivarius, Amati and Guanarius were making their marvellous instruments. But that they had instruments and even used them in combination is shewn by the following lines from Chaucer: —

"Cornemuse and shalmyes,
And many a maner pipe,"

and again,

"Both ye Dowced and ye Rede."

[3] The leading note is a semi-tone lower than the keynote, and is essential to the modern scales, both major and minor.

"Cornemuse" is generally accepted to mean a hornpipe.

"Shalmyes"[4] was probably a reed instrument of the character of an oboe.

With regard to "ye Dowced" and "ye Rede," numerous controversies have failed to establish any definite conviction.

The poet, however, in another line mentions an instrument, of which there is no doubt possible: —

"A baggepipe coude wel he blowe and soune."

It is natural to suppose that progress in the art of making instruments would correspond to that in the art of music itself, and the ever-increasing intercourse with the Continent since the Conquest would bring knowledge of many before unknown; both France and Italy being far in advance of England in this respect.

References to them in Shakespeare's works are numerous.

To cite only a few.

In the first part of "Henry IV.": —

"*Falstaff*: S'blood! I am as melancholy as a gibcat or a lugged bear.
"*Prince Henry*: Or an old lion; or a lover's *lute*.
"*Falstaff*: Yea, or the drone of a Lincolnshire *bagpipe*."

In "Hamlet": —

"*Hamlet*: … Will you play upon this *pipe*?
"*Guildenstern*: My lord, I cannot.
"*Guildenstern*: I know no touch of it, my lord.
"*Hamlet*: 'Tis as easy as lying: govern these ventages with your fingers and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops."

We will content ourselves with one more quotation. It consists of some lines of incomparable beauty from the sonnets: —

"How oft, when thou, my music, music play'st,
Upon that blessed wood whose motion sounds
With thy sweet fingers, when thou gently sway'st,
The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,
Do I envy those jacks, that nimble leap
To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,
Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest reap,
At the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand."

By the time of Queen Elizabeth the number and variety of instruments had greatly increased as the following lines by the poet, Michael Drayton, shew. It may be mentioned in explanation of the words, "the viol best in setts," that it was customary in those days to enclose in one case a set of these instruments, treble, tenor and bass, the last-named being probably the viol da gamba, the predecessor of the modern violoncello.

"The English that repined to be delayed so long,
All quickly at the hint, as with one free consent,

[4] More familiarly known as shawn.

Strook up at once and sang each to the instrument;
(Of Sundry sorts there were, as the musician likes)
On which the practiced hand with perfect'st fingering strikes,
Whereby their right of skill might liveliest be expressed.
The trembling lute some touch, some strain the violl best,
In setts which there were seene, the music wondrous choice,
Some likewise there affect the Gamba with the voice,
To shew that England could varietie afforde
Some that delight to touch the sterner wyerie chord,
The Cithron, the Pandore, and the Theorbo strike;
The Gittern and the Kit the wandering fidlers like.
So there were some againe, in this their learned strife,
Loud instruments that loved, the Cornet and the Phife,
The Hoboy, Sagbut deepe, Recorder and the Flute,
Even from the shrillest Shawn unto the Cornemute,
Some blow the Bagpie up, that plaies the country 'round,
The Tabor and the Pipe, some take delight to sound."

As some of the above-mentioned instruments are probably unknown to the majority of readers, I will select for explanation a few that seem least likely to be familiar: —

Cithron– An instrument with wire strings, like a German zither.

Pandore– A variety of the foregoing.

Theorbo– A large double-necked instrument of the lute family. It somewhat resembles, on a larger scale, the modern mandoline.

Gittern– Resembles the guitar. Chaucer refers to it more than once.

Kit– Diminutive violin.

Sagbut– Akin to the slide trombone.

Recorder– A wind instrument of the clarinet family.

Tabor– A small drum. In olden times used as an accompaniment to the pipe.

We have alluded to the possible effect on music of the return of numbers of men from the wars of the Crusades. We pass now to the probable effect on the morals of the people, with special reference to the musicians of the period. One of the first results would be to swell the numbers of itinerant musicians and players who were already a source of trouble not only to the custodians of the law, but to the average law-abiding citizen.

It is not to be supposed that the restless spirit of these wanderers through Europe and the East, with all the concomitant experiences, would permit them to again settle down to the life of quietude and practical isolation of the tiller of the soil, from which, no doubt, many of them had sprung.

No, the roving life of the itinerant "minstrel" or the riotous life of the city roysterer would be more likely to attract them.

Certain it is, from the diseases they acquired in the East and disseminated in Europe, one may justifiably argue that their presence was not likely to raise the moral tone of any company they might be pleased to join.

To whatever cause it may be assigned, it has to be admitted that musicians in those days had a most unenviable reputation, and were looked upon with the greatest contempt.

One qualification of this statement may be made, as there is little doubt that a great distinction was made between the *composer* and the "musician."

Every rogue and vagabond who scoured the country giving crude and generally offensive performances styled himself musician, so the public, having no greater genius for fine discrimination

then than now, came to regard all persons who were engaged in the performance of music, if not with active aversion, at any rate with passive contempt.

It is in these early times that the foundation of the feeling was laid, only to be strengthened later on when Puritanism came with fanatic intensity to still further deepen it. How engrained in the spirit of the people this sentiment became is evident, even to this day.

That the *composer* of music was regarded in a different light, we shall be able to prove.

He obtained degrees at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, where he proceeded to the high position of Professor of the University in the Chair of Music.

Leases of Crown lands were made to him, with grants of armorial bearings in some cases; indeed, there are evidences of many kinds to show that his calling was held in high esteem. With the "musicians," as they were called, or "minstrels," as they called themselves, things went from bad to worse. Doubtless reinforced again by cast-off camp-followers from the armies of the Wars of the Roses, they became, by the reign of Queen Elizabeth, not only a source of terror to the countryside, but a nuisance and a pest to the towns. Gosson writes, about 1580: "London is so full of unprofitable pipers and fiddlers that a man can no sooner enter a tavern, than two or three cast of them hang at his heels, to give him a dance before he depart."[5]

In 1597 a law was passed in which they were classed as "rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars," and were threatened with severe penalties.

The War of the Rebellion probably brought them still another accession to their ranks, as, so far from being harmed by this threat, things must have got even worse, to judge by the following edict issued by Cromwell only a few years later: —

"Any persons commonly called fidlers or minstrels who shall at any time be taken playing, fidling, and making music in any inn, ale-house, or tavern, or shall be taken proffering themselves, or desiring, or intreating any to hear them play or make music in any of the places aforesaid, shall be adjudged and declared to be rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars."

It may be at once assumed that if they were able to evade the hands of Elizabeth, they were little likely to escape those of Cromwell, who may be said to have, at last, cleared the country of what had become a positive menace to the security of life, since under the guise of wandering minstrels, highwaymen and other criminals had long been wont to carry on their occupations with comparative immunity.

The age of Queen Elizabeth was one of transition, the Commonwealth marked the birth of the new era, and with it the final disappearance of the picturesque, even if somewhat depraved, English troubadour.

[5] "Short Apologies of the School of Abuse," London.

CHAPTER II
MUSIC BEFORE AND DURING THE REFORMATION – (*continued*)

Secular music dating from the thirteenth century – Origin lost in antiquity – Earliest specimens, dance music – Morris dance traced to Saxon times – Dancing always associated with singing – Gradual independence – Popularity of the month of May – The ballad and its antiquity – Popular specimens – "Parthenia," a collection of pieces for virginals – Life in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth – Its happiness – Authority of Professor Thorold Rogers – Great men living at the time – Pageantry and the Queen – Her love of dancing and music – Her sympathy with the joys of her people – Queen Elizabeth as a musician – Sir James Melvil and his adventure – The masque – Its origin – Popularity – James I. and art – Masque forerunner of opera – The madrigal, catch, round and glee – Shakespeare and the catch – "Sumer is icumen in," a wonderful specimen of ancient skill and genius – The "canon" – Instrumental music – Explanation of its late development – Purcell – Conclusion.

Authentic examples of secular music in England date from the thirteenth century. It is not from this fact, though, one must suppose that it did not exist prior to that period. On the contrary, music of some kind or other has, doubtless, been a source of solace as well as amusement for untold years.

For antiquity, vocal music stands pre-eminent. Ages must have passed before instrumental music came to any position of efficacy at all correlative with it.

It must be remembered that music as we know it, is the gift that the ancient Church gave us centuries ago, and that the pangs of its birth were suffered in days of which all sense of record is lost.

That there were seculars, even in those remote days, whose ideas of musical progress would not be bound by the ties of ecclesiastical gravity may be taken for granted, and as the art progressed in the Church they would naturally take advantage of it to further their skill in the direction of a lighter and less serious type.

To seek for the earliest examples of dance music is simply to grope in the dark. As to its progress, all that can be suggested is that it fairly synchronises with that of sacred character.

This need be no matter for surprise, since seeing that the Church never did other than encourage the healthy outdoor life of the people, it may be assumed that the monks, who were responsible for the music in the Church, were as willing as able, to help in the advancement outside of it.

Research makes it certain that the first efforts at dancing were accompanied by singing, and only in its latest stages of advancement was it strong enough to dispense with this, and rely on the attraction of the rhythmic movements of the dancer.

From this it will be reasonably inferred that for countless centuries the two arts remained in combination, before the incentive genius of either proved too strong to longer brook the artificial ties that had bound them together.

It is said that the Morris dance can be traced to Saxon times, and that it is the one that has remained with the least variation from its original form. It must be admitted, however, that the difficulty of absolutely proving these assertions is almost insuperable, notwithstanding the amount of research that has been directed to the subject.

It can be traced definitely as far back as the reign of Edward III., and in its most popular form, is known as the may-pole dance.

It was particularly associated with May Day, and was danced round a may-pole to a lively and capering step.

Reminiscences of these old "round" dances may be traced in games played by children to-day, such as "Kiss in the ring," "Hunt the slipper," "Here we go round the mulberry bush," and others of a similar type.

The onlookers sang and marked the rhythm by the clapping of hands.

With increasing skill in the making of musical instruments, and increasing art in playing on them, the dance gradually became independent, as is manifestly shown by music that is still extant, and while being evidently intended for dancing, is quite unsingable. Once then separated, the art naturally developed on bolder and more original lines. As the human voice was the first medium of expression in music, all lines necessarily radiated from it. Singing induced dancing; dancing required a more certain rhythmic force than the voice could supply; hence artificial aid by means of instruments, the first, doubtless, being those of percussion.

With the arrival of instruments of a more advanced character and capable of more varied expression, the progress of the art would naturally proceed with greater rapidity, and on lines displaying greater variety.

England, in those days, was avid of pleasure. It is little to be wondered at.

We speak of the people, not of the nobles, whose wealth enabled them to combat the ordinary existing conditions.

Their day depended, in a very special sense, on the sun, in a manner surprising to those of us living in the twentieth century. It began with the rising, and ended with the setting.

Artificial light, except of the most primitive description, was a luxury entirely out of their reach.

If we, in modern times, remembering its fickle climate, wonder at the popularity of the month of May, and the adulation it received at the hands of the early poets, a little consideration will soon supply the cause. The long, weary months of winter, with its darkness and cold, had been endured; the bitter winds of March and April were over, and the long days and tempered breezes came to the people with a relief, the intensity of which is difficult to realise, with all the means of comfort that modern civilisation has placed at our disposal.

The ballad, as distinguished from the song, is peculiarly typical of the Northern races, and was, up to the time of Queen Elizabeth, a favourite feature of English music. As its name implies,[6] it was danced as well as sang; later on the dance was dispensed with.

Its antiquity is unquestionable, but it is, as is so often the case, impossible to assign any definite date to it.

The early part of the eleventh century certainly knew it in England, as the following stanza proves.[7] It tells of a visit paid to the city by King Canute: —

"Mery sungen the muneches binnen Ely.
Tha Cnut ching reu therby:
Roweth, cnites, noer the land,
An here we thes muneches saeng."

This may be translated for the modern reader as follows: —

"Merry sang the monks of Ely,
As King Canute rowed by.
Row knights, near the land

[6] The word ballad comes from *Ballare*, to dance.

[7] "Shakespeare in Music." Louis C. Elson. L. C. Page & Co., Boston.

And hear we these monks sing."

The music is, unfortunately, lost.

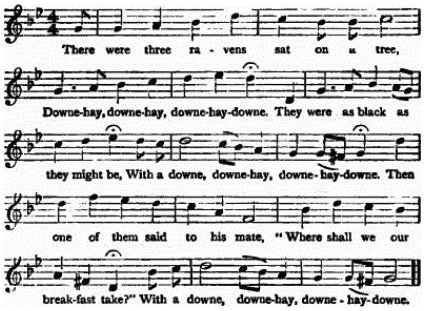
In Roman times a popular feature of the processions organised in honour of some newly-arrived conquering soldier was a band of dancers who, while gyrating in graceful movement, sang poems, reciting his heroic deeds.

The praise of heroes was, from the earliest, the dominant feature of the ballad, and, although far removed, as it must be from anything resembling even mediæval methods, the Greek and Roman form of it is most probably the real source from which it is derived.

There are many kinds of ballad known to England, but they are narrative, as a rule, such as "Chevy Chase," and many others of a similar style. Some are sad, some are gay; none are sentimental. One that can be seen in the Sloane Collection in the British Museum, "Joly Yankyn," is probably not much later than the one previously quoted. The name will recall Friar Tuck to the readers of Scott's "Ivanhoe."

A ballad that is believed to be of Eastern origin is the following: —

"There were three ravens sat on a tree."



[Text alternative]

There were three ra-vens sat on a tree,
Downe-hay, downe-hay, downe-hay-downe.
They were as black as they might be,
With a downe, downe-hay, downe-hay-downe.
Then one of them said to his mate,
"Where shall we our break-fast take?"
With a downe, downe-hay, downe-hay-downe.

We are on safer ground, however, when we come to such a one as "To-morrow the Fox will come to Town," with the refrain, "I must desire you neighbours all, to hallo the fox out of the hall." This is altogether more English in character, and is filled with the spirit of open air life.

Other examples that seem inevitable of quotation, are those that Shakespeare has made immortal, by putting them into the mouth of Ophelia, in the tragic scene from Hamlet.

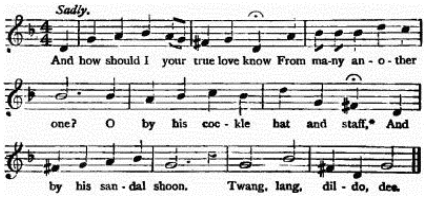
The music that we quote here is that which, there is every reason to believe, was sung at the original production.

The style accords with Shakespeare's time.

Unfortunately when Drury Lane Theatre was burnt down in 1812, the music library was destroyed. Happily, however, Mrs. Jordan, the celebrated actress with whose fame the part of Ophelia

is for ever associated, was alive, and was able to sing to Dr. Arnold, a famous musician of the time, the melodies, as they had been rendered in the theatre in her time, and probably for centuries past.

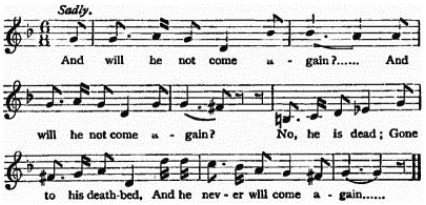
"How should I your true love know?"



[Text alternative]

And how should I your true love know
From ma-ny an-o-ther one?
O by his coc-kle hat and staff,[8]
And by his san-dal shoon.
Twang, lang, dil-do, dee.

"And will he not come again?"

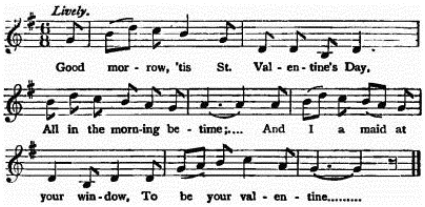


[Text alternative]

And will he not come a-gain?..
And will he not come a-gain?
No, he is dead;
Gone to his death-bed,
And he nev-er will come a-gain…

[8] Cockle hat and staff were distinguishing marks of a pilgrim.

"St. Valentine's Day." [9]



[Text alternative]

Good mor-row, 'tis St. Val-en-tine's Day,
All in the morn-ing be-time;…
And I a maid at your win-dow,
To be your val-en-tine…

In "Parthenia," a collection of pieces for the virginals (an instrument that may be described as the ancestor of the piano), which was published in 1611, it is shewn to what a high point of development the composition of dance music had arrived.

The music was composed by the three most celebrated English musicians then living, William Byrd, John Bull, and Orlando Gibbons – Tallis had been dead over twenty years.

The pieces are of the most stately kind, in general, and would scarcely realise the modern conception of dance music, but they are beautiful specimens of the art of those days, and cannot but command our admiration.

Of the more lively and frivolous dances the one known as Trenchmore was the most popular.

"Be we young or old … we must dance Trenchmore over table, chairs and stools."[10]

Selden, in his "Table Talk," "Then all the company dances, lord and groom, lady and kitchen maid, no distinction."

The more one comes to learn of life in the England of those days, the more one becomes convinced that, taken as a whole, life was both happy and joyous. No less an authority than Professor Thorold Rogers, after profound research into the social conditions of the Middle Ages, says they show that a state of happiness and content prevailed.[11]

Dancing was advised, too, as "a goodly regimen against the fever pestilence."

The fact that there is comparatively little of old-time music extant is due to the late invention of music printing and the slow progress of musical notation. "Parthenia" was, as the title page tells, the first music for the virginals ever printed, and yet appeared as late as 1611.

From that time, naturally, records of everything written of any importance, exist.

In the reign of Queen Elizabeth the typical life of the England of old, is shown at its best, and in its most characteristic state of development.

Soon afterwards, foreign influence, aided by a foreign Court, added to the depressing element of Puritanism, was to shake to its foundations this character and to mould it into that type which for centuries it retained.

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[9] It may be mentioned that there are numerous variations of these, as of all traditional melodies.

[10] Burton: "Anatomy of Melancholy," 1621.

[11] William Chappell's "Music of the Olden Time."

The Wars of the Roses had long been over, and economic conditions greatly modified and improved. The genius of the people seemed to burst out as if relieved from intolerable repression.

The absence of the unceasing scares and horrors of war gave them the opportunity that had so long been denied.

To think that such men as Shakespeare, Bacon, Burleigh, Drake, Raleigh, Tallis, Byrd, and Orlando Gibbons were living at the same time, and may have often passed each other in the streets of London!

There can be little doubt that the reign of Queen Elizabeth was the happiest the people had ever experienced, and it may be truly said that the Queen was the very incarnation of the spirit of the age.

Her love of pageantry and display was an unfailing source of joy to them, all the more, since they were frequently called upon to assist at many of the great functions that were organised in her honour by the great nobles. Her frequent progresses through the country were occasions, not only of gratification to herself, but excitement to them, relieving as they did the monotony of toil and the sense of isolation incidental to country communities in those days of difficult communications. The Reformation had not been sufficiently long in progress to affect the spirit of the people. It had not really reached them. If England ever deserved the appellation of "merrie," those were the days.

The sports were, if rough and coarse, joyous and frank.

To the Englishman of to-day their amusements may seem childish enough, but education was then, it must be remembered, entirely confined to the few, and the amenities of life, such as we know, were practically absent. A favourite feature was a procession of musicians and dancers dressed to represent such popular characters as Robin Hood and Friar Tuck, and bedecked with bells on elbow and knee that jingled as they danced.

The badinage that passed between the performers and onlookers was of a kind, it must be confessed, that would fall strangely on the ear at the present day, but still, there is every evidence that although the manners were rough and the language guileless of restraint, the heart of the people was sound at the core, and the deep-seated sense of religion in the Anglo-Saxon race was as present then as at any time in its history. The exuberant spirit is ever evidenced by the wealth of drinking songs. These seem to have been as much in vogue in those days as the monotonous frequency of love songs, from which we suffer, is in these.

Shakespeare makes good-humoured fun of the propensity in "Twelfth Night: or What you Will." In the famous drinking scene between Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek he satirises their foibles, it is true, but in the most delightful and even sympathetic manner, and certainly gives Sir Toby a telling rejoinder to the upbraiding of the sober-minded Malvolio, who had come with the intention of putting an end to the carousal: "Dost thou think that because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?"

Music was everywhere apparent. Wherever the monarch went, it was made a special feature at all functions. Whatever entertainments were devised by her courtiers, it ever had a principal place. Of the most gorgeous and notorious of them, the one given by the Earl of Leicester in her honour at Kenilworth Castle takes the first rank. Bishop Creighton, in his "Life of Queen Elizabeth," gives so vivid a description of it that, as one reads, the imagination seems, as it were, to become vitalised.

The Queen especially enjoyed these pageants, as they seemed to symbolise at once the greatness of her position and her personal dignity.

Those who entertained her, well knew both her haughty Tudor temper and intense femininity. To evade the one and satisfy the cravings of the other was the end ever held in view.

Hence, all kinds of contrivances were devised to glorify her person in allegory. In one, Triton is represented as rising from the water and imploring her to deliver an enchanted lady from the wiles of a cruel knight; upon which the lady straightway appears accompanied by a band of nymphs, Proteus following, riding on a dolphin. Suddenly, from the heart of the dolphin springs a choir of ocean gods, who sing the praises of the beautiful and all-powerful Queen!

Now Elizabeth was neither beautiful in person or character, but she possessed the very genius of sovereignty.

The imperious Tudor temper to which she constantly yielded, certainly detracted from her womanly qualities, but what she lacked as woman, it is only just to say, she more than made up for as Queen.

On this occasion, besides the great pageant, rustic sports of every kind, including bull baiting, were indulged in, and "a play was acted by the men of Coventry."

That she shared her people's love of dancing is again shewn by the following: "We are in frolic here at Court," writes Lord Worcester in 1602, "much dancing of country dances in the Privy Chamber before the Queen's Majesty, who is exceedingly pleased therewith."

In fact, her sympathy with the amusements of the people, and her encouragement of every healthy enjoyment, are certainly great factors in the hold her memory has retained in the minds of the English race.

There are other reasons, of course, of graver import, but they do not enter into our immediate consideration.

All the Tudor monarchs were essentially musical, as being Welsh they well might be. Henry VIII. was a composer of both sacred and secular music. I well remember that the first of an old volume of anthems in the library of Salisbury Cathedral was by no less a personage than that monarch himself. It was not, however, so far as my experience went, ever sung.

Queen Elizabeth was also an accomplished musician and an expert performer on the virginals, as the following quotation goes to prove. Its interest is peculiarly striking as it shows yet another side of the character of this many-sided, wonderful woman. It is from the memoirs of Sir James Melvil, at the time Scottish Ambassador: —

"The same day after dinner, my Lord of Hunsden drew me up to a quiet gallery that I might hear some music (but he said he durst not avow it), where I might hear the Queen play upon the virginals. After I had harkened awhile I took by the tapestry that hung by the door of the chamber, and seeing her back was toward the door, I entered within the chamber and stood a pretty space, hearing her play excellently well; but she left off immediately so soon as she turned her about and saw me. She appeared to be surprised to see me, and came forward, seeming to strike me with her hand, alleging she was not used to play before men, but when she was solitary, to shun melancholy. She asked me how I came there? I answered, as I was walking with my Lord Hunsden, as we passed by the chamber door, I heard such a melody as ravished me, whereby I was drawn in ere I knew how; excusing my fault of homeliness as being brought up in the Court of France, where such freedom was allowed; declaring myself willing to endure what kind of punishment her Majesty should be pleased to inflict upon me for so great offence. Then she sate down low upon a cushion, and I upon my knees by her; but with her own hand she gave me a cushion to lay under my knee; which at first I refused, but she compelled me to take it. She enquired whether my Queen or she played best. In that I found myself obliged to give her the praise."

Perhaps the most important form of musical and dramatic art that came into prominence during the Tudor period was the masque.

It was a combination of the various arts of music, acting, dancing and mimicry. Simple and unpretentious in its primitive form, it became subsequently, an entertainment of the most elaborate and gorgeous kind, and one that was conspicuously encouraged and patronised by Royalty. It attained to the highest pitch of artistic splendour and efficiency in the reign of James I.

From nearly every point of view it may be reasonably described as the forerunner of modern opera.

Its origin, like all that has to do with music in England, is obscure and dates back to centuries of which we have little or no record. In all probability it was the outcome of the early performances

encouraged by the Church, of representations of biblical subjects, to which we refer in another chapter.

By the time of Henry VIII. it had become as popular a feature in the life of the people as cricket or football is to-day.

Not only did the simple people take part in the performances, but the principal characters were frequently performed by members of the nobility and of the Court, Royalty itself not having altogether resisted their fascination.

The explanation of the vogue to which they attained in the reign of James I. is probably that the monarch was much less in touch generally with art, and particularly that akin to the Shakespearean drama, than was his more enlightened and intellectual predecessor. In fact, the drama proper was altogether beyond his region of intelligence, and since the masque, while making sufficient appeal to the senses, made less demand on his mental capacity, it suited him and enjoyed his particular favour.

His tastes were, it must be said, so far as appertaining to art, of a peculiarly low order.

Ben Jonson, who supplied the literary part of the most famous of these plays, was, for a man of his genius and learning, extraordinarily coarse in his language even for those days, and his comedy, "Bartholomew Fair," which was about the worst in this respect that even he perpetrated, was King James' special favourite.

Of music the King knew little and cared less, and it had come, probably in consequence, to play a secondary or even lower part in the productions of this time. In proportion as they increased in splendour they lost in artistic value, and, similarly as they came to be the exclusive amusement of the wealthy, so they lost their hold on the people.

In the year 1616 the splendour and extravagance of these displays culminated in the representation of the masque entitled, "The Golden Age Restored." It was played by the ladies and gentlemen of the Court. George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, so pleasing his Majesty that the latter cried out in ecstasy, "By my soul, mon, thou hast done it full weel." The King is said to have contributed £1000 on the occasion. There is little need for obvious comment on this fact.

It is worthy of remark that for some years before this, most of the performances of which there is any record were given at Whitehall, or in such buildings as the Inns of Court. They had grown out of the simplicity characterising primitive popular spectacles, and had become rather a medium for the idle pastimes of the rich.

The high tide of joyousness and gaiety in the life of the people had been reached in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and was fast receding. The spirit of the Reformation was getting hold of them and, perhaps, in its most fanatical aspect.

However, the masque had served its purpose. It had been in earlier days a source of harmless vent to the exuberant spirit of the people, and it was later to become the source of inspiration from which the primitive opera, as represented by Purcell's "Dido and Æneas," drew breath.

Of secular music, demanding more skill in invention and more proficiency in performance than the ballad, were the madrigal, catch, round, glee, and similar forms of expression. Being concerted pieces demanding the simultaneous singing of various parts, a technical training was, of course, necessary to enable one to join in them.

Their great popularity in all classes of society is sufficient proof, however, of the general training in the art that then existed. In fact, it was considered an essential thing in a gentleman's education, and the ability to take part in a "catch" or "round" was as natural to him in those days as it is to shoot or play cricket in these.

We cannot give the reader a better means to realise this than by quoting Shakespeare again, in whose words every feature in that wonderful age is held up to the mirror.

In "Twelfth Night" the following will be found: —

Sir Toby: Shall we rouse the night-owl in a catch, that will draw three souls out of one weaver[12]? Shall we do that?

"*Sir Andrew*: An you love me, let's do it: I am a dog at a catch.

"*Clown*: By'r lady, sir, and some dogs will catch well.

"*Sir Andrew*: Most certain: let our catch be 'Thou knave.'

"*Clown*: 'Hold thy peace, thou knave,' knight? I shall be constrained in't to call thee knave, knight.

"*Sir Andrew*: 'Tis not the first time I have constrain'd one to call me knave. Begin, fool; it begins, 'Hold thy peace.'

"*Clown*: I shall never begin, if I hold my peace.

"*Sir Andrew*: Good i' faith! Come, begin." (They sing a catch.)

The "catch" was a melody started by one singer and followed by another at an interval of one or more bars, singing identical notes, who would be succeeded by yet another in a similar manner. It depended upon the dexterity with which the performers would catch up their notes at the right moment as to whether harmony or chaos resulted.

It was a popular form of amusement, but we are hardly surprised when Malvolio appears on the scene and addresses the singers thus: —

"My masters, are you mad? or what are you? Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do you make an ale-house of my lady's house, that ye squeak out your cozier's catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice? Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?"

To all of which Sir Toby, treating it as an aspersion on his skill in music, replies, "We did keep time, sir, in our catches."

The madrigal was an altogether more serious form of art, and, except for the words, might be identified with the best specimens of ecclesiastical music. It was polyphonic in treatment, and generally grave in character. Indeed, to judge by some of the most celebrated examples, it seems almost savouring of jest to describe it as secular.

Of English composers, perhaps those who most excelled in this class of composition were Byrd, Dowland, and Orlando Gibbons. The most splendid example being that entitled, "The Silver Swan," by the last-named.

The glee, although less serious in character, as its name implies, was a truly artistic type of concerted music, and there are numerous specimens of early date of great beauty and contrapuntal skill, but they are characterised by comparative simplicity.

The transition from one to the other would seem natural, seeing the extreme elaboration that rendered the madrigal difficult of interpretation to any but highly-skilled singers.

The beautiful "Since First I Saw your Face," by Thomas Ford, can hardly be described by either title, for while it is removed in tone from the glee it lacks the atmosphere of the schools that the madrigal suggests. The glee, as it is popularly known to-day, is of a later date, and came to perfection about the middle of the eighteenth century.

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[12] "That will draw three souls out of one weaver" is a line of peculiar interest.Although it shows a distinct lack of reverence, it is quite typical of the spirit of the time. The "weavers" were mostly Calvinist refugees settled on the East Coast, whose austere manners and mode of life made them a constant source of ridicule to the people among whom they had taken shelter.The imperious will of the Tudor monarchs had, hitherto, prevented the dissemination of Calvinism in England, and so, to the boisterous, happy-go-lucky temperament of the Elizabethan Englishman, the ostentation of religious phraseology, added, probably, to their quaint pronunciation of the language, made them at once a butt of scorn and contempt.The expression used, too, by the clown "By'r lady" shows that Protestantism had as yet made little inroad on the life of the people. It is worthy of note that it was from this part of England sailed the first batch of emigrants to the new world in the "Mayflower," now immortalised in history.

It is a remarkable fact that perhaps the most beautiful and certainly one of the most skilfully written specimens of mediæval music, is also one of the most ancient. The date of it must be purely conjectural, although the scholar may to some extent be guided by the words as to the actual century of its origin.

The opening words, "Sumer is icumen in," are probably familiar to most readers, since they are ever in evidence when the question of old English music is under consideration. Indeed, it would take many volumes to record what has been written about this extraordinary composition.

From whatever point of view it is judged it commands admiration and wonder.

It demonstrates that in the art of music England was then not only abreast of foreign nations, but probably in advance of them.

It shows that polyphonic writing must have reached to a high point of development even so far back as the thirteenth century, and there is every reason to believe, even long before then.

It seems to me to be only a very obvious deduction. Just as there must have been many great poets before Homer, so this work must be the fortunate survivor of a long-lost school that, unhappily for us, had no enduring medium for transmission of its genius to later ages.

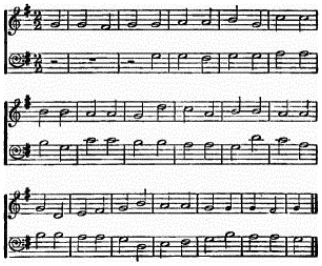
It exhibits, apart from the skill that characterised ancient ecclesiastical music, from which it indubitably sprang, a rare genius in interpreting the spirit and feeling of the words. In this respect it may be said to have anticipated centuries to come. With every appreciation, sincere and even reverend, of the ancient music of the Church, it must be acknowledged that in spirit it was rigid, severe and formal. In other words, it appealed to the religious and intellectual sense rather than that of beauty. "Sumer is icumen in," on the contrary, seems to be the work of one who is able to leap over the centuries and speak in the tones of ages unborn, to be, in fact, a forerunner, a teacher of the ages then in the womb of Time.

It has, in perfection, three great qualities of the highest art – perfect skill in execution, commanding appeal to the purest emotions, and the power to leave the mind in a state of ecstatic rest or emotional contentment that makes one oblivious of the world while listening or watching. It was the outcome of an age of great religious enthusiasm. The monks had great dreams, and with them came the energy that inspired their brains to the utmost fulfilment.

The dream that led to the Crusades is the one that has most appealed to the imagination of the world; but it was only one of many.

"Sumer is icumen in" was written in a form that seems to have especially appealed to those early composers, for the *canon*[13] was a constant medium of musical expression in mediæval times.

That the reader may the more readily understand, I quote here a specimen that is at once beautiful and familiar to all, and is known as the "Morning Hymn." Its simplicity will make it intelligible to the least technically instructed of musical readers: —



It will be observed that the last four notes in the treble clef indicate the repetition of the melody, which can continue indefinitely as here represented.

[13] A canon is a form of composition in which a melody is started by one voice and followed by another, one or more bars later (or even less) in strict imitation of it.

When we come to the consideration of instrumental music of olden times, we have little to guide us in the formation of any dear conception of its value or importance.

It is evident, however, that up to the time of Purcell or that immediately preceding it, the state of development was altogether inferior to that of vocal music.

For many centuries, except as regards its use in the Church, it occupied the humble position of handmaiden to the sister art of dancing.

Such of it as still exists is, practically, all written in dance measure. The dances were, it is true, in varied forms and rhythms. Some were stately and even serious in character, and offered the composer an opportunity to display his skill in a more thankful task than in furnishing accompaniments to the lighter and more frivolous ones.

Beautiful specimens of these are found in the compositions of William Byrd, John Ball, Orlando Gibbons, and others of the same period; they were mostly written for the virginals.

To those living in this age of stupendous achievement in the art, the comparative simplicity and ineffectiveness of instrumentation may well seem strange, seeing to what a point of splendour vocal music had attained.

The explanation is, I think, to be found in the defective nature of the instrument on which the composer had to rely to provide the sounds that his consciousness urged him to produce.

The violin had yet to be brought to perfection through the genius of a Stradivarius, and time was needed to show its full capacities in the hands of a Paganini.

The wind instruments, too, of the modern orchestra are of incomparable possibilities to those in use in the sixteenth century.

However, with the improvement and perfecting in their manufacture came a decided step towards a higher and independent form of art, and that this advance was not slowly taken advantage of is shown in the most extraordinary way in the works of Purcell.

Again, the very imperfect forms of musical notation must have always proved a stumbling-block to those early musicians. Even to-day, with its advanced methods, the act of putting on paper a modern orchestral composition is a work of enormous labour. The reader will understand this, when I say that music which takes but merely a few minutes in performance may easily take the composer as many hours to translate on to the pages of his score.

That this obstacle to musical progress was signally true as applied to organ music, I am convinced.

An organ is known to have been used in a French cathedral as early as the sixth century.

Primitive in its structure as it must have been, it probably had sufficient pipes to aid the congregation in the singing of the plain-song.

As time advanced, the monks, ever restless in their desire to add glory to the Church, made unceasing efforts to improve this great adjunct to her service, and by the fifteenth century an instrument had been constructed that was secure in the promise of untold possibilities, and had already become a verification of their early dreams.

The sixteenth century saw the organ come into general use, and in the early days of the seventeenth it arrived at maturity. The immense advance in the structural appliances in modern times are, it would seem, simply scientific application to ancient ideas.

One cannot help thinking how many must have been the inspired strains that rang through cathedral aisles in those early days as the hands of the monks wandered over the organ keys, the double incentives of religious fervour and love of art urging them on to higher achievement: a strange and yet fascinating figure of saint and artist.

By the time of Purcell instrumental music had advanced beyond the dance measure, and arrived at a state of independence. It could stand by itself without the aid of singer or dancer to sustain it. The process of emerging from the parasitic stage of clinging to these arts for sustenance was completed, and it had struck its roots so deep down that future ages might well, with wondering amazement

at its magnificent growth, find it difficult to grasp the idea of its humble origin. The compositions left, in this kind, by Purcell, such as the fantasias, sonatas, incidental music to plays, harpsichord and organ music, indicate only, it is true, the first offshoots of the wonderful tree that was destined to so fascinate the world, but they gave birth to many noble branches that helped to invigorate the initial life in its struggles for existence, and were the most prolific of the tendrils that make for healthy growth.

In conjunction with his sacred music, these amply justify the claim made for Purcell that he was, from whatever point of view he may be judged, the greatest of all English composers.

CHAPTER III
EARLY ENGLISH COMPOSERS

THOMAS TALLIS (OR TALLYS)

Most of the pre-Reformation music destroyed – Tallis, the oldest English musician of which anything certain is known – Organist of Waltham Abbey at time of the suppression of the monasteries – Date of his birth unknown – Favourite of King Henry VIII. and Queen Elizabeth – State of difficulty and danger in intervening reigns – Chaotic state of things in the Church – Queen Elizabeth's policy – View of it taken by the present Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral – Greatness of Tallis as a composer – His death.

We are, unfortunately, not able to write of the earliest English composers, as much of their work (and with their work their very names) perished at the time of the destruction of the monasteries by King Henry VIII. in 1540, and what was left of it was destroyed by fire during the sacking of the cathedrals by the Puritans in the Commonwealth period. We are, then, obliged to begin with the *early* English composers, who date no further back than the sixteenth century and the Reformation.

In dealing with these and their music, it is impossible to think without emotion of the terrible sacrifice of treasures of art caused by the veritable holocaust made of them by the Puritans, for, of the work of centuries, there is, practically, little or no trace left. What we do know of the works of those composers who lived before and during the early Reformation period, shews that ecclesiastical music had arrived at a point of great splendour, and if Tallis may be considered as the descendant of a great school of composers, which he undoubtedly was, it can help us to realize the extent of our loss.

He was, fortunately, able to protect his own work, or, doubtless, that would have perished with the rest, since all of his early music (and some of the noblest specimens) was written for the monastery at Waltham Abbey.

Tallis stands out pre-eminent among the early Church composers, and, indeed, has been generally called the father of English music. The date of his birth is not known, but as he was organist and composer to an important monastery at the time of its dissolution in 1540, it is not only evident that he must have been born early in the century, but that his genius was decidedly precocious. Some authorities give the date as about 1529; Grove's Dictionary, on the other hand, as supposedly in the second decade of the century: this seems more probable, as the former would have found him holding such a conspicuous appointment at the age of eleven. It is a fact of much significance that he was a prominent composer before the Reformation, and thus a descendant of the ancient school of English Church music, pure and unalloyed.

His earliest compositions were, of course, written to Latin words, and the publication of his motets in that language in 1575, more than thirty years after its suppression, suggests that the call of his early training and associations was greater than he could resist, for it must be borne in mind that those were days of fierce bigotry, and many had been undone for acts much less provocative of "suspicion."

Indeed, of all the immediate changes in the Church services effected under Henry VIII., perhaps the most important, after those asserting severance from Rome, was the substitution of English in place of Latin in their administration, and on no point were the reformers more jealous, since it implied complete freedom from outside interference and, above all, that of the Pope.

That Tallis escaped trouble on this occasion shews that he was a decidedly fortunate, or as some unkind critics suggest, a decidedly adroit being. They even go to the length of comparing him to the "Vicar of Bray," because of the continuity of his employment in the Church during four reigns, in which such diverging views were inculcated and, outwardly at least, demanded of acceptance. Thus Henry VIII., who broke the Roman connection, but generally upheld its doctrines; Edward VI., who repudiated them; Mary, who not only enforced them, but restored, as far as she was able, the *status quo* before the act of separation from Rome; and Elizabeth, who reverted, practically, to the position as it was at the death of her father, additional alterations in the liturgy excepted.

The "Vicar of Bray" theory seems to me to be quite easy of demolition. With regard to King Henry and Queen Elizabeth, they were, both, skilled musicians and perfectly capable to appreciate the genius of Tallis in its highest aspects, and were, therefore, little likely to rid the Church of so brilliant an ornament.

In the intervening reigns, it seems only natural to suppose that many who still adhered to their Catholic principles, while bowing to the inevitable for the time being, and, knowing the precarious state of the health of the young Prince, foresaw the probable accession of Queen Mary and the consequent restoration of the ancient Church. Of these, Tallis may have been one.

On the actual accession their hopes seemed justified to the fullest extent, and only the fact of the Queen proving childless rendered them futile.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to say with any approach to exactitude what were, precisely, the immediate changes in the forms of the Church services insisted on at the moment of King Henry's rebellion against Papal supremacy. It is, however, only natural to assume that all reference to that supremacy would be eliminated, and that the use of the English language would be insisted upon, so as to mark, once and for all time, the absolutely irrevocable nature of the act.

The state of affairs in the Church must have been absolutely chaotic, what with those who, while remaining Catholic in principle, were willing to accept such changes as were not inconsistent with their faith, and others who were anti-Catholic by conviction and desirous of banishing all traces of the past, so far as it might be possible.

It was to these that the young King extended his sympathy and help, on his accession to the throne.

His death after a short reign and the consequent accession of Queen Mary, simply made "confusion worse confounded." Although strenuous in her methods, she had not time to achieve what she had at heart, and her death put an end for ever to the hopes of the extreme Catholic party. However much had been carried out that Queen Elizabeth at once settled herself to undo, and thus prolonged, perhaps inevitably, the crisis through which the Church was passing.

It is not difficult to imagine the delicate position in which musicians found themselves at various times during this crucial period. Let me quote Mr. Myles B. Foster in his interesting book, "Anthems and Anthem Composers"[14]: "Can we not picture the puzzled state of these poor composers, never knowing whether, by setting their music to the new English words, they would be burned alive, or, by using the old Latin ones, they would be hanged!"

With the accession of Queen Elizabeth these critical times may be said to have become a thing of the past – at least for the musician. The policy of the wonderful Queen was based on compromise, by which she endeavoured to so broaden the lines of the Church as to make it possible for the two factions to remain within its boundaries. So far as the extremists on either side are concerned, the idea was doomed to failure, but while she lived she pursued the policy with characteristic pertinacity, and unenviable was the fate of the too-reforming Bishop who encountered her displeasure. The state of the Church of England to-day seems, at once, a tribute to her genius and foresight, for while the trend

[14] Novello & Co.

of feeling and opinion certainly continued to move in the direction of Protestantism, the opposing principles never became quite extinct.[15]

It was, undoubtedly, under circumstances of great uncertainty that Tallis was called upon to write music for a reformed liturgy that was at once novel and, probably, seeing his early training, distasteful to him. How he met the emergency is evident to-day, for his "Preces and Responses" not only remain in use, but are a priceless possession of the English Church. On the greatness of Tallis as a composer it is needless to insist, for it has been universally acknowledged. His contrapuntal skill was amazing, his fertility and originality equally so, and everything he wrote bears the impress of a nobility of mind difficult of description. That he remained in high favour with the Queen until his death, is shewn by the grants of land and other proofs of her regard that she bestowed on him. A complete list of his compositions (so far as can be known) is given in Grove's "Dictionary of Music and Musicians," and is a striking proof of his immense activity.

To secular music he seems to have been quite indifferent, for, to all appearances, he wrote little or none.

He died in 1585 when, probably, about seventy years of age, and was buried in the parish church of Greenwich. We have other of the early English musicians to deal with, but none, I think, of such unique interest, as he was the first of whom we have any reliable record, the works of his predecessors having been literally *burnt* out of existence.

WILLIAM BYRD

Date of Byrd's birth unknown – Pupil of Tallis – Strict Catholic, yet employed in the English Church – Explanation – Queen Elizabeth's protection – Organist of Lincoln Cathedral – Member of the Chapel Royal – Granted sole privilege of publishing music in conjunction with Tallis – Greatness as composer, both sacred and secular music – His masses – His character – His death.

The date of the birth of this composer is quite unknown. Many speculations have been made on the subject, but they are purely conjectural. It seems certain, however, that he was born late in the first half of the sixteenth century, and thus at the time of the highest development of the ancient English ecclesiastical school of music. He had the inestimable privilege of being a pupil of Tallis, and remained his friend and colleague until the death of the latter dissolved the connection in 1585.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, he sturdily refused to change his religious views at the capricious behests of any monarch, and, strange to say, he does not seem to have suffered for his constancy materially, for he continued in official employment and the favour of Elizabeth as long as the Queen lived.

This fact has often evoked expression of astonishment, and has been cited as a proof, not only of the unstable position in the Church itself, but of instability in the character of its rulers.

It seems to me to be simply one more proof of the extraordinary tenacity with which Queen Elizabeth held to her policy of trusting to the influence of time to gradually moderate opposing views, and ultimately cement them in one creed which should embody the essential beliefs of both.

In any case, two things are known, that his services were retained, and that he adhered to the use of Latin for his sacred music. This, of course, means that either none of his music was sung

[15] Since the above was written I read in the *Evening News*, November 24, 1911, the following words from a lecture delivered by the Dean of St. Paul's:"In its present state" (the Church of England) "it was the product of a political compromise, which was so framed as to include Catholics who would renounce the Pope, and Puritans who were not anarchistic on principle. It was officially Protestant and disliked the name. Ever since the Reformation the reformed churches had been in a state of uncertainty, like a Dotheboys Hall after it had expelled its Squeers, full of earnestness and deep conviction, but undecided as to what kind of church they wanted, how it ought to be governed, what the conditions of membership ought to be and where the seat of authority should reside."

in the Church, or that the occasional use of Latin for singing was permitted. The latter, I think, extremely probable, at least in the early years of the Reformation. He was appointed organist of Lincoln Cathedral in 1563, and in 1569 became a member of the Chapel Royal. In 1575 he published, in conjunction with Tallis, a collection of motets, which was dedicated to the Queen. It may be noted that it was printed by one Vautrollier, although the two composers had recently acquired the right of exclusively printing music for twenty-one years. It may be assumed that they sub-let the privilege, for it is known that after the death of Tallis, Byrd became sole possessor of the monopoly. This collection was entitled "Cantiones, quæ ab argumento sacræ vocantar, quinque et sex partum." Unlike Tallis, he did not confine his energies to sacred music, but wrote much for the virginals, as well as some beautiful madrigals.

In 1591 was issued his "Liber secundus Sacrarum Cantionum."

By this time Byrd was universally recognised as the greatest English musician of his time, and his fame had spread to the Continent. The death of Tallis had left him absolutely without a rival. There is plenty of evidence proving Queen Elizabeth's regard for him. In fact, it was from a pecuniary point of view, somewhat embarrassing to him, as it must be admitted that the great Queen was exacting of service, and somewhat parsimonious in the paying for it. The many references to him made by contemporary writers, such as "homo memorabilis," "the most celebrated musician of the English nation," and "one of the most famous musicians that ever were in this land," all go to shew that his name was held in the highest esteem.

The year 1607 witnessed the production of the "Gradualia"; this contained music for the complete ecclesiastical year of the Catholic Church. A striking example of his fearlessness!

The work by which he is best known to the general public to-day is the ever popular "Non nobis Domine," which, although written in the severe style of canon form, is at once beautiful and touching in its extraordinary expression of reverence. The highest achievements of William Byrd were the Masses in three, four and five parts.

In these works his genius is displayed to its fullest extent and in its most splendid guise.

The period is declared by so great an authority as W. S. Rockstro (Grove's Dictionary) to be the greatest in the history of Mass music, and Byrd's Mass in five parts is one of the most splendid that were written during that memorable time.

In personal character William Byrd was a decidedly interesting man. At a time when what may be termed opportunism was the evident thing that made for success, he refused to be influenced by it, and steadfastly declined to abate by jot or tittle his allegiance to the Catholic Church in its integrity, and it is an extraordinary proof of the attraction of his forceful character that, notwithstanding this fact, so menacing to his personal safety, he not only retained the Queen's favour during her lifetime, but seems to have held a firm grip on all the benefactions she bestowed on him up to the day of his death.

That this was not easy to accomplish is shown by the legal actions in which he became involved, the principal one being Shelley v. Byrd, upon whose issue depended his retention of Stondon Place, a property granted to him by Elizabeth. It continued for some years, and would seem to have ended in a form of compromise. It is not without interest that the plaintiff in the case was an ancestress of no less a personage than the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. However, Byrd remained in possession, and there is reason to believe that he died there and was buried in the Parish Church, although there are no records to bear out the supposition. His death took place in 1623, when he must have been at an advanced age.

ORLANDO GIBBONS

Orlando Gibbons, one of a large family of musicians – Born in a time of transition from rigidity of ancient ecclesiastical music – Instrumentation coming into existence – Protest by Byrd – Contrast of the two composers – The age one in which freedom of thought springing up in all directions – Gibbons eager to take advantage of it – The result of the substitution of English for Latin in the Church – His eminence as writer of secular music – His death.

The youngest son in a family of musicians, Orlando Gibbons is a particularly interesting subject for study, not only on account of his genius, but for the fact that he became the most distinguished living composer at a time that was, essentially, one of transition. The old order was giving place to the new.

The rigid severity of the ancient Catholic Church music was gradually yielding to the attractions of greater warmth of feeling, added grace of melody and more freedom in expression. Instrumental music was lifting its head, and instruments other than the organ, the ever accepted aid to the rites of the Church, were invading the sacred precincts. Now, there are always men who are constitutionally averse to change, and of these was the great, but not too amiable, Mr. William Byrd. We can, therefore, quite appreciate his feelings on this particular innovation and understand the frame of mind in which he writes, in a preface to his "Songs of Sadness," thus: "There is no music of instruments whatever to be compared to the voyces of men, when they are good, well-sorted and ordered."

Orlando Gibbons was the impersonator of the new spirit; William Byrd was the jealous guardian of the old. One can, then, easily imagine the indignation with which such innovations would be met, and the accumulated wrath that must have burnt at his heart as he saw the repeated and successful attacks on all that he regarded as sacred. Up to this time all musical instruments, with the exception of the organ, had been associated with dancing and the outdoor amusements of the common people, and since many of these were of a kind far removed from religious exercise, it is only rational to suppose that such a man as Byrd would view with repugnance their introduction into the Church's service. The fact, too, must be taken into consideration that at the time of this particular innovation he was fairly advanced in years, and, therefore, with a disposition less adaptable than that of the young and ardent musician who was destined to leave behind him an imperishable name in the hierarchy of the world's greatest musicians.

Born about forty years after the birth of Byrd, Orlando Gibbons yet but survived him by two, being one of that long list of composers who have died young and whose premature death has robbed the world of who can tell how many masterpieces! His music was as distinct an advance on that of Byrd, as Byrd's was on that of Tallis.

The age was one in which the bonds, by which intellectual effort had been tethered, were being rapidly loosed or broken, and it is only natural that a young and greatly gifted man like Orlando Gibbons would revel in the sense of freedom from which the older one would shrink with something akin to horror.

He was thus fortunate to be born in such an era – an era made for ever memorable by the works of two of the greatest geniuses the world has possessed, William Shakespeare and Francis Bacon – and endowed with faculties that enabled him to grasp the opportunities it held out to him.

The substitution of English for Latin in the Church was, in itself, an event of striking importance to the composer, but, above all, the translation of the Bible into the vulgar tongue placed at his disposition the sources of limitless inspiration.

That Orlando Gibbons was quick to take advantage of the golden opportunity is proved by the list of superb anthems he bequeathed to the English Church. It includes such glorious examples as

those entitled "Hosanna," "O clap your hands" and "This is the record of John." Of other forms of sacred music, the service in the key of F is perhaps his most notable achievement.

He was also eminent as a composer of secular music, and was equalled by few and excelled by none as a writer of madrigals. His music for the viols and virginals not only emphasises the scope of his genius, but marks a veritable epoch in the history of instrumental music. So far did his originality carry him, that some of it might even be attributed to Bach or Handel, without violence to our sense of proportion. He died at Canterbury in 1625, the forty-second year of his age.

HENRY PURCELL

Purcell, the last of the great early English musicians – His genius – Supremacy of the foreign musicians in England – His short life – His originality – His power of invention – A pioneer – His harmony – His precocity – Handel – An irrepressible conjecture – A comparison – Purcell enters the Chapel Royal – Becomes Organist of Westminster Abbey – Dr. John Blow – Purcell as composer of dramatic music – Te Deum and Jubilate for St. Cecilia's Day – His death and epitaph.

With Henry Purcell we come to the last and greatest of the early English composers.

Born before the traditions and influence of the ancient school of ecclesiastical music had actually died out, and yet after other and conflicting influences had become supreme, he had the extraordinary power that enabled him to seize on what was best in either and blend them in a style that, had there been successors of sufficient genius and independence of thought, might have proved the foundation of a school of English music sufficiently elastic to encourage every possible development and yet remaining absolutely national in character.

Unfortunately, he had no such successors, and foreign musicians soon asserted that supremacy in the country they have held ever since, until the memorable events of the last decade sounded its death knell.

The Writing on the Wall has appeared. Many think they have read it.

Purcell was one more of that large number of men of genius who have died in early manhood. This fate seems to have been peculiarly conspicuous among musicians and poets. To cite only a few: Purcell, Mozart and Mendelssohn; Shelley, Keats and Chatterton. The list could, alas, be largely extended.

It may be truly said that, seeing how short his life was, his achievements were amazing, both in extent and significance. He advanced the art of music in every direction, to such a degree indeed, that one can only regard his latest works with astonishment at their modernity.

Such combinations of voices and instruments as had hitherto been tried were quite primitive in character, and were simply confined to the support of the voice parts. The illuminating genius of Purcell, however, enabled him to see, even if dimly, the infinite possibilities the combination held out to the composer, and he set himself to give effect to it. The crude efforts of his predecessors became in his hands a tremendous artistic force, and when he died the way had been paved for Handel and other of his illustrious successors. The same originality is displayed in his harmonies. He cast off all the shackles of convention and indulged in progressions and discords that would, doubtless, have shocked the earlier writers. Many of his cadences[16] are altogether too discordant for modern ears. In fact, the extreme harshness of some of them is rather calculated to make one doubt their authenticity. But it is, nevertheless, perhaps in his harmony and its extraordinary beauty that his genius is most conspicuously displayed.[17]

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[16] A cadence is the end of a musical phrase.

[17] A tablet to his memory in Westminster records, in touching language, that he "has gone to that Blessed Place, where only his

His melodies were bold and unconventional to the point, as regards rhythm, of seeming wilfulness on occasion. Yet many were lovely and full of intense feeling, and all characterised by a genius at once independent and conscious of its power.

His precocity was amazing, even in the history of an art that has produced so many extraordinary specimens of this particular gift.

Some of his anthems were written while still a chorister boy, and his earliest essays in dramatic music at the age of fourteen.

That in some of his later works in which voices were combined with organ and orchestra, he anticipated Handelian effects is undoubted, and that the great German master was influenced by them, I think, equally so.

If an account of the orchestra with which he had to deal would read strangely at the present time, it is at least not without interest to think that, even so tremendous a genius as Handel made little advance on it. It has been shewn elsewhere that the genesis of the modern orchestra is of a later date.

Handel was only ten years of age when Purcell died.

It is an irrepressible conjecture of what might have been, if the latter had lived thirty years longer. He then would have failed to reach the age at which the former died. The acting and re-acting of the genius of each one on the other might have produced results of profound importance to English music – might, indeed, have saved it.

Fate, however, on this occasion, probably displayed more kindness than is usually attributed to her. The contest would have proved unequal.

The great German genius, giant in body, overwhelming in energy and ever thirsting for new worlds to conquer (and succeeding), would have been no fitting opponent to the other, frail in physique and already a prey to the terrible disease that has cut off, prematurely, the lives of such countless thousands of men whose possibilities of attainment were barely given time to indicate.[18]

Purcell entered the choir of the Chapel Royal at the age of six, and while there became acquainted, in the best of all possible ways, with such of the masterpieces of the ancient English school as had escaped destruction, by taking part in their performance. At the age of eighteen[19] he became organist of Westminster Abbey, by the voluntary act of Dr. John Blow, who relinquished the post in favour of his illustrious pupil. This fact is immensely suggestive. It shews that not only was his genius universally recognised, but that his personality was already sufficiently developed to justify his appointment to the most important position to which any musician could attain.

Many theories have been ventilated as to Dr. Blow's action on this occasion, some suggesting that, so far from being a voluntary act, he was dismissed. This seems to me to be without the least justification, seeing that he was re-appointed after Purcell's death. At this early age, too, Purcell seems to have been attracted by the influence of the theatre, as records shew that he was constantly writing music for the stage.

That his genius for this class of composition was, in every respect, equal to that he displayed in any other field open to him, is shewn by his music to "Dido and Æneas," which was not only masterly, but as much in advance of anything that had preceded it, as most of his other work proved to be. The same can be said of his music to "King Arthur," in which he collaborated with Dryden.

If the word "opera," in its modern significance, can scarcely be applied to it, there is not the slightest doubt that the genius was there to give inspiration and guidance to those who were to come after him.

He wrote upwards of twenty works of this kind. For some years he was a "composer to their Majesties," and in fulfilment of his duties in this connection wrote many odes for use on official

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harmony can be exceeded."

[18] He died of consumption.

[19] There is a conflict of authorities on this point, but it may be taken for granted that he was but little, if any, older at the time.

occasions. These do not count among his best works. He was a voluminous writer of instrumental music, and his sonatas are in advance of any previously written. He wrote, practically for all instruments then extant, but that by which he is principally known as an instrumental composer is his harpsichord music, this instrument having by this time superseded the virginals.

One of his last, and perhaps the greatest of his works, was the magnificent "Te Deum and Jubilate" for St. Cecilia's Day.

This was for many years sung at the annual Festival of the Sons of the Clergy, but was for some reason or other relinquished in favour of Handel's Dettingen Te Deum. Purcell died when his genius was at the highest point of power and splendour, leaving behind him a name of imperishable memory and a fame that has seldom been eclipsed.

His death took place in 1695, the 37th year of his age. He was buried in Westminster Abbey. Over his grave was inscribed the following epitaph:

Plaudite, felices, superi, tanto hospite, nostris
Præfuerat, vestris addite illa choris:
Invida nec vobis Purcellum terra reproscat.
Questa decus secli, deliciasque breves.
Tam cito decessisse, modo cui singula debet
Musa, prophana suos religiosa suos.
Vivat so vivat, dum vicina organa spirant,
Dumque colet numeris turba canora Deum.

CHAPTER IV
THE DECLINE OF ENGLISH MUSIC

Three principal causes leading to decline – Reformation the principal one – The plain-song and the people – Gradual transition in mode of living – Effect of Calvinistic teaching – Excesses of the Commonwealth soldiery – Facts as to life of Calvin – Effects of change of dynasty – The Stuarts and music – The Restoration and resulting excitement – England rid of the Stuarts – Jonathan Swift a Church dignitary – First appearance of opera in England – Handel and Italian opera – He leaves England – Returns and devotes himself to oratorio – Effect on the people – Its influence on native composers – Ill-effects of imitation – Necessity of relying on native inspiration – Vincent Novello – Novello and Company – Services to English music – Revival – The Wesleys, Samuel and Samuel Sebastian – Conclusion.

The three principal causes that led to the decline and practical extinction of English music were the Reformation, the indifference of a foreign Court, and the settlement in England of large numbers of foreign musicians, among whom was one of the greatest musical geniuses of all time, the German, George Frederick Handel. The two latter causes may be said to be the complement one of the other.

Of these three hostile influences, the Reformation and all that it involved was, overwhelmingly, the most fatal in its effect, for it struck at the root foundation; it killed the very soil that gave birth to the plant. The first blow it inflicted on music – and in those days that meant English music, not as now – and it was a deadly one, was its suppression in the services of the Church. To grasp to the full the significance of this act, one must recall some of the salient features of national life that had existed for centuries.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.