
The Literature of Music

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THE LITERATURE
OF MUSIC

BY

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AUTHOR OF "A MANUAL OF MUSICAL HISTORY"



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THE
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CHAPTER I.

THE LITERATURE OF ANCIENT MUSIC.

THE familiar description of Jubal in the book of Genesis as “the father of all such as handle the harp and organ” is the earliest mention in literature of the art of Music, and many other references in the Bible, chiefly in the Old Testament, will be familiar to every reader.

It will not be supposed that the translations of the names of the different instruments can be accepted as more than approximations. At the time the Authorised Version was made no adequate knowledge of the subject existed, and in many cases no exact equivalent was to be found among the instruments then in use. The difficulty of the investigation

commended it to almost every commentator. Among the most celebrated of these we may mention the learned Benedictine Dom Calmet, in his *Commentaire littéral* (Paris, 1714-20), an enormous work in twenty-six volumes quarto. Another, and an earlier writer, of whom we shall have to speak again, Père Marin Mersenne, possessed more ample qualifications for the task. He projected a commentary on the Book of Genesis—*Quæstiones celeberrimæ in Genesim* (Paris, 1623: folio), with a view of confuting certain objections to the Mosaic Cosmogony. The good father was a man of universal acquirements, but the art of Music was his delight, and the mention of Jubal an opportunity which was irresistible. It served as the text for a disquisition, not only on the music of the Hebrews, but also of the Greeks, and even of the Moderns. It extends to one hundred pages folio, with a supplement of thirty-one pages. With so long a commentary on a single text, it is not surprising that the author found himself compelled to bring his work to a conclusion at the end of the sixth chapter, having already occupied one thousand one hundred and seventy-five pages!

It cannot be said that the labours of

these, and of many other earnest workers in the same field, threw much light on the subject of Jewish music ; nor were the professed historians of Music much more fortunate. Each of them was of course bound to begin at the earliest times, and to say all that he knew,—and much that he imagined,—on the music of the Hebrews. In truth the requisite materials were not available, nor did it occur to any one that the Jews in 'all probability acquired whatever knowledge of the arts they possessed during their sojourn of three hundred years in the land of Egypt ; nor would this have appreciably advanced the matter, as information about the music of Egypt was equally wanting.

Strange to say, when the first piece of solid information was brought to light, the learned public received it with scorn. The well-known traveller Bruce communicated to Dr. Burney a copy of a painting of an Egyptian harp which he claimed to have discovered in an ancient tomb. It was reproduced in the first volume of Burney's *History*. The instrument approximated so nearly to the modern form that it was believed to have existed only in Bruce's imagination ; subsequent discoveries, however, have proved the absolute correctness of the drawing.

It is well known that when General Bonaparte made his expedition into Egypt, he organised a body of *savants* to investigate the monuments and antiquities of that country. Among these was G. A. Villoteau, a well-qualified musician. The result of his researches will be found in the magnificent work published by the French Government, *La Description de l'Égypte* (Paris, 1809-26 : 20 vols., folio) ; a second edition was published by Pancoucke in octavo, in which form it is more readily to be met with. The articles by Villoteau will be found in vols. vii., viii., xiii., xiv., and were by far the most valuable contributions to the knowledge of the subject up to that date. This was followed in 1836 by the publication of Sir J. Gardner Wilkinson's work on the Ancient Egyptians, better known in the popular edition, which has been reprinted several times, and contains much useful and trustworthy information on the subject of Music in that country.

In the meantime many specimens of Egyptian instruments found their way into museums, and still more numerous representations of them were discovered depicted on the tombs and other buildings of ancient Egypt. In 1847 the world was astonished by the discoveries of Sir A. H.