The evolution of church music

Humphreys Frank Landon
Evolution of Church Music

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To the one
to whom I owe the most
is this least of offerings dedicated
My Father
Preface

It is eminently appropriate that the story of the Evolution of Music should be written by a clergyman. A retrospect which reaches back no farther in the land from which we derive both our language and our literature than the third decade of the thirteenth century will discover that the first English school of music of which any trace has been discovered, was founded about that time by John of Fornsete, a monk attached to the famous monastery at Reading, in Berkshire. Its records still survive, and the curious scholar may find them in a manuscript bearing date 1226, which is known as the Reading MS., and which is among the treasures of the British Museum.*

It is a suggestive picture which such a fact calls up. Dr. Jessup has shown, in his charming volume on the monastic life of

* Harl. MS., No. 978.
England in those times, how in days of warfare and unrest the cloister was the refuge of the student and the artist. Everything that is best that has survived those days reveals how men of native refinement and of cultivated taste found in such retreats the opportunity for the cultivation of painting, letters, and music. John Henry Newman, in his memorable sermon on St. Andrew, reminds us that the author of the present system of musical notation is unknown, but the history of music leaves little reason to doubt that it was the invention of an ecclesiastic. There were devout men, like David long before them, who found in music the most adequate expression of their deepest emotions; and the history of music may be said, in one aspect of it, to be almost a history of religion.

We go back to the earliest beginnings in that history, and we find that music is forever associated with two conspicuous elements of a nation's life—war and worship. Indeed, as in the case of Israel in its wanderings, the two were, in a