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Dudley Buck**

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Author: Dudley Buck

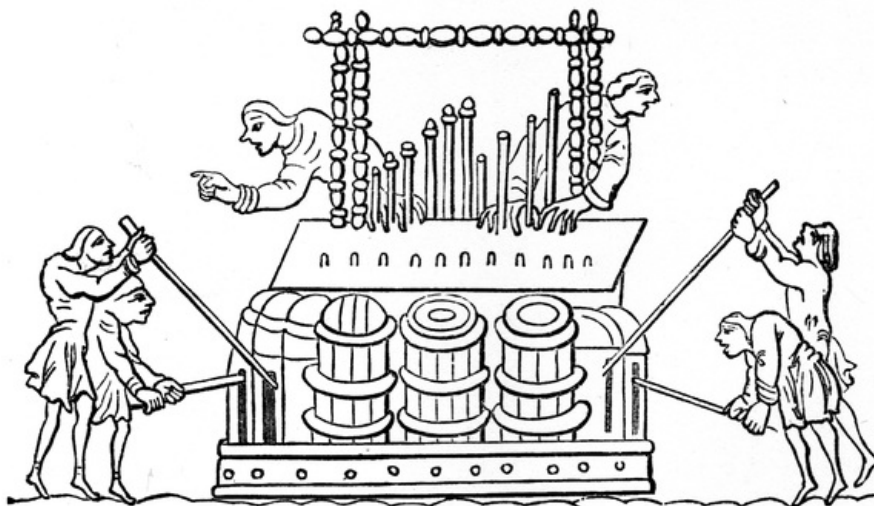
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HISTORY ***

**THE INFLUENCE OF THE ORGAN
IN HISTORY.**



**PNEUMATIC ORGAN FROM A MS. PSALTER OF EADWINE IN
THE LIBRARY OF TRINITY COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE.**

THE INFLUENCE OF THE ORGAN IN HISTORY.

Inaugural Lecture of the Department of the Organ in the College of Music of Boston University

BY

DUDLEY BUCK.

PROFESSOR AND LECTURER OF THE DEPARTMENT.

New Edition, with Illustrations.

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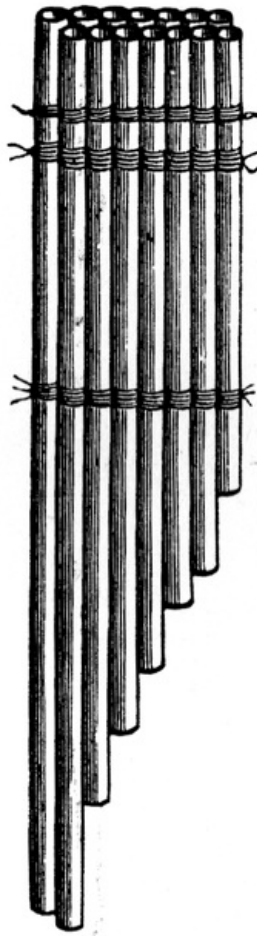
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SECTION I.



**PERUVIAN PAN'S PIPES,
DOUBLE SET. FROM A
TOMB IN AFRICA.**

THE INFLUENCE OF THE ORGAN IN HISTORY.

SECTION I.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—

It having become my duty to deliver this, the inaugural lecture of the organ department attached to this institution, I have found myself considerably embarrassed as to choice of subjects.

The trouble lay in the quantity of material at hand, and not in any lack of it.

The history of the Organ runs back so far into the centuries, that no matter what point one might select for examination, it can scarcely be brought into the scope of a lecture except in a very empty and skeleton form. You will bear with me, then, for the superficial manner in which I shall be forced to treat many important points. As many of those present do not propose to make a

THE INFLUENCE OF THE ORGAN IN HISTORY,

with a glance at the "schools of playing" thus created.

The Organ is called the "king of instruments."

This phrase has been used so often that it has become decidedly well worn and trite. None the less, however, is the expression full of significance; and to what an extent (especially in a historical sense) is known to but comparatively few persons, among whom I fear far too few organists would be found.

To bring up some of these neglected facts; to examine them in their historical and theoretical bearing, as well as in practice; to thus create a greater love for and appreciation of the instrument on the part of its students,—to do this, I say, is, if I apprehend it aright, one of the principal objects which the Boston University has had in view in founding this department.

The organ, then, is called the "king of instruments."

If we look at the phrase a little closer, it will be perceived that the simile is a striking one. A king, in the so-called "good old times of yore," if he were a man of any force of character, generally possessed, along with the divine right theoretical, any quantity of the human power practical. The day of more or less ornamental constitutional figure-heads had not yet arrived.

In other words, the live kings of the past, of the feudal time, moulded to their own tastes and characters their age, their people, or only their court, according to the innate ability they might possess. In turn they were themselves affected, to a degree, by their surroundings, but to a far lesser extent than is the case at this day, the balance of influence remaining largely in their favour. [Pg 13]

I will endeavour to show that among musical instruments this "kingship," as regards the organ, held good in a parallel way,—that by its own nature as to construction, by its very faults and weaknesses, by the mission it was called upon to fulfil, it did, in very fact, long reign supreme as king of instruments.

Absolute power, as represented by a monarch, became narrowed down, in the lapse of centuries, by external forces working out their own independence, thus checking and limiting this absolutism. Here, too, I will endeavour to draw a parallel, and show that as years rolled on, the influence of the organ upon music in the abstract diminished. The process became inverted, and music began to affect the organ, rather than the organ it. To this we owe the vast improvements in the construction of the instrument, the many additions of new qualities of tone, and numberless new inventions of value still going on in our day, with a rapidity difficult to keep pace with. To fairly appreciate this past or present relation of things, it becomes necessary to take a hasty and necessarily superficial glance backward at the origin of the organ,—its invention and development.

All writers attribute the origin of the organ to that simplest as well as most ancient of musical instruments, called by the Greeks the "pipes of Pan,"—Pan, in the ancient mythology, being the god of the woods and groves. It consisted of a few hollow reeds of various lengths, securely bound together, and blown by the lips. We still occasionally see and hear this instrument in our streets, performed upon by those nomadic "sons of art," the organ-grinders. The performer being obliged to move his head continually from side to side, an unpleasant and fatiguing operation, soon led to an attempt to blow these tubes artificially. From this resulted the placing of the pipes upon a small wind-chest, and the addition of a primitive bellows, the whole being easily carried and operated by one performer. Of particular value in the establishment of this historical fact was the discovery, in Syria, among some ancient ruins, of a sculptured figure playing on such an instrument. Although much mutilated, all the more important parts were still intact. This interesting relic was brought to England about the year 1853. [Pg 14]

It should be mentioned here, that the word "organ," not unfrequently found in the Bible, should not be supposed to refer to any such instrument as the name would suggest to our minds. Both with the Greeks and Romans the term translated "organ" simply meant an "instrument,"—and that of any kind, but with usage apparently favouring its application to musical instruments.

Upon the application of the bellows to supply wind, instead of the human lungs, the fingers were used to stop the pipes, and thus prevent their sounding all at once, which it is evident they would have done, standing on a simple wind-chest, which was filled by the bellows. As the number of pipes was gradually increased, the difficulty of managing them by hand of course became greater and greater. This in time led to the invention of the pallet, or valve, to control the admission of wind to each pipe, and by the close of the eleventh century we find it chronicled that there existed at Magdeburg an organ with a *key-board* comprising sixteen keys. From this time the name of the instrument begins to correspond with our modern idea of the same; its invention was a realized fact, although but a germ of that development which has since raised organ-building to its artistic importance. It must be borne in mind that the pedal organ, with its keys for the feet, was a much later invention. Meantime, the first keys made use of measured from three to five inches and a half wide. Consequently, the title of the performer on this instrument, in the eleventh century, was not that of organ-*player*, but organ-*beater*, the keys being struck by the [Pg 15]

fist, which was protected by a heavy glove. There was, it must be remembered, but one rank of pipes, and these could seldom, if ever, have been in tune, from the fact that they had no means of regulating the wind pressure; while in organs of later date, and at the present day, an even wind is secured principally by weights placed upon the bellows, and the creation of a reservoir of compressed air. At this early time the wind supply was furnished by the common bellows as used by blacksmiths. Thus the supply and consequent pressure of the wind would necessarily be in direct proportion to the muscle or activity of the blowers.

While the various discoveries and improvements in organs of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were slowly progressing, almost the only vocal music the world knew were the Gregorian tones, or plain song of the Early Church. Harmony was entirely unknown, and indeed remained so for many a long year in anything like our modern significance. It is not my purpose here to enter into even a partial examination of the parallel progress of melody and harmony at this age of the world. You have already heard it treated by an abler pen than mine; nor does it properly belong to this department, except in so far as it becomes necessary to note any decided influence exerted by the one upon the other. This influence, as exerted by the organ upon Church music, did not begin as early as might be supposed. Rimbault, in his work on the "History of the Organ" (which I shall have occasion frequently to quote), states that "even in the thirteenth century, the priests of both the Greek and Roman Churches thought the use of organs in divine service scandalous and profane. They preferred rendering divine worship as simple as possible, in order to distinguish it from that of the Jews and Pagans. Even to this day the Greek Church does not tolerate the use of organs in their public services. Notwithstanding these opinions, the use of organs, and even other instruments, gradually became almost universal, not only in great churches, but in those of monasteries, convents, and small towns. The historians of this era celebrate several monks distinguished for the art of playing on the organ. For some time, however, organs were not used in the ordinary celebration of the offices, but only on great feasts and solemn occasions. These first monastic and conventual organs were very small, being only used to play the melody of the plain song in unison with the voices."

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In spite of the disrepute into which the whole monastic system fell, there is no question but that the monks and friars were the great conservators and preservers of all the fine arts, and even mechanics, during the troubled times of the Middle Ages. As the prejudice against the employment of instrumental music in the church services began to disappear, nothing was more natural than that the monks, having both the leisure and pecuniary means, and containing among their number the best educated men of the day, should turn their attention to organ-building, animated by the same spirit which led them to decorate and ornament their churches and monasteries. Thus we find that it is to them we owe the improvement of the hitherto clumsy keyboard, extending its compass both upward and downward to the extent of some three octaves, and so reduced both fall and breadth of the keys that they could be pressed down by the fingers, instead of struck by the fist; certainly no small improvement. The first organ possessing keys to give the chromatic tones or semitones was built by a priest—Nicholas Faber by name—about 1360.

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It now behoves us to glance for a moment at the influence which the organ already began to exert upon music, or the art composition, and to show how the instrument became to show proofs of that right to the title, "king of instruments," in the sense I have adopted. It must be kept in mind that the veriest twilight dawn of the knowledge of harmony had scarcely begun. Yet what can be conceived more natural, than that the organist of that day, even, should stumble on the fact that different tones in conjunction were more agreeable to the ear than the bare unison, which was at first the only accompaniment of the choral song? This being noted, the next logical step was to try and produce the same approved effect with the voices themselves. In the "*History of the Modern Music of Western Europe*," by Kiesewetter, the following passage occurs. He is not speaking of the organ, but of the origin and development of the science of harmony.

He says: "The union of different human voices which now occurred to their thoughts (the early harmonists), was an imitation not altogether happy, perhaps, of that which in various instances *they had discovered with the organ!*" Here the fact that the organ was even then beginning to assert itself, to mould the minds of the early writers, in fact, to claim its royal dues, is pretty conclusively shown.

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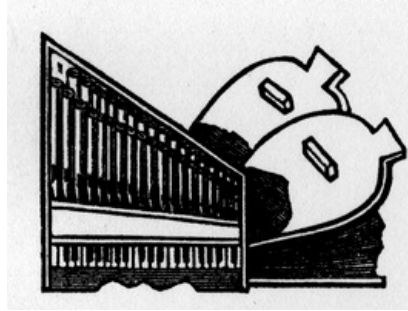
Time would altogether fail me in the scope that this lecture must necessarily occupy, to trace down this influence, once established, through the long cycle of years that followed; the theoretic science and practical application keeping pace with the mechanical development, until it found its full culmination and glory in the new-born science of Counterpoint. This science, which has given polish to the mightiest thoughts of the greatest masters of our art (and in totally different departments than mere organ-playing),—a science, without a satisfactory knowledge of which no man can call himself a thoroughly educated musician,—sprang from just this source.

How often we hear the remark that contrapuntal treatment is best suited to the organ! True; but how many reflect that the organ, so to speak, first *dictated* counterpoint to the world? An influence, which (the free forms being derived from the stricter) is carried clear down into the realm of Italian opera, *i.e.*, when it is good of its kind. Is not, then, this influence, which the organ has indisputably exerted upon not merely its own literature, but the musical literature at large, an all-sufficient proof of its right to the royal title? It must be borne in mind that this absolutism, as in matters political (to carry out the simile), was possible at this stage of the world in matters musical, because not even the harpsichord, clavichord, spinet, or any of those presentiments of the modern pianoforte, by whatever name they were called, had as yet made their appearance.

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The organ was, for the time, the sole keyed instrument.

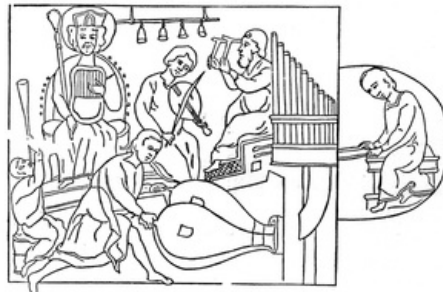
In view of these facts, it seems to me that it may be justly claimed that the title "king of instruments" should be based on far nobler and more historic grounds than is usually done, and that we should not content ourselves with explaining this phrase as arising from the circumstances that it is the instrument which can, of its own resources, make the loudest noise!



**EARLY FORM OF THE
REGALS. FROM LUCINIUS'
MUSURGIA, SEN PRAXIS
MUSICÆ. 1536.**

SECTION II.

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**FROM GORI'S THESAURUS
DIPTYCHORUM. SAID TO BE
FROM AN ANCIENT MS. OF THE
TIME OF CHARLEMAGNE.**

SECTION II.

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The organ nomenclature has, as is the way of the world, changed somewhat from age to age. In accounts of the old English organ, we frequently find this and that church being referred to as possessing a "payre of organs." This has been variously interpreted, some supposing it to refer to organs of two manuals, which explanation seems natural enough; but the best authorities explain it as meaning an organ which possesses more than one rank of pipes, or more than one stop. Rimbault, who takes this view, says the expression is to be regarded as a phrase of nearly obsolete English, and to be taken in the same sense as we still sometimes say "a pair of stairs," instead of a "flight of stairs." One proof of this interpretation that he cites is interesting. During the great Cromwellian rebellion, and the rule of the Roundheads in England, a great many organs were destroyed by the soldiery, who considered them a relic of Popery. At this time, a certain Mr. Pepys, whose diary is still extant, travelled about considerably and interested himself in the organ, as well as some other matters, as will be seen from the following extract from the aforesaid diary. The point to us (although by no means the only one to him) lies in the fact that he uses the words "the organ" and the "pair of organs" as evidently, synonymous. He writes as follows:—

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April 5, 1667. "*To Hackney: where good beef tongue, and things to eat and drink, and very merry, the weather being mighty pleasant; and here I was told, that at their church they have a fair PAIR OF ORGANS, which play while the people sing, which I am mighty glad of wishing the like at our church at London, and would give £50 towards it.*"

April 21, 1667. "*To Hackney church, where very full, and found much difficulty to get pews. I offered the sexton money, and he could not help me.... That which I chiefly went to see was the young ladies of the schools, whereof there is great store, very pretty" (you see how history repeats itself); "and ALSO the ORGAN, which is handsome and tunes the psalms, and plays with the people; which is mighty pretty, and makes me mighty earnest to have a pair at our church, I having almost a mind to give them a pair, if they would settle a maintenance on them for it.*"

Mr. Pepys' heart was evidently in the right place, and the thought of having the church provide a fund for the proper tuning and repair of the organ, not only sensible, but, to quote his own words, "a mighty pretty" idea.

The invention of the pedal key-board, that most important and characteristic part of the organ, seems to have occurred about the beginning of the fourteenth century. There is no reliable account of who first made this addition, it being claimed by various parties. The sixteenth century was the period when the arts of sculpture, painting, and architecture had gained what might almost be termed a modern artistic polish, in not a few instances, indeed, surpassing all that the moderns have accomplished. The early school of church painters had become modified. Grace and relative refinement had largely taken the place of the early stiffness of design and execution, and in sculpture and architecture were witnessed many of the results which are still the wonder of the world. With this refinement came a taste for luxury and a love of ornament which in the seventeenth and early part of the eighteenth century had extended to and affected organ-building, at least externally.

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Seidel, in his work on the organ, gives this excellent account of the tendency referred to:—

"At this time, great industry and expense was bestowed upon the external decoration of the organ. The entire case was ornamented with statues, heads of angels, vases, foliage, and even figures of animals. Sometimes the front pipes were painted with grotesque figures, and the lips of the pipes made to resemble lions' jaws. They went further, and threw away the money, which might have been expended in a worthier manner, on the display of the most tasteless and absurd tricks of art, degrading thereby—doubtless unintentionally—a noble instrument, intended for sacred purposes, into a *raree-show*. Among these ornaments, the figures of angels played a very conspicuous part; trumpets were placed in their hands, which by means of mechanism could be moved to and from the mouth. Carillons (bells) too, and kettle-drums, were performed upon by the movable arms of angels." (Think of an angel playing upon a kettle-drum!). "In the midst of this heavenly host, sometimes a gigantic angel would be exhibited hovering in a 'glory' over the organ, beating time with his bâton as conductor of this super-earthly orchestra!

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"Under such circumstances, the firmament, of course, could not be dispensed with. So we had wandering suns and moons, and jingling stars in motion. Even the animal kingdom was summoned to activity. Cuckoos, nightingales, and every species of bird, singing, or rather chirping, glorified the festival of Christmas, and announced to the assembled congregation the birth of the Redeemer. Eagles flapped their wings, or flew towards an artificial sun. The climax, however, of all these rarities, was the *fox-tail*. It was intended to frighten away from the organ all such inquisitive persons as had no business near it. Thus, when they pulled out this draw-stop, suddenly a large fox-tail flew into their faces! It is clear that by such absurd practices, curiosity was much rather excited than stopped, and that all this host of moving figures, and their ridiculous jingling, disturbed meditation, excited the curiosity of the congregation, and thus disparaged the sublimity of divine service."

Of course all this nonsense in due time brought its own cure with it. The money expended was diverted towards its worthy and legitimate object, and to-day, in Europe, but few such relics of the past can be found, and those generally in out-of-the-way places. I have myself seen but one organ containing any of these absurdities. That was in a small town of Camin, on the Baltic sea-coast of North Prussia, and I was informed by the old organist (as Seidel says) that these things were *reserved for Christmas and Easter!*

While the power, compass, and variety of organ tone, as well as the mechanism of the instrument, made steady progress throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the science of harmony in the largest sense kept even pace with it, and, perhaps, received even a greater relative development. Meantime, the orchestral instruments of the day had received a fair share of improvement. The harpsichord had been invented, and sufficiently perfected to be worthy of the powers of such a master as Sebastian Bach. With the appearance of this great man the art of counterpoint reached its culmination, never surpassed, if even equalled in isolated instances, by any subsequent writer. His organ compositions cover every resource, both in design and execution, possible to the organ of his day; and yet, I do not think it too much to say that, had Bach never written a single organ piece, his claims for recognition as a great composer would remain substantially the same. His greatest works are to be found among his vocal and orchestral writings. Let us examine for a moment the reason for this, and of the influence of the "king of instruments" upon musical composition at this time.

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We have seen that contrapuntal treatment, so-called, owed its origin to the nature of the organ. Vocal music, at the time of which we speak, felt the same influence and followed the same form. Now, if we open one of the vocal and orchestral scores of Bach, we shall see that while he gives the instruments more freedom than his predecessors, in consequence of their largely increased powers and the proportional increased ability of the executants of his day, yet the contrapuntal influence is everywhere visible. It was the period of strict form. As we count back such cycles, it was but a relatively short time since music had been "without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep," artistically speaking. Music was a serious matter. They revelled in fugue, and even danced contrapuntally. Although not a direct influence, perhaps, is not this state of things, after all, a sufficient proof of the absolutism of the organ in a derived manner,—the regal sway of the king of instruments at this period? Bach breathed new life into these dry and purely scientific forms, and it is his greatest glory that in many, if not all, of his profoundest works, his genius enabled him to unite the emotional and æsthetic element with the purely

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intellectual and scientific.

While the improvement of the organ, as respects both tone, mechanism and general capabilities, continued, and still continues at the present day, it is noteworthy that from the time of Bach, of all others, the influence of the organ upon music at large began to diminish. From this point we have to consider the decline of this influence, showing that music began to emancipate itself, each instrument claiming and receiving its own especial rights and treatment, long before a similar dawn of liberty began in the political world. Two reasons conduced to this change.

First, the requirements of music, which found no prototype in the organ of that day. As the instruments were then built, they possessed but little variety of tone, the swelling or diminishing of which was an impossibility; nor had the organist any mechanical assistance whatever to enable him to vary the combinations of stops.

Second, the invention of the harpsichord. This instrument, the *avant-courier* of the pianoforte, to which we have already referred, had already become sufficiently popular to make its own peculiar influence felt. This consisted in the power of crescendo and diminuendo according to the force exerted by the player, and a light touch which offered no impediment to rapid execution, besides certain other effects through its characteristic tone impossible upon the organ.

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The light touch of the harpsichord, as compared with the heavy and fatiguing action of the organs of that day, was necessarily a source of great attraction; and the instrument itself, although far from finding a home in every household, as the piano has in our time, yet possessed the merit of being portable.

It was not long before the transition period began,—that period in which musicians and composers tested and decided upon that which was best and most fitting in the treatment of these respective instruments. Nowhere can we find more evident signs of this time of experiment, this gradually leaving old landmarks and seeking a new form of expression, than in the works of Bach himself.

In the "Well-Tempered Clavier" we find preludes and fugues impossible to properly interpret on any other instrument except the piano, placed side by side with those whose real significance can only be developed upon the organ. In a portion of the pieces written especially for the organ, we find, on the other hand, passages which to modern ears are only fit for and tolerable on the piano. The dividing lines of effect, not to say possibility, had not as yet been fully marked out. The organ was no more disposed to give up its long sway, and be narrowed to its own particular sphere, than any other sovereign, when the limiting influences of modern times first began to make themselves felt. Like them, however, it was obliged to yield. Little by little the piano emancipated itself from the *strict* contrapuntal chain which bound it to the organ, until, in the sonatas of Mozart and Beethoven, it emerged into a new life.

Here it was strengthened by the *free* contrapuntal treatment it received, like the fruits of early education showing themselves in new and original forms,—speaking a language founded indeed on the past, but new, fresh, and sparkling; or, when adopting the strict style, taking it up as a matter of choice, but not of compulsion. Such results followed the invention of the harpsichord,—the early piano,—and here we must leave it. It would, however, be an interesting subject to trace this development down to Chopin, Liszt, and the modern Titans of the piano, showing how gradually the mutual treatment of piano and organ disappeared and what was substituted in their place. It could, however, only be satisfactorily done by musical examples.

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Meanwhile the orchestra blossomed into a new significance. To us moderns who read its history, or look back into the scores which antedate this time, it does not seem so much a period to be described, as that of progress, as that of a veritable new birth itself, a new creation. And this is, indeed, the fact; for no improvements in ancient instruments, although they took place, nor addition of new ones, can account for the change which now occurred in the orchestra. Here it was *the man*, not the instrument; and the name of Joseph Haydn will always be quoted as "Father of the Modern Orchestra."

The organ lost nothing of real value to itself by this increased significance of other branches of instrumental music. Its sphere became defined, and in Germany quite limited, as to this day it is but rarely employed there in the way of accompaniment beyond supporting the choral song of the congregation. In France and England it has been different, the organ having been employed to accompany many anthems and other extended pieces of music, which in Germany (at least in the larger cities) would be given with the orchestra. It should be noticed that to England we owe one great improvement, which, especially for the *rôle* the organ is called upon to fill in this country, can scarcely be overrated. I refer to the invention of the swell, and the great variety of effects we are enabled to achieve by its means in both accompaniment and solo playing.

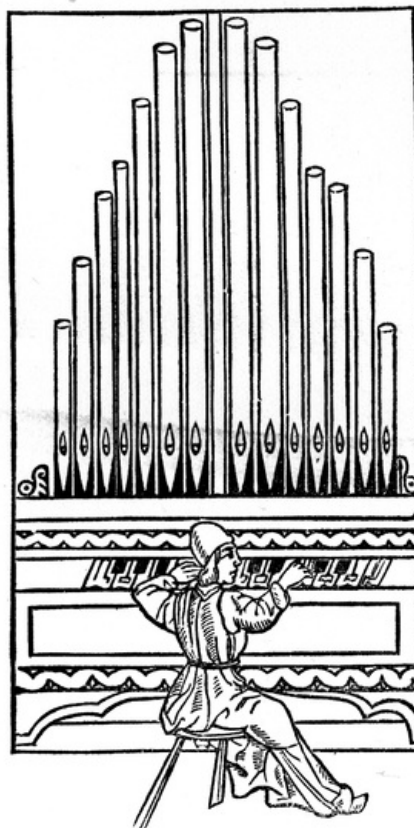
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**A POSITIVE ORGAN. FROM
AMBROSIUS WELPHLINGSEDER'S
EROTEMATA MUSICES PRACTIÆ.
NUREMBERG, 1563.**

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SECTION III.



**A CURIOUS ENGRAVING
SHOWING AN ORGANIST
PERFORMING UPON AN
INSTRUMENT WITH BROAD
KEYS. FROM FRANCHINUS
GAFFURIUS' THEORICA MUSICA.
1492.**

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SECTION III.

In the London "Spectator" of Feb. 8, 1712, is the following announcement:—

"Whereas, Mr. Abraham Jordan, senior and junior, have, with their own hands, joynery excepted, made and erected a very large organ in St. Magnus' church, at the foot of London bridge, consisting of four sets of keys, one of which is adapted to the art of emitting the sounds by swelling the notes, *which was never in any organ before*; this instrument will be publicly opened on Sunday next, the performance by Mr. John Robinson. The above said Abraham Jordan gives notice to all masters and performers, that he will attend every day next week at the said church, to accommodate all those gentlemen who shall have a curiosity to hear it."

Very little is known of this Mr. Jordan, except that his invention pleased greatly, and was found of such practical use, that not only were all new organs in England (virtually from this date) furnished with swells, but himself and son found much occupation in adapting and adding their invention to the older London organs. The lack of a swell is the weakest point of the great

majority of German organs. Even Dr. Burney, fifty years after swells had become common in England, expresses, in his famous work entitled *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands and United Provinces*, two volumes, also *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*, his great surprise to find them utterly unknown upon the Continent. His remarks would hold true at the present day with but little modification, as far as Germany is concerned, few instruments outside the larger ones of recent date possessing this great improvement. The reason of this is to be found, partly in the extremely conservative character of their organ-builders, almost a national trait, and still more in the fact that but little use would be found for a swell organ outside solo playing. With us, nearly the reverse is true, the swell being most indispensable in accompanying choirs as here constituted. Notwithstanding this neglect of what seems to us an indispensable addition to the instrument, the glory of the invention and perfection of the organ justly belongs to Germany. Modern organ-building requires the most profound study of the laws both of mechanics and acoustics, and the German mind was constitutionally fitted, by a natural depth and thoroughness of thought, together with the truly artistic quality of patience, to be successful in solving this great problem,—the creation of the most complex instrument known.

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France, too, has produced her great organs and organ-builders. If often lacking the sublimity and solidity of tone characteristic of many of the famous German organs, they interest (particularly the American taste) by a greater variety of the so-called "fancy," or solo stops. This difference, too, has grown out of the nature of the duties demanded of the organ and the organist in the service of the Roman Catholic church, and it is these differences of usage which in process of time, combining with further differences of national taste, led to that varied style and treatment which we denominate "Schools of Playing."

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We divide these schools into the German, French, and English.

The first of these, the German school, is especially characterized by the importance given to the use of the pedals, the feet being called upon to execute passages of equal melodic value with that assigned to the fingers. This renders it the school of schools for those who would really attain a mastery of the instrument, and gain that independence of foot and finger so difficult to acquire. In fact, it is only possible by a thorough study of the great masters in this school of playing, to destroy that sympathy which exists between the left hand and the feet. This sympathy lies in the fact that should a pedal passage *ascending* occur in conjunction with a left-hand passage *descending*, the natural inclination of the left hand is to follow the pedal, instead of executing its own independent part. Of course the same trouble is experienced if the conditions, as just stated, should be reversed. This is the great difficulty of the *obbligato*, or independent mode of treating the pedals, to conquer which may fairly be termed a life-study. For this reason the earnest student should always begin his studies in this school, and not deviate therefrom until such time as a reasonable degree of skill has been attained, and the sympathy between hands and feet, before alluded to, measurably overcome. And here let me say that far too many of those who feel themselves drawn towards the study of the organ, approach such study unprepared. The organ, as a keyed instrument, has all the main points of technique in common with the piano. All the varied forms of scales, arpeggios, &c., together with the necessary independence of finger requisite to play in the *legato* style, should first be learned upon the piano, where, by the way, it can be more speedily acquired. Pupils who, having accomplished this, proceed to the study of the organ, can at once begin with the peculiarities and characteristic difficulties of the instrument, and as far as the pedal is concerned, will make far more rapid progress if fair manual players. They are thus enabled to concentrate their attention upon that which is new and strange to them. Such would undoubtedly be the testimony of all those who have had experience in this branch of teaching.

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Without questioning the pre-eminence of the German school in all matters of technique and pure science, although educated in that school myself, I would not claim for it, as do some, that it is the Alpha and Omega of all true organ playing. Viewed in relation to the modern organ as it exists to-day, especially in France, England, and America, it seems to me that the instrument is in advance of the school, or that the school is weak in the two following points:—

First: It does not make a sufficient employ of registration within the limits of one and the same composition. Beauties of contrast, to be obtained by this means, are too frequently regarded as a matter of less than secondary importance. This, I am aware, arises from the fact that the majority of German organs are incapable of producing such variety, being built with a single eye to accompanying the congregation. In the direction of the grand and sublime, this school is unequalled; but surely there are many effects possible to-day which lay no claim to profundity, and yet are pleasing and worthy of employment by a true artist.

[Pg 39]

Second: Ignoring the emotional element in organ music to a great extent, and substituting the purely intellectual and technical. In their melodies we recognize the true inspiration of the great composers. The scientific setting they may give them, the technical dress in which they may clothe them, thus often greatly enhancing their beauty, is, after all, a matter of pure science acquired through schooling and dignified by talent. This appeals to the intellect, and is a most desirable object of study; but the melodic inspiration itself appeals to the heart, and, as the God-given quality, is the higher of the two. Now the German writers for the organ, from Bach to this day, have, as a rule (to which I am aware there are some marked exceptions), apparently avoiding giving to the organ that *melodious* element which their great composers have so beautifully done, not only in their symphonic writings, but also in their smallest works for the piano or other instruments. The mere lack of means for expression (by means of the swell or

other mechanical appliances) is hardly a sufficient explanation of this, nor do I see anything in the character of the organ to account for it. That the great German writers following Bach (Mendelssohn excepted), but more especially the masters of the more recent so-called Romantic School, have contributed little or nothing towards the literature of the organ, is really explained by the following remark of Berlioz, in his treatise on "Modern Instrumentation." Speaking of writing properly for the organ, he says: "The special resources are here so vast and numerous, that the composer will never be well acquainted with them, as it appears to me, unless he be himself an accomplished organist."

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The French school of organ playing is usually light, sensational, often pleasing, but too often frivolous and unworthy of the instrument. Yet in a certain direction they have had their great men. No one who has had the opportunity of hearing Lefebure Wely extemporize on that great organ at the church of Saint Sulpice, in Paris, but must acknowledge that the performance was masterly, although widely different from the German school. In fact, these extempore performances of Wely's were far better than his published compositions. The prevailing tone of the French organ-playing is dramatic, and, as before said, too often sensational. As might be expected from the national character, it forms a great contrast to the German style. The use of the pedal for melodic phrases is rare, it being more generally employed simply to give the fundamental support of the harmonies and passages executed upon the manuals. On the other hand, much attention is paid to registration, and frequently much talent displayed in this direction; besides, their organs are built in a manner calculated to assist the player in this respect. Of course the Romish ceremonial, the universally dominant religion in France, gives much opportunity for display of this kind. To judge any of these varieties of organ-playing, it will be seen that the standpoint of use to which the instrument is to be put must be carefully borne in mind. Although this school is by no means devoid of excellencies, it is not to be recommended to the American student who is seeking a solid foundation in organ-playing. Still it may be employed to advantage, both in the way of recreation, general culture, and especially as studies in registration, after the "weightier matters of the law" have received due attention.

[Pg 41]

The English school, as a *distinctive* method of treatment, can hardly be said to exist. It forms a sort of middle ground between the two schools of which I have just spoken, and their organs may be described in the same manner as to characteristics of building. In America, of late years, we have followed suit, copying Germany in the voicing of most of our open and stopped pipes, both metal and wood; copying France in the main characteristics of their reed voicing (in which they were long pre-eminent), and copying England in the general plan of our organs, together with their conveniences of mechanism and effects of combination.

In spite of the fact, then, that England has no distinctive *national* school of the instrument, still there is probably no country where so much interest is taken in organs and organ-playing as in the England of to-day. Her prominent organists are solidly founded on the German school; but while they execute these great works in a masterly manner, their *repertoire* extends over a far wider range and variety of compositions than the German school alone can supply. This seems to me to be praiseworthy, for although the practice of this theory may be carried too far, and it is certain that *everything* cannot even approximately be played upon the organ; yet, in view of the vast improvements of the last twenty years, all tending to assist the players in producing effects impossible heretofore, why should the use of these means be ignored? The English organists, to this end, have made a vast number of arrangements and adaptations from works not originally composed for the organ. Very many of these are just as effective as if originally composed for the instrument, and so far form a welcome addition to organ literature; inasmuch as they generally embody the use of the new improvements and facilities referred to. On the other hand, many of these go too far, and attempt transcriptions of compositions totally opposed to the genius of the organ. The careful student will, however, easily be able to recognize and avoid such, if he has had the proper foundation laid before attempting works of this class.

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There are those, however (and their opinions are entitled to respect), who claim that such free treatment of the organ is improper. These persons would, with little or no exception, limit the *repertoire* to such works as have been originally written for the organ; and when they got outside fugue or canon, would still remain carefully within the limits of purely contrapuntal orthodoxy. Any other treatment is styled "*illegitimate*." I had hoped to avoid this terrible word,—the great bugbear among conscientious students of the organ,—nor do I propose to enter into any analysis of what the "legitimate" may or may not consist in. The fact is, we should all retain our original opinions very much according to our early education, natural tastes, and impressions. There has been much controversy on this point, and I do not think it necessary to contribute to that. In any case, where the subject under discussion cannot be considered as a *positive* right or wrong, but largely as a matter of taste or preference, there will always be a difference of opinion.

Froude, the historian, says in one of his published lectures: "Controversy has kept alive a certain quantity of bitterness; and that, I suspect, is all that it would accomplish if continued till the day of judgment.... Each polemic writes for his *own partisans*, and makes no impression on his adversary." So it would be in this case.

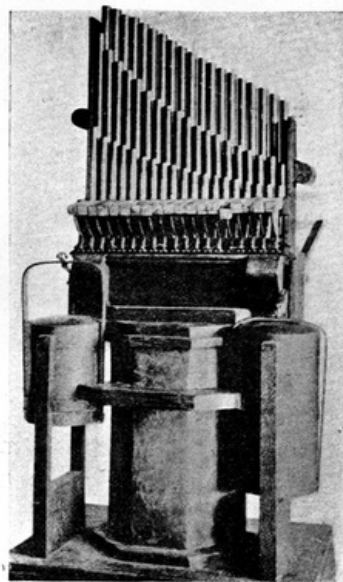
[Pg 43]

The inference which I draw from this superficial glance at the main characteristics of these three schools, is this:—

The American student who would excel as an organist, must first be thoroughly educated in the German school of playing. Here alone can he gain the solid technique which will fit him for the execution of any tasks he may propose to himself. Only from that mine of musical wealth, the



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