

THE ORIGIN AND PROGRESS OF MUSIC.

VARIOUS theories have been formed respecting the origin of music; and, indeed, in attempting to account for it, we meet with difficulty which does not occur in the other fine arts. Architecture, for instance, originated in the earliest wants of man: the first houses were only more convenient than the dens of wild beasts; afterwards, from a principle inherent in our nature, attempts were made to beautify what at first was only useful. The objects of nature suggested the ornaments employed in architecture. The trunk of some tall and graceful tree was the model of the Grecian column; a few saplings, bound together, form the Gothic. A basket of votive offerings, left on the tomb of a Greek girl, round which the Acanthus had gracefully spread its leaves, is said to have given the idea of the Corinthian capital; and the interweaving of the branches of a forest, which is clear of brushwood, seen in winter with a sunset sky for the background, presents the most exquisite specimens of the Gothic arch. Painting and sculpture are also strictly imitative arts.

This is not the case with music: no imperious physical want first called it into existence; no models constantly prompted its cultivators to improvement. We might almost say, there is no type of it in nature; for what, compared with music as we now possess it, is the roar of the ocean, the sighing of the forest, or the warbling of birds, which form the music of nature? If we examine music as a science, we find it involving some of the deepest mathematical calculations, proceeding upon principles as invariable and governed by laws as intricate as those by which the planets move on in their orbits. If we view it as an art, we are astonished at its variety and power; we observe that genius alone, aided by years of patience and toil, can excel in it. We find it a universal language, written and uttered alike by all civilized nations: no translations are needed for it: the distant Russian, of the north-west coast, and the inhabitant of sunny Italy, read it with ease. It cannot perish with length of time; it can never become a dead language, for there is no mystery about its pronunciation; it is written in characters which suggest tones as well as thoughts, and which will never cease to do so, until the very nature of the art shall be changed.

This sublime and perfect art, therefore, seems to have grown up out of nothing—a solitary monument of unaided genius.

A common thing respecting its origin is, that it was first produced by the imitative propensities of men. Hearing the notes of birds, the rushing of streams, or the whistling of the wind, they endeavored to produce the same sound with the voice, or upon some rude instrument, and, gradually improving upon these beginnings, brought music to its present perfection. This theory is ingenious, but not probable. We might as well account for language in the same manner, and infer, that speech was suggested to man by the growl of the bear, the barking of the dog, or the more homely sounds of more homely animals. I much prefer to suppose, that music is born within us; that it is indissolubly allied to our nature, and belongs to us as peculiarly as language itself. Instead of being merely imitative, and addressed to the senses alone, I prefer to invest it with a high intellectual character. The cry of horror, at sudden and fearful events, the loud shout of thanksgiving and jubilee, the soft, sweet tone that lulls the cradled infant, are more than imitative sounds; they address themselves directly to the understanding and feelings. Music begins where language ends; it expresses thoughts and emotions, to which speech can give no utterance; it clothes words with a power which language cannot impart. Our favorite songs are set to music, because we are not satisfied with hearing them recited; we want to express more vividly the emotions which these words excite within us; and music alone will do it. Hence it is, that after hearing them sung, the words appear powerless if read in the common tone of voice.

Though it is probable, that vocal music preceded all other kinds, we still know that instruments for producing sound were very early invented. We are told, in Genesis, that "Jubal was the father of all such as handle the harp and the organ." Other references were also made to the cultivation of music in the first ages of the world. The first grand musical festival on record, however, occurred immediately after the passage of the Israelites across the Red Sea; nor can we conceive of a more sublime celebration. Standing on the shores of that wreck-strewn sea, whose