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Musical Instruments

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From the INTRODUCTION.

Music, in however primitive a stage of development it may be with some nations, is universally appreciated as one of the Fine Arts. The origin of vocal music may have been coeval with that of language; and the construction of musical instruments evidently dates with the earliest inventions which suggested themselves to human ingenuity. There exist even at the present day some savage tribes in Australia and South America who, although they have no more than the five first numerals in their language and are thereby unable to count the fingers of both hands together, nevertheless possess musical instruments of their own contrivance, with which they accompany their songs and dances.

Wood, metal, and the hide of animals are the most common substances used in the construction of musical instruments. In tropical countries bamboo or some similar kind of cane and gourds are especially made use of for this purpose. The ingenuity of man has contrived to employ in producing music, horn, bone, glass, pottery, slabs of sonorous stone — in fact, almost all vibrating matter. The strings of instruments have been made of the hair of animals, of silk, the runners of creeping plants, the fibrous roots of certain trees, of cane, catgut (which, absurdly referred to the cat, is from the sheep, goat, lamb, camel, and some other animals), metal, etc.

The mode in which individual nations or tribes are in the habit of embellishing their musical instruments is sometimes as characteristic as it is singular. In several districts of Western Africa affix to their drums human skulls. A war-trumpet of the king of Ashantee which was brought to England is surrounded by human jawbones. The Maoris in New Zealand carve around the mouth-hole of their trumpets a figure intended, it is said, to represent female lips. The materials for ornamentation chiefly employed by savages are bright colours, beads, shells, grasses, the bark of trees, feathers, stones, gilding, pieces of looking-glass inlaid like mosaic, etc. Uncivilised nations are sure to consider anything which is bright and glittering ornamental, especially if it is also scarce. Captain Tuckey saw in Congo an instrument which was ornamented with part of the broken frame of a looking-glass, to which were affixed in a semicircle a number of brass buttons with the head of Louis XVI. on them, — perhaps a relic of some French sailor drowned near the coast years ago.

Again, musical instruments are not infrequently formed in the shape of certain animals. Thus, a kind of harmonicon of the Chinese represents the figure of a crouching tiger. The Burmese possess a stringed instrument in the shape of an alligator. Even more grotesque are the imitations of various beasts adopted by the Javanese. The natives of New Guinea have a singularly shaped drum, terminating in the head of a reptile. A wooden rattle like a bird is a favorite instrument of the Indians of Nootka Sound. In short, not only the inner construction of the instruments and their peculiar quality of sound exhibit in most nations certain distinctive characteristics, but it is also in great measure true as to their outward appearance.

An arrangement of the various kinds of musical instruments in a regular order, beginning with that kind which is the most universally known, and progressing gradually to the least usual, gives the following results. Instruments of percussion of indefinite sonorousness or, in other words, pulsatile instruments which have not a sound of a fixed pitch, as the drum, rattle, castanets, etc., are most universal. Wind instruments of the flute kind — including pipes, whistles, flutes, Pandean pipes, etc. — are also to be found almost everywhere....

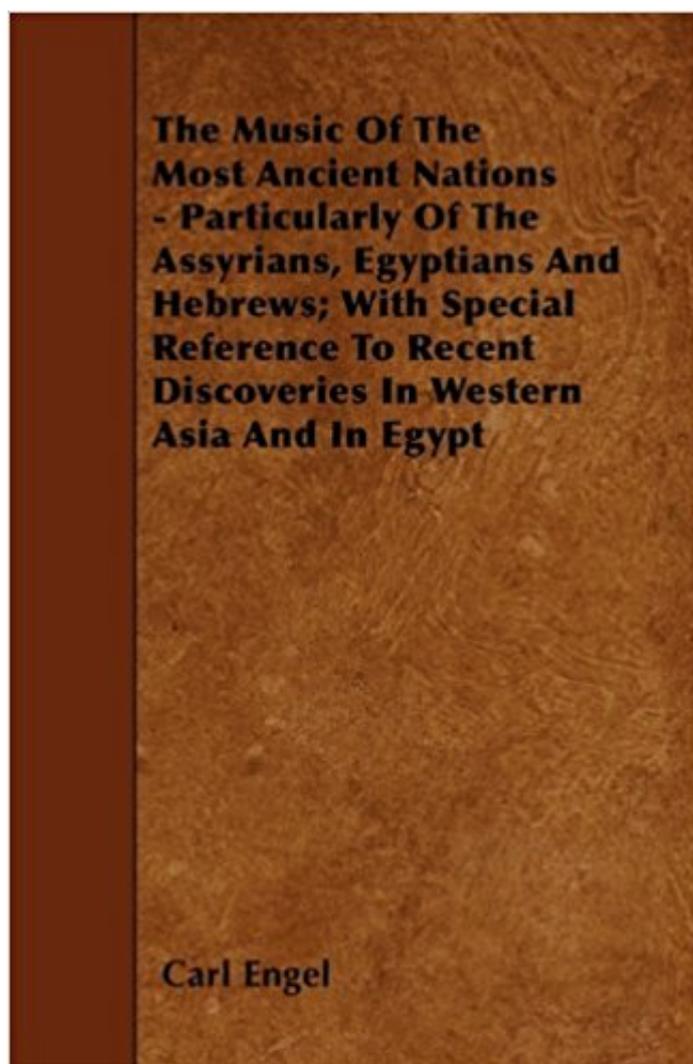
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