
Review

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Musical Instruments. Part II. English and Irish Instruments, by
R. B. ARMSTRONG. Edinburgh : T. and A. Constable. Price £2 net.

The second part of Mr. Armstrong's great work on Musical Instruments has been issued. The first part is well known to students of Celtic music as the most complete and elaborate modern study of the Irish and Highland Harps, a sumptuous and magnificent volume which was received with general approval five years ago. This volume follows up the development of stringed instruments of the Harp family down to the beginning of last century. The author deals in minutest detail with the construction and musical capabilities of various obsolete instruments such as the Dital Harp, Egan's Harp, and the Harp Ventura. The appeal of the work is mainly to the musical Antiquarian and not directly to the student of Celtic music, except in so far as it shows how ancient Irish music had to surrender to modern tonality by the introduction of modulating keys for the full chromatic scale. It is most interesting to trace this development, through various forms of ingenious and complicated mechanism applied to the small harp, until we reach the final stage of the modern Pedal Harp. The present volume is got up in excellent style by Messrs. Constable. The plates that illustrate the text are exquisitely beautiful. We have not seen finer examples of modern photographic art reproduction. The pictures are soft yet minutely detailed without any of the hardness and excessive contrast often seen in photographs of such difficult subjects as old instruments. The book owes much to the fine technical skill of the artistic craftsman, as well as to the research, learning, and thorough mastery of detail of the author.

Only a specialist can adequately review the mass of detail contained in this book; we can only say that the author wins the reader's confidence by the clearness of his style and the convincing character of his exposition of intricate technical details. Any one who is fortunate enough to possess one of the old instruments described in the text will find everything he needs to know here regarding stringing the instrument, scales, manipulation, and the possibilities and limitations of the various types. To some the study of ancient musical instruments has a peculiar and fascinating charm. Long years ago these instruments expressed in sweet music the language of human passion and old romance, though the fingers that touched the strings are now mouldering in the dust. Mr. Armstrong gives numerous specimens of music written for these old instruments. For a long time to come this will be the standard work on the subject.

M. N. M.

Songs of the Hebrides. By MARJORY KENNEDY FRASER: Gaelic Editor,
KENNETH M'LEOD.

Messrs. Boosey and Co., London, now publish the above work in complete form, bound in one handsome volume, at the price of one guinea. We have in a former number of the *Celtic Review* referred to the very high quality of Mrs. Kennedy Fraser's work when reviewing several copies of the songs issued in separate parts. The volume as a whole more than confirms our

earlier impressions. It is a most valuable interpretation not only of Celtic music but of the true inwardness of the life and manner of thought and feeling of the people of the Isles. All Highlanders, and particularly all Islanders, who use this work will feel that they owe a debt of gratitude to the Editors for the technical skill, musical and literary talent, and loving enthusiasm they have put into their work. The result of their toil is a treat of a high order to all who have an interest in Celtic music and the Celtic people. Not since Dr. Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica* appeared has there issued from the press such a sympathetic and intelligent interpretation of the folk-lore and music of the ancient kingdom of the Hebrides.

Mrs. Kennedy Fraser writes an Introduction describing in charming English her interesting experiences in the work of collecting airs. Her Essay on the Hebridean scales is full of illuminating suggestion and pregnant thought,—the work of a true musician. Its value educationally is enhanced by the fact that it illustrates itself by reference to the songs in the book. These are classified according to scale. She suggests that the Pentatonic scales of the Scots folk-tonality, nowhere else found except in the Far East, may have come to Scotland through the Finnish or Mongolian mound-dwellers. Lowland music assimilated these from the Highland, the more ancient art culture. She has discovered in the Islands irregular time rhythms never pointed out before so far as we know, as in the remarkable version of *I hu o leiginn* (Killin Collection) entitled *Milking Croom* and set in $\frac{7}{4}$ time. It is a striking fact that Finnish music is also partial to irregular rhythms with five beats to the bar. Mrs. Kennedy Fraser also gives a most curious waulking song which balances fives with threes (p. 161), i.e. $\frac{5}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ time in alternate bars. She truly remarks on the perfect feeling for rhythm in the Western Isles that comes apparently from a life-long association of music and labour.

Regarding the existence of scales whose tone intervals vary from the diatonic, her conclusion is that as sung by the people these scales 'differ slightly from anything we can convey by any system of notation as yet in use.' Thus some sacrifice of character is unavoidable when we note them down in the usual way. But she thinks that a suitable accompaniment can to some extent compensate for this loss by emphasising characteristic features, even though it is true, as Abdy Williams has said, that 'to add harmony to an ancient melody is practically to produce a modern composition on an ancient foundation.'

The accompaniments in the book are of great originality, beauty, and fitness. The work as a whole will do more to give Celtic folk-song an assured position in the art world than any that have yet appeared.

The work of the Gaelic editor calls for more than a passing word of commendation. A collector himself, he has given freely of his store of melodies and has also fitted original verses of excellent quality to several songs when the original words obtainable were merely 'mutilated fragments.' His prose articles scattered throughout the book illuminate and ex-

plain the songs and the conditions among which they arose. They show a fine mastery of the English tongue, and reveal a new and brilliant writer on Celtic themes from whom much may yet be expected. Mr. M'Leod's first article in the *Celtic Review* some time ago on the subject of sea-songs strongly attracted our attention. A new and individual note was struck; here was a man with a voice of his own and no echo of others. Mr. M'Leod is a writer who possesses the magic of style. All he writes passes through fires of a living personality and is transfused with a passionate love for the dear people of the isles whose inner life he knows so well. He has many of the qualities that gave charm to the writings of the late Fiona M'Leod. He possesses the same wonderful insight into the psychology of the primitive mind, and if there is 'gloom' sometimes, it is real human sorrow and no melodramatic affair—the sorrow of the mourners who wait at home for those that sailed away on the sea but now return no more. His essay on the 'Sea Sorrow' is a very fine piece of work.

What songs are these! Songs of sorrow, and of rapture too, songs of the sea and of the soil, of birth and of death and of love. Contrast them with the modern drawing-room song, the only song that sells nowadays. There is little or no poetry in their words, any sort of piffle will do if it suits the music. Literary hacks provide them *ad lib.* for the musical composer. But the songs of the Hebrides—they enshrine history and are full of imagination and real human passion. If they are not poetry, we do not know where poetry is to be found.

Miss Fanny Tolmie has contributed several fine airs to the collection. There is a wonderful funeral chant entitled *An Cronan Bais*, given by Mr. K. M'Leod, containing an air that some have been hunting for vainly for a long time. In Lewis the same words (probably of pre-Reformation origin) were sung long ago to the tune '*The Campbells are coming*' in slow time.

Ailean Donn is a notable song full of the most poignant feeling, 'a beautiful song—sore to sing but seven times sorer to feel,' says Mr. M'Leod. The whole romantic story of the song may be found in Fionn's *Naigheachdan Firinnech*, Part II. p. 29. We trust that Mod singers, and, perhaps, Irish singers also, may take up and popularise many of these songs in their native Gaelic. These separate parts we believe are still available. Mrs. Kennedy Fraser, with great fitness, dedicates the work to the women of the Hebrides, 'who were not only skilled in the spinning and weaving of fine linen and in the curious arts of the dyer but who sang at their work, and, singing, fashioned for themselves songs that are as rich in colour as the wools they steeped in lichen and heather, and as curious in construction as the tartans they designed, and subtle too at times as the interlacements of Celtic illuminative art.'

Well do the women of the Isles deserve such an appreciation. In all probability the majority of the songs in this book were made by women. But more than singers they are toilers, very often the chief support of the poor homes in which they live, but always simple-hearted, kindly, and singing toilers. At home their work is chiefly spinning, weaving, cultivating the

croft, and ordinary domestic work. But now many of them cross the sea in thousands and take places as domestic servants in the South, winning respect and regard for themselves and the Highlands from which they come in many Lowland homes. They are a greater influence than we imagine in bringing North and South together in terms of mutual understanding and appreciation. Seldom do these girls forget to send part of their earnings to the support of the old home in far-away Uist or Lewis. Or it may be that some prefer the short but remunerative period of toil at herring curing to absence from home during the whole year. In hundreds at a time they migrate to Yarmouth or Grimsby or Peterhead as herring girls, sober and industrious always, cheerfully toiling at the most disagreeable of trades, that they may bring home their wages to help their parents, and at times even their brothers, to support existence in the poor boggy crofts at home. Some of them bring home more money to the croft than the men-folk can earn in cash during the whole year. We remember on one occasion seeing five hundred of these Hebridean women crowd on board the Stornoway steamer on their way to the fishing-stations. They were so closely packed and crowded on deck that one could hardly move without stepping over their bodies. There was no shelter of any kind to protect them from rain or cold. Fortunately for themselves they were inured to exposure. Uncomplainingly they sat or reclined on the decks singing Gaelic airs at intervals, while sometimes an old Psalm tune such as *Stornoway* rose clear and high on the night air. 'What a shame it is that these girls are not better treated!' said one to your reviewer. 'They are the mainstay of the Island.' M. N. MUNRO.

An Introduction to Early Welsh. By the late JOHN STRACHAN, LL.D.,
Professor of Greek and Lecturer in Celtic in the University of
Manchester. Manchester: At the University Press, 1909.

The science of language, and that of the Celtic languages in particular, suffered a very severe blow through the passing away of the late Professor Strachan, for he combined a capacity for the most unrelenting and laborious industry with a broad survey of the development of the Indo-European languages generally, and the power of presenting the knowledge which he gained in a highly systematic and lucid form. The present volume bears throughout the impress of his mind and character. Welshmen everywhere, both in Wales and outside Wales, will rejoice that the Welsh tongue should have been so lovingly studied by one of the most brilliant of modern philologists, and it is not improbable that the present work, if a knowledge of it reaches their ears, will have a good moral effect upon those misguided Welshmen who ever tend to depreciate their native tongue and its literature. It is a thousand pities that Professor Strachan did not live to write a grammar, not of mediæval Welsh only, but of the noble living tongue of to-day, which is far richer in the hands of a master than even the copious language of Wales in the Middle Ages. Nothing has helped the Celtic languages so much in modern times in the eyes of the