

# Music of the Hebrews.

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IT is not to be wondered at that the Hebrews, a small branch of the great Chaldean race, who existed in a precarious isolation as settlers amongst hostile and foreign tribes, passed their youth in the most abject slavery, escaped from that only to be brought face to face with want and misery in the desert, and enjoyed but a short space of sunshine before the sky became overcast for good and all, should by this special education have developed great men and noble aspirations; and in the reaction of their mind against the fearful unkindnesses of their surroundings, a wonderful impulse should have been given to their imagination, which is the handmaid of the spiritual life.

The Hebrews, with such an exacting training, contracted blemishes with their great merits. The former were few in comparison with the latter, but were none the less existent. Their weakness lay in an absolute deadness to the sensuous and artistic side of life; their merits consisted in exalting the religious side of life to such a height as we shall never possibly meet with again. They despised sculpture, and the practice of the art was even considered unlawful and wicked. Painting was also considered in the same light. Architecture was so poorly represented that Jahveh's tabernacle was for centuries little better than a tent, and Solomon had to engage a foreigner to build the temple. The Hebrews were equally wanting in dramatic genius. There was only one way that their wild emotion could find a vent, and that was by the aid of passionate outbreaks of lyric poetry, and the coincident effusion of extemporized song. It is here, then, that we must find a musical importance in the history of the Hebrews. Their instrumental

music scarcely calls for any remark. They had very few instruments, and with one exception, these were all borrowed from other peoples, and principally from the Egyptians. The drum, that most sensuous of instruments, was to the last, forever an exile in the Holy Land. There was not a drum or a dulcimer to be found from Dan to Beersheba, and flutes were seldom used. The only instrument that was at all a popular one was the harp, probably because it could be carried about easily. This instrument was more a lyre than a harp, for in an old Rabbinical tradition it is stated that David used to hang his harp up on a nail above his pillow when he went to bed. This little lyre was a great instrument in Israel, for it was portable and useful for accompanying the voice. The music of the Hebrews was essentially a vocal one. The voice outdid the instrument, and instrumental development stood still.

The centre of interest amongst the Hebrews was the minstrel poet. This individual was an inspired seer, who was wont to utter moral precepts, or preach against the sins and vices of his day, or maybe in an ecstasy revealed the future. He was thus a preacher, a censor, and we might almost say, the chief exponent of religion itself. For to "prophecy" meant "to sing," and there is no doubt Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others uttered their prophecies in song, no less than in verse, both alike being extemporized. To such men as these music could never be an art; it was a mere form of speech which they employed as unconsciously as we do our speech of to-day. So closely connected was it with poetry that it can be scarcely considered apart. Certainly there was no conscious separation between the two in the