A CRITICAL STUDY
OF
BEETHOVEN'S NINE SYMPHONIES

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A CRITICAL STUDY OF
BEETHOVEN'S NINE SYMPHONIES

WITH
"A few words on His Trios and Sonatas," a criticism of "Fidelio" and an Introductory Essay on Music

BY
HECTOR BERLIOZ

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
EDWIN EVANS, SENR.


LONDON:
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

THESE essays and criticisms are taken from the volume published in the French under the title "A TRAVERS CHANTS, Etudes Musicales, Adorations, Boutades et Critiques." It is proposed in a further two volumes to issue the remainder of "A Travers Chants" ("Mid Realms of Song"), one containing Berlioz's critical essays upon Gluck and his operas, and the other the miscellaneous essays upon Wagner, Gounod and Weber, besides other questions of absorbing musical interest.
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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

It was in 1828, and therefore at the age of twenty-five, that Berlioz began to take up the position of a writer upon musical subjects for several Paris journals; but from first to last the occupation was distasteful to him and never undertaken otherwise than from necessity. The principal satisfaction attending this phase of his career may probably be fixed at about the year 1834, when he became a recognised and important contributor to the "Gazette musicale de Paris," then recently founded. But even this literary connection was soon afterwards thrown into the shade by his appointment to the "Journal des Debats"; which we may fairly assume him to have found at least tolerable, since it was not until the year 1864 that he finally gave it up. It was a position which, independently of the financial help it afforded, gave Berlioz the opportunity of expatiating upon his artistic ideas; besides being probably also one of some indirect value in furthering his compositions, as a consequence of the
respect in which the critic of so important a newspaper would naturally be held.

Berlioz is therefore one of the few great composers who, without pretending to eminence, have nevertheless cut a very respectable figure in the literary world. His writings, however, differ materially from those of the other two celebrated musicians whose dissertations have proved of such immense value to artists generally. While no less penetrating than those of either Schumann or Wagner the criticisms of Berlioz are characterised by a more pungent wit; and the happiness of his mode of expression very often goes far to atone for the severity of his views. Moreover, though probably without actually standing for any greater earnestness on that account, his warmth of temperament is greatly reflected in his writings, their utility to the reader being thereby greatly increased. This takes the form that whatever he desires to express is so vividly pictured, so graphically illustrated and so passionately set forth, that, not only is a conviction in its favour rendered an almost foregone conclusion, but the perusal of his page is coupled with an amount of entertainment which dispenses the memory from all effort.

The leading items of Berlioz's literary output are comprised in the following list:

"Voyage Musical en Allemagne et en Italie." (Paris, 1845)

"Les Soirées de l'Orchestre." (Paris, 1853-4)

"Les grotesques de la Musique." (Paris, 1859)
"A travers Chants." (Paris, 1862.)
in addition to which volumes are extant entitled,
respectively, "La musique et les musiciens," "Corres-
pondance inédite," "Lettres intimes" and "Mémoires."
There is also the treatise on instrumentation; which, in
spite of the many changes in constitution of the orches-
tra since the date of its production, still retains a high
degree of authority. Of the musical merit of Berlioz,
however, we have no purpose at present to speak; but
entirely of his criticisms and specially, of course, of
those contained in the present work.

The first part now introduced is comprised princi-
pally of the review of Beethoven's symphonies and that
of "Fidelio"; with regard to the former of which it
may be doubted whether, in spite of the vast amount of
literature to which those masterworks have given rise,
any have yet appeared to depict so vividly their lead-
ing features. It is quite safe to aver that the merit of
other literature devoted to the subject can never place
these descriptions out of date; for they can be read
with an intense pleasure even by those unacquainted
with the scores to which they refer—a singular merit
in analyses which are at the same time musicianly in
the very highest degree. When we further reflect that
they were written at a time when Beethoven's fame
was in its infancy, comparatively, and that no subse-
quent criticism of the same works has revealed any flaw
in the views expressed, it is impossible not to accord to
Berlioz's judgment our very highest esteem.
TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

The same general terms apply equally to the description of "Fidelio"; the study of Berlioz's essay being almost a necessity for any student desirous of becoming intelligently familiar with that opera. The remarks upon the smaller works of Beethoven are really in sequel to those upon the symphonics; but in "Beethoven in the Ring of Saturn" we have an excellent sample of Berlioz's wit, and one which will greatly help the reader to realise the distinction alluded to as existing between Berlioz and other literary musicians. The remaining papers are all conceived in Berlioz's lighter style; notwithstanding that there is no diminution of earnestness in the treatment of the serious subjects involved. The only one in which Berlioz can be said to allow us to forget his natural warmth of temperament is the introductory essay on "Music"; the difference in style of which is partly accounted for by the author himself, who tells us that it has been rescued from a work no longer existing, and which had been published twenty years before.

With regard to the translation the endeavour has been to enable the reader to imagine himself engaged in the perusal of an original. The utmost fidelity to thought and spirit has been preserved, but liberty is taken in favour of occasional collocations more suited to the English idiom than might have resulted from too close an adherence to original constructions.
MID REALMS OF SONG
(A TRAVERS CHANTS)

I.—MUSIC.*

Music is the art of producing emotion, by means of combinations of sound, upon men both intelligent and gifted with special and cultivated senses. To define music in this way is equivalent to admitting that we do not believe it to be, as some say, made for everybody. Whatever may, in fact, be the conditions of its existence—whatever may have been at any time its means of action, whether simple or complex, gentle or energetic—it has always appeared evi-

* This chapter was published some twenty years ago in a book which no longer exists, and of which sundry fragments are reproduced in this volume. The reader may probably not be displeased to meet with it before proceeding to follow us in the analytical studies we are about to undertake of some celebrated chefs d'œuvre of musical art. (Author's note.)
dent to the impartial observer that a large number of persons remained incapable of either feeling or understanding its power. Such people were not made for it; and it follows that it was not made for them.

Music is, at one and the same time, both a sentiment and a science. It exacts from anyone who cultivates it, whether as executant or composer, both a natural inspiration and a range of knowledge only to be acquired by long study and profound meditation. It is this union of knowledge with inspiration which constitutes the art. Outside these conditions, therefore, the musician can only be an incomplete artist; even if he merits to be called an artist at all. The grand question as to which is pre-eminent, whether a natural organisation without study, or study without natural organisation—a question, moreover, which Horace did not venture to decide positively in the case of poets—seems to us equally difficult to settle in the case of musicians. We have seen some men, perfectly unacquainted with science, instinctively produce airs not only graceful, but even sublime; as, for example, Rouget de l'Isle and his immortal "Marseillaise"; but such flashes of inspiration illumine only part of art's domain, whilst other portions, equally important, remain obscure. From this it follows, due regard being had to the complex nature of our music, that these men could not be definitively classified as musicians—THEY LACK THE NECESSARY KNOWLEDGE.

It is even more common to meet with methodical
natures who are calm and cold; and who, after having made patient theoretical studies, after having accumulated observations, by bringing their mind to bear upon the subject for a long time succeed in drawing all that is possible from their incomplete faculties. Such as these manage to write things which seem, in appearance, to fulfil the conditions usually expected from music; but they satisfy the ear without charming it, and impart nothing either to the heart or to the imagination. Now, the mere satisfaction of the ear is very far removed from the delicious sensations which that organ is capable of experiencing; besides which the delights both of heart and imagination do not belong to the category of those which may be held lightly in account. And, as these are both united to a sensual pleasure of the most lively kind in all true musical works of any school, such incapable producers should also, in our opinion, be excluded from the class of those whom we estimate as musicians: THEY LACK THE NECESSARY FEELING.

What we call music is a new art; in the sense that it resembles in all probability but very slightly what the civilised nations of antiquity designated by that name. Moreover, we must hasten to mention that the word music ancietly bore an acceptation of such extent that, far from merely signifying, as nowadays, the art of combining sounds, it was equally applied to dance, gesture, poetry and eloquence—even the whole collection of sciences being included within its
range of meaning. If we suppose the word music etymologically traceable to muse, the wide meaning assigned to it by the ancients is at once explained. It expressed, and was evidently intended to express, whatever was presided over by the Muses. This accounts for the mistakes of interpretation into which many commentators of ancient times have fallen. There exists, however, in our current speech an established expression with a sense almost as general. In speaking of the union of works of intelligence, whether alone or aided by certain organs, as well as those exercises of the body which our intellect has poetised, we say: Art. It thus may happen that the reader who, in two thousand years, may come across titles so commonly applied in our books to rambling dissertations, such as—"On the state of Art in Europe during the nineteenth century," may have to interpret it thus: "On the state of poetry, eloquence, music, painting, engraving, sculpture, architecture, dramatic action, pantomime and dance during the nineteenth century." Evidently with the exception of the exact sciences, to which it is not applied, our word art corresponds very closely to the word music as used by the ancients.

What musical art, properly so called, was among them, we know but most imperfectly. Some isolated facts, related perhaps with an exaggeration similar to that of which we have every day analogous examples; the ideas, either bombastic or altogether absurd, of
certain philosophers; besides, in some instances, the false interpretation of their writings; all these tended to attribute to their music an immense power and such an influence upon manners that legislators were obliged, in the interest of their people, to determine its progress and regulate its use. Without taking any account of causes which may have contributed to adulteration of the truth in this respect, and admitting that the music of the Greeks may really have produced on some individuals extraordinary impressions—impressions neither due to the ideas expressed by the poetry nor to either the facial expression or acting of the singer, but really to music and to music alone—this fact would not in any way prove that the art had attained amongst them to any high degree of perfection. Who does not know the violent action of musical sounds, combined in the most ordinary fashion, upon nervous temperaments in certain circumstances? After a splendid feast, for instance, when, excited by the intoxicating acclamations of a crowd of adorers; by the remembrance of a recent triumph; by the hope of new victories; by the aspect of arms as well as by that of beautiful slaves surrounding him; by ideas of voluptuousness of love, glory, power, immortality—the whole enhanced by the powerful effects both of good fare and wine; Alexander (whose organisation moreover was so impressionable that he could fall into ecstasy at the accents of Timothy) can easily be imagined moved somewhat powerfully, his state of
sensibility at the time being one almost amounting to ill-health, without its requiring any great efforts on the part of the singer to produce such an effect.

Rousseau, in quoting the more modern example of Eric, King of Denmark, who killed his best servants whilst in a state of frenzy caused by certain songs, calls attention, it is true, to the fact that these unfortunate must have been far less susceptible to music than their master; or the danger would have been much reduced. But the paradoxical instinct of the philosopher again reveals itself in this witty piece of irony. Of course the servants of the Danish king were not so susceptible to music as their master. Would it not, on the contrary, be very strange had it been otherwise? Do we not know that the musical sense becomes developed by exercise? That certain affections of the soul, very active in some persons, are much less so in others? That nervous sensibility is, in some degree, the heritage of the upper classes of society; and that the lower classes, whether it be on account of the manual labour to which they are subject or for any other reason, are comparatively deprived of it? It is because this inequality of organisation is both incontestable and incontested, therefore, that we have been obliged to limit, in our definition of music, the number of those upon whom it produces effect.

Nevertheless, Rousseau, though he sometimes ridiculed in this way the accounts of marvels effected by
ancient music, seems to have been at other times so far inclined to believe them as to place ancient art much above modern: ancient art being one which we know very little about, but respecting which Rousseau was no better informed than ourselves. He ought to have been the last to depreciate the effects of our present music, for the enthusiasm with which he speaks of them everywhere else shows that their intensity in his own case was quite out of the common. But, however that may be, it remains a fact that, from merely ordinary observation, it would be easy to quote, in favour of the power of our music, certain facts which, to say the least, are of an authority equal to that of doubtful anecdotes by ancient historians. How often we have seen, at the performance of the *chef d'œuvre* of our great masters, listeners agitated with dreadful spasms; crying and laughing at the same time, and manifesting all the symptoms of delirium and fever! One young provincial musician, under the influence of passionate sentiments engendered by the "Vestale" of Spontini, could not endure the idea of returning to our prosaic world after the poetic paradise which had just been opened to him; so, after writing to inform his friends of his intention and again hearing the work which was the object of his ecstatic admiration, rightly thinking that he had attained the maximum sum of happiness reserved to man on earth, one day, at the door of the Opera he blew out his brains.

The celebrated singer, Mme. Malibran, hearing for
the first time, at the Conservatoire, the C minor Symphony of Beethoven, was seized with convulsions to such a degree that she had to be carried from the room. Twenty times have we seen, in similar cases, grave men obliged to withdraw, in order to conceal from the public the violence of their emotions. As to those which the author of this essay owes personally to music, he may at once affirm that no terms could convey an exact idea of them to those who have never made a similar experience. Without speaking of moral effects produced in him, and alluding only to impressions received and results experienced at the very moment of the execution of works which he admires, he can advance the following in all sincerity:

On hearing certain works my vital strength seems first of all doubled; I feel a delicious pleasure with which the reason has no connection; the habit of analysis then unbidden as it were to engender admiration. Emotion, increasing in direct proportion to the energy or grandeur of the composer’s ideas then soon produces a strange agitation in the circulation of the blood; my arteries throb violently; tears which, in a general way, indicate the end of the paroxysm, mark in this case only a progressive stage which is liable to be much exceeded. In the latter case, spasmodic contractions of the muscles supervene; the limbs tremble; there is a total numbness of the feet and hands; a partial paralysis of the nerves of sight and hearing; in short I no longer see or hear perfectly, am seized with
giddiness and am half swooning. No doubt, sensations carried to such a degree of violence are somewhat rare; besides which there is a vigorous contrast to be placed against them—that of bad musical effect producing the contrary of admiration and pleasure. No music acts more strongly in this direction than that which appears to me to present the principal defects of platitude and false expression. I then blush as if for shame; a veritable indignation seizes me; and one might think, to observe me, that I had just suffered some outrage for which pardon seemed impossible. In order to eliminate the impression thus received there is a general rising or effort of rejection by the entire organism, similar to the effort of vomiting when the stomach seeks to relieve itself of some nauseous liquor. This may be disgust and hatred carried to extreme limits; but such music exasperates me, and I seem to vomit it from every pore.

Of course, the habit of disguising and controlling my feelings results in their being rarely fully displayed; and, if it has sometimes happened to me, even since youth, to give full scope to them, this has only arisen for want of proper time for reflection, and because I was taken unawares.

Modern music has, accordingly, in respect of the power which it is capable of exercising, no cause to envy that of the ancients. At the present time let us ask, therefore: "What are the prevalent modes of action in musical art?" The following comprises all
those with which we are familiar; and, although they are very numerous, it is by no means proved that the future has not the discovery of some others in store.

(1) Melody.

Musical effect produced by different sounds heard successively; and formed into phrases, more or less symmetrical. The art of arranging such series of different notes in an agreeable manner and of giving them an expressive signification is one which cannot be learned. It is a gift of nature; which observation of pre-existing melodies and the separate character of individuals and nations modifies in a thousand ways.

(2) Harmony.

Musical effect produced by different sounds heard simultaneously. Natural dispositions can alone, no doubt, make a truly great harmonist; nevertheless, knowledge of the groups of sounds forming chords (generally recognised as agreeable and beautiful) as well as the art of regulating their succession, is everywhere taught with success.

(3) Rhythm.

Symmetrical division of time by sounds. The musician cannot be taught to find beautiful rhythmic forms; and the particular faculty which leads to their discovery is one of the most rare. Of all elements of music that
of rhythm appears to us at the present day to be the least advanced.

(4) Expression.

Quality by which music is brought into direct relation, in point of character, with the sentiments desired to be rendered, or the emotions to be excited. An accurate perception of this relation is far from common; and it is not unusual to see the entire audience at the opera, who would be disgusted at a false note, listen not only contentedly, but even with pleasure to pieces delivered with an expression entirely false.

(5) Modulation.

By this term we indicate, nowadays, the passage or transition from one key, or mode, to another. Study is capable of very greatly contributing to the musician's art in thus effectively replacing the key and modifying its constitution appropriately. Popular song generally modulates but slightly.

(6) Instrumentation.

This consists in allotting to each instrument what is both suited to its peculiar nature and best calculated to aid the effect intended to be produced. It also includes the art of so grouping the instruments as to cause the tone of some to be modified by that of others; and of thus causing the general effect to be of a character which no one instrument could have evolved,
even if added to others of its own class. This aspect of instrumentation is, in music, the exact equivalent of colour in painting. Though powerful, gorgeous and often exaggerated at present, it was scarcely known before the close of the eighteenth century. Precisely as in the case of rhythm, melody and expression, we believe that the study of models is capable of starting the musician on the road to its full acquirement; but that success is impossible without a special natural disposition.

(7) Situation in Regard to the Listener.

By placing the listener at a greater or less distance from the executants, or by separating, for certain occasions, sonorous instruments from others, we obtain modifications of musical effect which have not yet received a due attention.

(8) Accumulation of Sound.

This is one of the most powerful principles of musical emotion. When instruments or voices are extremely numerous and cover a great space the mass of air set in vibration becomes enormous; and its undulations assume a character of which, in the ordinary way, they are deprived. This takes place to such a degree that, in a church where there are many singers, if one of them is heard alone, whatever may be the strength or beauty of his voice, as exhibited in the delivery, of a theme of simple and slow character though uninter-
esting in itself, he will produce but an indifferent effect. On the other hand, let the same theme be repeated, even without much art by all the voices in unison; and it will, at once, assume an inconceivable majesty.

Of the several constituent parts of music which we have just mentioned nearly all seem to have been employed by the ancients. The only one, their possession of which is disputed, is that of harmony. A learned composer, our contemporary M. Lesueur, assumed, some forty years ago, the position of an intrepid antagonist of this opinion; and the views of those to whom he was opposed are set forth in the following.

They say that "harmony was unknown to the ancients because different passages in their historians and a crowd of documents testify to the fact. They employed nothing but the unison and octave. Moreover, it is known that harmony is an invention which does not date back further than the eighth century. The scale and tonal constitution of the ancients were not the same as ours; the latter, invented by Guido d'Arezzo, very much resembling those of plain-chant, which in its turn, is but a remnant of Greek music. It is therefore evident, for any man versed in the science of chords, that this kind of song, which does not lend itself to a harmonised accompaniment, is suited only to the unison and octave."

To this one might reply that the invention of harmony in the Middle Ages by no means proves that it
was unknown in the preceding centuries. Several other items of human knowledge have been lost and rediscovered; and one of the most important which Europe attributes to itself, that of gunpowder, had been made in China long previously. It is, moreover, to say the least doubtful, with regard to the inventions of Guido d'Arezzo, whether they are really his own; for several of them are quoted by himself as universally admitted before his time. As to the difficulty of adapting plain chant to our harmony, without denying that the latter allies itself more naturally into modern melodic forms, the fact of church song being executed in counterpoint of several parts as well as accompanied by organ-chords in all churches is a sufficient reply. Let us now see upon what the opinion of M. Lesueur was based.

"Harmony was known to the ancients," he said, "because the works of their poets, philosophers and historians prove it in many places, and in peremptory fashion. These historical fragments, quite clear in themselves, have nevertheless been subject to contradictory interpretations. Thanks to the knowledge we have of Greek notation, entire pieces of their music, written for several voices, and accompanied by various instruments, are there to testify to this truth. Duets, trios and choruses of Sapho, Olympe, Terpandre, Aristroxène,* etc., faithfully reproduced by our musical

* Classical proper names as in the original French.
signs, will be published later on. In them, a simple and clear harmony will be discovered; consisting entirely of the most concordant combinations, and in precisely the same style as that of certain fragments of religious music composed in our own day. Both their scale and tonal system are entirely identical with our own. It is a most serious mistake to recognise in plain-chant, which is simply a monstrous tradition of barbarous hymns howled by the Druids whilst standing round the statue of Odin during the progress of horrible sacrifices, a remnant of Greek music. There are some hymns in use in the ritual of the Catholic Church which are Greek, it is true; and these we find conceived in the same system as our modern music. Moreover, even if proof by an appeal to fact should fail, would not the appeal to reason suffice to demonstrate the incorrectness of the opinion which denies to the ancients the knowledge and employment of harmony? What! the Greeks—those ingenious and polished sons of the country which gave birth to Homère, Sophocle, Pindare, Phidias, Appeles and Zeuxis*—that artistic people by whom those marvellous temples were reared which time has even yet not been able to destroy, and whose chisel carved from the marble such human forms as might worthily represent the gods—the nation whose monumental works serve as models to poets, statuaries, architects and painters

* Classical proper names as in the original French.
of our own day—this people possess only a kind of music as incomplete and coarse as that of barbarians? What! those thousands of singers of both sexes maintained at great expense in the temples, the crowd of instruments of different nature which they mention:

"Lyra, Psalterium, Trigonium, Sambuca, Cithara, Pectis, Maga, Barbiton, Testudo, Epigonium, Simmicium, Epandoron, etc., as stringed instruments; and Tuba, Fistula, Tibia, Cornu, Lituus, etc., as wind instruments; besides Tympanum, Cymbalum, Crepitaculum, Tintinnabulum, Crotalum, etc., as instruments of percussion; all these we are to suppose only to have been employed to produce cold and sterile unisons or miserable octaves! So, they must have given the same part to both harp and trumpet—have chained together by sheer force and for the production of a grotesque unison two instruments the bearing, character and effect of which are so enormously different! This is an unmerited insult to the intelligence and musical sense of a great people; an accusation of barbarism against the whole of Greece."

Such was the basis of M. Lesueur's opinion. As to the facts to which he alludes in proof, nothing can be urged against them. If the illustrious master had published his great work on ancient music with the fragments alluded to above; if he had indicated the sources of his information and the manuscripts which he had brought into requisition; if the incredulous had been enabled to convince themselves with their own
eyes that the harmonics attributed to the Greeks have really and visibly been bequeathed to us by them, then indeed M. Lesueur would have gained the case in advocacy of which he has worked so long with an inexhaustible perseverance and conviction. Unfortunately, he has not done so; and, as doubt is still very permissible upon this question, we shall proceed to examine the proofs of reasoning advanced by M. Lesueur; and this with the same impartiality as that brought to bear in testing the notions of his antagonists.

We shall therefore answer him as follows:

The plain chants which you call barbarous are not all so severely regarded by the generality of present-day musicians; to whom several of them appear, on the contrary, imbued with a rare character of severity and grandeur. The tonal system in which these hymns are written, and which you condemn, is susceptible of many admirable applications. Popular songs, often full of expression and simplicity, are deprived of the leading note; and are consequently written in the same tonal system as plain-chant; others, such as Scotch melodies, belong to a musical scale even still more strange; since both the fourth and seventh degrees of our scale are absent from it. What can be more fresh, however, or sometimes more energetic than these mountain airs? To pronounce all forms to be barbarous which are contrary to our habits is not to prove that an education different from the one we have received might not singularly modify our ideas in regard to
them. Moreover, without going so far as to tax Greece with barbarism, we need only admit that its music, in comparison with our own was in a state of infancy; and to contrast the imperfect state of one art in particular with the splendour of other arts not presenting any point of contact with it, or possessing in regard to it any kind of relation, is not at all admissible. The form of reasoning which seeks to pronounce this anomaly impossible is far from new; and it is known that, in many cases, it has led to conclusions which the facts have subsequently disproved with a destructive ruthlessness.

The argument drawn from the musical absurdity of allowing instruments so dissimilar in their nature as the harp, trumpet and tympanum to go together in the octave or unison is without any real force, for we have only to ask whether such an instrumental disposition is practicable? Of course it is; and musicians of the present day are open to use it, whenever they please. It is therefore not very extraordinary that it should have been admitted by nations the very constitution of whose art did not permit of the employment of any other.

Now, as to the superiority of our music over that of ancient times, this certainly appears more than probable. Whether, in point of fact, the ancients understood harmony or not, by grouping together the ideas that the partisans of the two contrary opinions have given us of the nature and resources of their art, suffi-
cient evidence results to come to the following conclusion:

Our music includes that of the ancients; but theirs does not include ours. That is to say, we can easily reproduce the effects of the music of antiquity; and, in addition to them, an infinite number of other effects which they never knew; and which it was impossible for them to render.

We have said nothing respecting Oriental music; and for this reason. All that we have so far gathered from travellers respecting this subject is confined to informal puerilities; lacking all relation to the ideas which we attach to the term "music." In default of information both new and opposed on all points to that which we have acquired, we must regard music among the Oriental peoples as merely a grotesque noise, analogous to that of children at play.*

* Since these lines were written we have had occasion, in France and England to hear Arabian, Chinese and Persian musicians; and every experience which it has been permitted to us to make of their songs and their instruments, as well as the questions we have addressed to such of them as could speak French—all has combined to confirm us in the view expressed. (Author's note.)