

JEROME OF MORAVIA, O.P.

STEPHEN CANNON, O.P.



FROM an academic point of view, there is as yet no satisfactory definition as to what a musician is. But it may be said that the highest type of musician is undoubtedly one who has creative fancy, deep emotions, and technique in expression. There is no record as to whether Jerome of Moravia was famous as an executive musician, but from his *Tractatus de Musica* it is certain that he was quite learned as a theorist and musicologist.

Brother Jerome was born in the province of Moravia, situated between Austria and old Hungary. Of his life we know only that he lived at the convent of St. Jacques in Paris around the middle of the thirteenth century and was to all appearances a fellow religious of Bl. Humbert and St. Thomas Aquinas.¹ St. Dominic had obtained an order from Pope Honorius III that the University should give his friars a house, and accordingly in 1218 the Dominicans received the convent of St. Jacques which they opened as a House of Studies for young clerics of the whole Order. This foundation was presently incorporated in the University, for as the late Father Jarrett succinctly observed "St. Dominic sent his first disciples to the universities, primarily that they might learn and ultimately that they might teach."² Msgr. Franz Xaver Haberl writes that Jerome of Moravia was very likely Master of Music at the Sorbonne.³ During the Middle Ages, music, such as it was, must have been thought a most important part of a learned education, as it was one of the sciences which made up the Quadrivium, the highest course in philosophical learning, consisting of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy.

¹ Laporte, Vincent, O.P., "Précis historique du Rit Dominicain," *Analecta*, xxv, no. 4, 221.

² Jarret, Bede, O.P., *The Life of St. Dominic*, p. 97.

³ *Kirchenmusikalisches Jahrbuch*, V (1890), 14.

The sixty-fourth book in the list assigned to be studied by students of the Quadrivium was the *Tractatus de Musica* of Jerome of Moravia. This work was written about the year 1250. Its original contains 187 vellum pages; the writing is difficult to read and is surcharged with abbreviations. At present it is among the rare manuscripts in the National Library of Paris. Jerome had given his work to Peter of Lemoges, a student and later one of the Masters at the University, who in turn bequeathed it to the Sorbonne for the use of the faculty and students, with the provision that it be kept chained in the chapel.⁴

In the preface to his work, the Friar writes:

"We have compiled by diligent study this summary from the various writings of our predecessors, so that when the brethren of our Order or others wish to judge of the quality of singing, whether it be true or false, refined or vulgar, and wish to correct mistakes and compose new melodies through their own efforts, they may be able rightly to accomplish what they desire to do. This, indeed, is not a mere vain or useless undertaking, nor a cheap work of musical science; but, besides bringing about the result of making one familiar with his own compositions, it makes him a singer, a judge, and a critic of new works."

This led M. François Fétis, the distinguished French historian, to conclude that Jerome was merely a compiler of the works of such authors as Boëthius, St. Isadore of Seville, Alfarabius, and Richard, and also of John of Garlandia, Franco of Cologne, and Peter Picard.⁵ But M. Edmond de Coussemaker, the highest ranking authority on medieval music,⁶ who edited the entire *Tractatus* of Jerome and included it in his first volume *Scriptorum de Musica Medii Aevi* in 1864, does not agree with him. As he says:

"Jerome is in very truth a compiler in that he reproduces more or less considerable fragments from the writings of Boëthius, Isadore, Alfarabius, Richard, and Peter; but chapters 18 to 25 as well as chapter 28 are his own, and if these were compilations the learned Dominican would not have failed to inform the reader of their authorship."⁷

Coussemaker adds that Jerome was a musician versed in both the theory and practice of measured as well as of ecclesiastical music, and that his *Tractatus* is one the most important known writings in the history of music.⁸

⁴ Coussemaker, Ed. de, *Histoire de l'harmonie au Moyen Age*, Intro.

⁵ *Biographie universelle des musiciens* (2e ed.) III, 400, c. 2.

⁶ *Oxford History of Music*, I, 60.

⁷ Coussemaker, *op. cit.*, Intro.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 213.

Part of the preface in which Jerome points out the purpose of his work is strikingly similar to St. Thomas' Prologue to the *Summa Theologica* :

St. Thomas

"We have considered that students in this doctrine have not seldom been hampered by what they have found written by other authors, partly on account of the multiplication of useless questions, articles, and arguments, partly also because those things that are needful for them to know are not taught according to the order of the subject-matter, but according as the plan of the book might require, or the occasion of the argument offer, partly, too, because frequent repetition brought weariness and confusion to the minds of the readers. Endeavoring to avoid these and other like faults, we shall try, by God's help, to set forth whatever is included in this sacred doctrine as briefly and clearly as the matter itself may allow."⁹

Jerome

"We have considered that students in this doctrine have been greatly hampered by the many things that have been written, partly on account of the multiplication of useless words and notes, partly because the essentials have been transmitted not clearly but rather obscurely, and partly, too, because frequent repetition brought weariness and confusion to the minds of the readers. Endeavoring to avoid these and other like faults, we shall try, by God's help, to treat briefly and clearly of that part of music which pertains to the office of singing, all being comprised in a small volume in order that the necessity of consulting a number of books be avoided, and that what is sought be found easily and without trouble."¹⁰

Also in the preface Jerome inserts the Latin poem of the famous Guido d'Arezzo which gives the distinction between a singer and a musician :

Between a singer and musician
Wide is the distance and condition ;
The one repeats, the other knows,
The sounds which harmony compose.
And he who acts without a plan
May be defin'd more beast than man.
At shrillness if he only aim
The nightingale his strains can shame ;
And still more loud and deep the lay
Which bulls can roar and donkeys bray.
A human form 'twas vain to give
To beings merely sensitive,
Who ne'er can quite the leading-string¹¹
Or psalm, without a master, sing.¹²

⁹ Coussemaker, *Scriptorum de Musica Medii Aevi*, I, 2.

¹⁰ Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *The Summa Theologica*, Part I, QQ. I-XXVI, lxxxix.

¹¹ The "leading-string" was the monochord, a single vibrating string, which, being subdivided by movable bridges in simple mathematical ratios, gave the main note of the scale which underlay all musical theory of that time.

¹² Burney, Charles, translator, *A General History of Music*, (1776—new ed. 1935) Vol. I, 464.

Jerome's arrangement of the twenty-eight chapters of his work reflects a Scholastic training. In truly Aristotelian fashion, he begins with the definition of music, and considers in order its name, invention, division, and excellence, passing then to a treatment of the various speculative elements of music. Jerome defines music as "the movement of tones harmonizing together in an agreeable proportion one to another."¹³ He then quotes other definitions, the most curious and painfully logical of which is that of John of Garlandia.

"Science is the knowledge of a thing as it is. Science is divided into theoretical and practical. The theoretical is a speculative; the practical, operative. Theoretical science is divided into theology, that is, divine science, into natural science, that is, the knowledge of natural things, and into doctrinal science. Doctrinal science is sometimes taken in the strict sense and sometimes in the wide sense: in the wide sense, when the science proceeds by means of some certain and common rules. Doctrinal science in the strict sense is mathematics or quantitative science, as of numbers, etc. . . . Quantity is two-fold: continuous and discrete. Continuous quantity concerns lines, surfaces, and bodies; and this is also two-fold, for one kind of continuous quantity is movable and the other immovable. Continuous immovable quantity is geometry; continuous movable quantity is astronomy. Discrete quantity is likewise two-fold: absolute and relative. Discrete absolute is arithmetic, in which quantity is determined by absolute numbers. Discrete relative is music, in which quantity is determined by numbers related to sounds. Hence the definition of music is, the science of numbers related to sounds. Or, practically, music is the science of a multiplicity of sounds. Or again, music is the science of true singing and the easy path to the perfection of singing."¹⁴

Boëthius (475-525 A. D.), who transmitted the knowledge of the music of the Greeks to the Middle Ages, was, for Jerome, the master *par excellence*, even though his point of view was never that of a practical musician, but rather that of an arithmetician and a speculative.

Following his lead, Jerome devotes Chapter 14, 15, and 17 to a consideration of the arithmetical and geometrical proportions of tones,—matters which are of historical value to acousticians. Boëthius states his concept of music in this wise: "How superior is the science of music, the knowledge of its theory, to its practice, just as the intellect is superior to the body. He is a musician who has acquired the science of song through reason, without undergoing the drudgery of practice. All music is rationalism and speculation."¹⁵ The only one we know of who reached such a speculative plane was Pythagoras who under-

¹³ Coussemaker, *Scriptorum*, p. 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁵ Combarieu, Jules, *Histoire de la musique*, Vol. I, p. 221.

took a penetrating study of music leaving aside the testimony of the ear! The Pythagoreans were wont to boast that their leader heard even the music caused by the movements of the stars and planets by knowing the proportions of which their harmony is composed! In the seventh chapter Jerome gives a very lengthy recital of the arguments of the Pythagoreans on the music caused by the movements of the heavenly bodies and the objections which Aristotle urged against these arguments. Jerome, however, ends the chapter in these words: "Which of these opinions of these great men is the truer, we do not make so bold as to state, but leave this to be determined by our betters."¹⁶

In regard to plain chant, it is interesting to note that the present edition of the Dominican *Processionarium*, wherein are contained the rules for chant, gives no more or less than Chapter XXII of the *Tractatus de Musica*, "On the Ecclesiastical Tones in Particular." Hence we may conclude that the characteristic Dominican psalmody used today is substantially the same as that in use in the middle of the thirteenth century when Jerome wrote down the examples. In the chapter entitled, "Of the Manner of Composing New Ecclesiastical Chants," Jerome advocates diatonic and chromatic embellishments in the chant of the Offices of Sundays and of principal feasts, but he says that their use in the chant of the ferial Offices is an abuse not to be tolerated. Near the end of the same chapter, there is an amusing little hint in Jerome's words: "Sorrow is the special impediment to beautiful singing. Consequently, that chant is worth nothing which proceeds from heaviness of heart, and even though the melancholic may have beautiful voices, they cannot really sing beautifully."¹⁷

Of paramount importance to the history of medieval music is the chapter on the Discant, or method of harmonizing the plain chant. It is in this chapter that Jerome is really a compiler, since he includes the treatises of John of Garlandia, Franco, Peter Picard, and John of Bourgogne. The Discant was the infancy, as it were, of counterpoint; and counterpoint, in turn, developed into polyphony. If the early attempts of the Discant had its admirers, it also had its enemies. The Domini-

¹⁶ Coussemaker, *Scriptorum*, p. 16.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

can Chapter held at Bologna in 1252 expressly proscribed the use of Discant by the brethren either in their own churches or in the churches of others.¹⁸ The Constitutions of the Order have ever forbidden the use of part-singing, and even the latest edition made in 1932 retains the term *discantus*.¹⁹

The last chapter of the *Tractatus* was considered of such merit that M. François J. Perne, the Inspector-General of the Paris Conservatoire in 1816 and the author of erudite works on some of the most obscure points in the history of music,²⁰ translated it from the Latin into French and added an interesting commentary for the *Revue Musicale* of 1828.²¹ This chapter is entitled: "Of the Four- and Five-Stringed Instruments, Namely the Rubebe and the Vielle." Concerning the vielle, the fore-runner of the violin as we know it, Perne writes: "We are going to examine the structure of the vielle or violin of which Jerome of Moravia gives such particularized details as to the three ways of tuning as well as of playing it, that we consider this section of his work the first method for the violin which could have existed since the origin of this instrument."²² It is evident therefore, that if Jerome were an executive musician he was more than likely what we would call a violinist.

Jerome of Moravia bring the *Tractatus* to a close in a deeply religious vein:

"Let it be known to all who read this work that we have written all these things to the honor of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the most glorious Virgin Mary, His Mother, and St. Dominic, for the use of students,—not indeed to contradict the writings of others, or to overthrow their teachings, but rather to stimulate our betters to do more perfectly that which we have done less well. Wherefore, dear reader, mindful of our good intention, be kind to us, a poor sinner, and do not bite us with a reproachful tongue. What is worthwhile attribute to God alone; and if some things seem of little or of no use to you, regard them as mistakes, or acknowledging that you do not understand them, consider them as being inserted outside of our intention, and correct them with fraternal charity."²³

¹⁸ Fontana, V. M., O.P., *Constitutiones Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum*, p. 54, no. 4.

¹⁹ *Constitutiones*, O.P., 537, 1.

²⁰ Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, (3rd. ed. 1935) IV, 121.

²¹ Vol. II, pp. 457, 481 ff.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 469.

²³ Coussemaeker, *Scriptorum*, pp. 153-154.

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MARCH SIMILE

SEBASTIAN CARLSON, O.P.

A muddy pool, ice-rimmed and bleak,
 Attempts to show
 A tree's sharp outlines, and the glow
 Of stars. Grotesque the trees, and weak
 The night-eyes grow.

If once the wind would lull and die
 The mud would settle; mirrored sky
 And tree would seem reality.

My soul—you turbid splash, unfrozen
 But deathly chill,
 Who travesty the deeds and will
 And words of Him Whom you have chosen—
 Be still, O still!