

**A LETTER TO HIS GRACE THE
DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND ON
THE ANCIENT NORTHUMBRIAN
MUSIC, ITS COLLECTION AND
PRESERVATION**

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A letter to his grace the duke of Northumberland on the ancient Northumbrian music, its collection and preservation by Thomas Doubleday

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THOMAS DOUBLEDAY

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A LETTER

TO

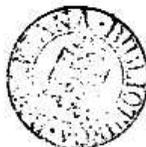
HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND

ON THE

ANCIENT NORTHUMBRIAN MUSIC,

ITS COLLECTION AND PRESERVATION.

BY THOMAS DOUBLEDAY.



"Nor rough nor barren are the winding ways
Of hear Antiquity, but strewn with flowers."

THOMAS WARTON.

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A Letter

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HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND.

MY LORD DUKE,

I do not formally apologize to your Grace for the liberty I take in venturing to address to you the following remarks. A Duke of Northumberland must naturally feel an interest in everything which appertains to that county whence his high station and merited influence in society are derived. Nor has your Grace's conduct been such as to leave any room for doubt on that head, had he who now addresses you felt any inclination to doubt. Everything interesting to the county of Northumberland and to its inhabitants has had an interest also for its Duke. In every institution, in every enterprise, whether benevolent, literary, scientific, or social, you, my Lord Duke, have been prompt to take an active and leading part. Your Grace's past acts, then, are my assurance. I need no further encouragement; nor do I seek further apology for that which I am now about to do,—that is to say, to bespeak your Grace's kind attention to a theme which, at all events, is eminently Northumbrian, and which must, therefore,

have an easily allowed claim upon the ear of even the humblest of that designation, and one more potent, of course, upon that of your Grace, whose ancestors have given a historical value to the name of Percy, and a historical lustre to the border county, of which they were at once "Decus et Tutamen"—the ornament and the defence.

In entering upon the subject with which I am now to deal, I fear your Grace may deem me guilty of uttering a truism rather than a truth, when I observe that the origin and history of all Ancient and National Music, where such exists, must ever be a matter of interest to the inquiring mind. Interesting, however, as they are, it may be doubted whether the subject has yet been studied in all its bearings, or subjected to that comprehensive consideration which it really demands. These bearings are much more varied and extended than they appear to be upon a mere cursory view; so much so, that some of them, even in discussions of which they ought to form some part, have been neglected.

In the various disquisitions, elaborate and erudite as many of them are, which have been put before the world by the various speculators upon the different races of mankind, physical evidence has been mostly relied upon. Numerous theories, as to the number and distinguishing differences of the primitive races of man, have been based upon varieties of complexion and stature, upon the nature and colour of the hair, upon the colour of the eyes, upon the facial angle, upon the shape of the skull and the length of the jaw-bone. From all these inferences of no trifling import have been drawn; whilst upon mental characteristics a stress much inferior has been laid, although the intellectual qualities of a people are perhaps more unalterable than their physical characteristics. Such has been the course followed by modern authors in their treatment of this nice

and difficult topic; but not such the conduct of the ancient writers, when they happened to touch upon this subject. Cæsar, in describing the Gallic Celt of his day, enlarges upon the mental as well as bodily peculiarities of the Gaul; and at this hour the mental tendencies described by this deep observer of mankind are wonderfully true of the French people, whilst their physical differences have been partially modified by the innumerable influences of civilisation. Rousseau ascribes their want of vocal music entirely to the deficient intonation of the modern French language, which is a case in point. If, then, intellectual and mental tendencies may form a portion of the characteristics of a race, amongst these tendencies surely must be classed the creation and preservation of a National Music; and from some of the peculiarities of that music itself may be deduced no faint indications of race, and no unsafe means of accounting for varieties of national character, as gradually formed and brought about by the social and political vicissitudes to which nations are subjected.

These remarks have naturally, and allow me to hope not altogether ungracefully, led me to that point to which it has become my ambition to direct your Grace's attention—the importance, namely, of a National Music as a national characteristic; whence I may, by an easy gradation, trust to conduct your Grace to another point of equally general and much greater local interest, bearing directly upon the subject in hand. I refer to the music peculiar to the County of Northumberland itself; a music full of peculiarities, all of them capable of throwing light upon a difficult and delicate subject, and, therefore, all of them worthy of the attention of those for whom it may possess either a local or general interest.

Northumbria, my Lord Duke, I need not remind your

Grace, is a county peculiarly placed in this wise, that it forms the border, in part, of another country, inhabited by a people which, though now happily living under the same government, were yet once aliens, owing allegiance to another monarch, with manners and predilections differing from those of England, and of a race markedly distinct, at all events, from that which inhabits the country south of the Tweed. It would not accord with the plan or purpose of a composition like the present to enter far into the disputed points as to the origin of the people living in the Lowlands of Scotland, and of those who are inhabitants of the Highlands. I am not unaware there are antiquaries, men whose opinions ought to have great weight when expressed upon such a subject, who assert, upon sufficiently obscure historical evidence, (as it seems to me), that the Highlanders are "Celts," whilst the Lowlanders are "Picts," and that the Pictish race is not a mere Celtic variety, but a distinct race, essentially different from the other. Much stress has been laid upon the fact that Gaelic is not now spoken by the Lowland Scotch. Upon this, however, far too much weight has been laid. It should be recollected that, from a period very remote, there has been great, though interrupted, intercommunication betwixt the Lowlands of Scotland, which are of small extent, and the North of England. Scotland was a constant refuge for border outlaws. Intermarriages were constantly taking place. This was encouraged in order to destroy French influence in Scotland, which was at one time all-powerful, and which existed up to 1745, nay, indeed as long as the Stuart line was not extinct. Hence the Anglo-Saxon became gradually a prevalent tongue in the Lowlands. Being a written language, it also supplanted the Gaelic, which has only been written in modern times. That the Lowland tongue should

thus gradually become Teutonic is no matter for surprise, when it is recollected that, although Anglo-Saxon was never heard in Ireland until the expedition of Strongbow, under the auspices of Henry II., and although the Irish race have been perpetually in rebellion against the Saxon domination, yet has the Anglo-Saxon tongue penetrated into every part of Ireland so completely that it is now the language of the country, and an Englishman is understood everywhere. Whereas there can be no doubt that, since Christianity was first planted in the Scottish Lowlands, the Anglo-Saxons have had constant intercommunication with them on religious grounds, and that, in the teaching and exercises of religion where Latin was not used, the Anglo-Saxon was, which in itself was enough, in these days, to give that language a preponderance.

When to these considerations is added the fact, that the National Music of Scotland, as to the nationality of which there cannot be a shadow of doubt, is more perfect in the Lowlands than in the Highlands of Scotland, and that it becomes immediately modified and soon dies out when it reaches a race that is chiefly Anglo-Saxon, or, at all events, Teutonic (for the Danish and Norman blood is not Celtic), there needs not be much hesitation in affirming that the Lowland Scot (call him "Pict" if that be insisted on) is a Celtic variety, and that his beautiful music is the strongest of proofs of this, inasmuch as wherever remains of a natural, national music are left, there exist strong reasons for the supposition that Celtic blood is there.

That the Music of Scotland, as a whole, is an ancient, natural, national music, an accurate examination of its principle and structure will demonstrate, if that principle and that structure be, at the same time, compared with the principle and structure of other music known to be national,