

In "Henry VIII.," Act III., Scene I., one of Katharine's waiting-women, at her request, sings to enliven their sadness. This is the song :—

"Orpheus, with his lute, made trees,
And the mountain-tops that freeze,
Bow themselves when he did sing ;
To his music, plants and flowers
Ever sprung ; as sun and showers
There had made a lasting spring.

"Everything that heard him play,
Even the billows of the sea,
Hung their heads, and then lay by.
In sweet music is such art,
Killing care and grief of heart
Fall asleep, or, hearing, die."

In "Merchant of Venice," Act V., Scene I., Lorenzo and Jessica are talking about the effect of music ; after an eloquent rhapsody on the subject by Lorenzo, Jessica says, "I am never merry when I hear sweet music."

Lorenzo attempts to explain why this is so, and cites the effect of music upon a herd, or race of unhandled colts, saying :—

"If they but hear perchance a trumpet sound,
Or any air of music touch their ears,
You shall perceive them make a mutual stand,
Their savage eyes turn'd to a modest gaze,
By the sweet power of music. Therefore the poet
Did feign that Orpheus drew trees, stones, and floods ;
Since nought so stockish, hard, and full of rage,
But music for the time doth change his nature."

That the myth is capable of humorous treatment will be seen in the following poem by J. G. Saxe.

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE.

JOHN G. SAXE.

Sir Orpheus, whom the poets have sung
In every metre and every tongue,
Was, you may remember, a famous musician, —
At least for a youth in his pagan condition, —
For historians tell he played on his shell
From morning till night, so remarkably well
That his music created a regular spell
On trees and stones in forest and dell!
What sort of an instrument his could be
Is really more than is known to me, —
For none of the books have told, d'ye see!
It's very certain those heathen "swells"
Knew nothing at all of oyster-shells,
And it's clear Sir Orpheus never could own a
Shell like those they make in Cremona;
But whatever it was, to "move the stones,"
It must have shelled out some powerful tones,

* * * * *

But alas for the joys of this mutable life!
Sir Orpheus lost his beautiful wife —
Eurydice — who vanished one day
From Earth in a very unpleasant way!
It chanced as near as I can determine,
Through one of those vertebrated vermin
That lie in the grass so prettily curled,
Waiting to "snake" you out of the world!
And the poets tell she went to — well —
A place where Greeks and Romans dwell

After they burst their mortal shell;
A region that in the deepest shade is,
And known by the classical name of Hades, —

* * * * *

Now having a heart uncommonly stout,
Sir Orpheus didn't go whining about,
But made up his mind to fiddle her out!

* * * * *

And then he played so remarkably fine
That it really might be called divine, —
For who can show on earth or below,
Such wonderful feats in the musical line?

* * * * *

And still Sir Orpheus chanted his song,
Sweet and clear and strong and long,

"Eurydice! Eurydice!"

He cried as loud as loud could be;
And Echo, taking up the word,
Kept it up till the lady heard,
And came with joy to meet her lord.
And he led her along the infernal route
Until he had almost got her out,
When, suddenly turning his head about
(To take a peep at his wife, no doubt),
He gave a groan, for the lady was gone,
And had left him standing there all alone!
For by an oath the gods had bound
Sir Orpheus not to look around
Till he was clear of the sacred ground,
If he'd have Eurydice safe and sound;

* * * * *

A STORY TOLD BY MERCURY TO ARGUS.

THERE was a certain nymph whose name was Syrinx, — much beloved by the satyrs and spirits of the wood. She favored none of them, for she was a faithful worshipper of Diana, and followed the chase. Pan, meeting her one day, wooed her with many compliments, likening her to Diana of the silver bow. Without stopping to hear him, she ran away; but on the bank of a river he overtook her. She called for help on her friends, the water-nymphs, who heard and saved her; for when Pan threw his arms around what he supposed to be the form of the nymph, he found only a tuft of reeds.

As he breathed a sigh, the air sounded through the reeds, and produced a plaintive melody. Whereupon, the god, charmed with the novelty and with the sweetness of the music, said, "Thus, then, at least, you shall be mine." Taking some of the reeds of unequal lengths, and placing them together side by side, he made an instrument, and called it Syrinx in honor of the nymph.

NOTE. — This instrument is also called the Pandean Pipes.

A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT.

MRS. BBROWNING.

I.

What was he doing, the great god Pan,
Down in the reeds by the river?
Spreading ruin and scattering ban,

Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a goat
And breaking the golden lilies afloat
With the dragon-fly on the river?

II.

He tore out a reed, the great god Pan,
From the deep cool bed of the river.
The limpid water turbidly ran,
And the broken lilies a-dying lay,
And the dragon-fly had fled away,
Ere he brought it out of the river.

III.

High on the shore sate the great god Pan,
While turbidly flowed the river,
And hacked and hewed as a great god can
With his hard bleak steel at the patient reed,
Till there was not a sign of a leaf indeed
To prove it fresh from the river.

IV.

He cut it short, did the great god Pan,
(How tall it stood in the river!)
Then drew the pith like the heart of a man
Steadily from the outside ring,
Then notched the poor, dry, empty thing
In holes as he sate by the river.

V.

"This is the way," laughed the great god Pan,
(Laughed while he sate by the river!)
"The only way since gods began
To make sweet music, they could succeed."
Then dropping his mouth to a hole in the reed,
He blew in power by the river!

VI.

Sweet, sweet, sweet, O Pan,
Piercing sweet by the river!
Blinding sweet, O great god Pan!
The sun on the hill forgot to die,
And the lilies revived, and the dragon-fly
Came back to dream on the river.

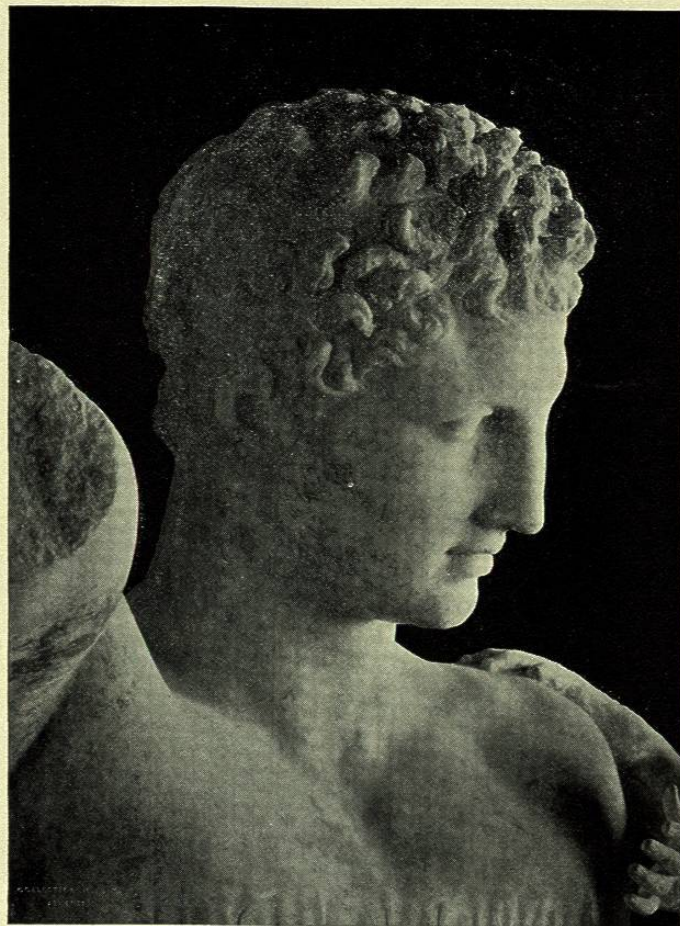
VII.

Yet half a beast is the great god Pan
To laugh as he sits by the river,
Making a poet out of a man.
The true gods sigh for the cost and the pain —
For the reed that grows never more again
As a reed with the reeds of the river.

The musical instrument most used by the Greeks was the lyre, to which frequent allusions are made by all poets. The origin of this famous instrument is of course mythical, and is very prettily told by James Russell Lowell in the following poem:—

THE FINDING OF THE LYRE.

There lay upon the ocean's shore
What once a tortoise served to cover.
A year and more, with rush and roar,
The surf had rolled it over,
Had played with it, and flung it by,
As wind and weather might decide it,
Then tossed it high where sand-drifts dry
Cheap burial might provide it.



*"O, empty world that round us lies!
Brought we but eyes like Mercury's,
In thee what songs would waken."*

It rested there to bleach or tan,
The rains had soaked, the suns had burned it ;
With many a ban the fisherman
Had stumbled o'er and spurned it ;
And there the fisher-girl would stay,
Conjecturing with her brother
How in their play the poor estray
Might serve some use or other.

So there it lay, through wet and dry,
As empty as the last new sonnet,
Till by and by came Mercury,
And having mused upon it,
" Why, here," cried he, " the thing of things,
In shape, material, and dimension !
Give it but strings, and lo, it sings,
A wonderful invention !"

So said, so done ; the cords he strained,
And, as his fingers o'er them hovered,
The shell disdained a soul had gained,
The lyre had been discovered.
O empty world that round us lies,
Dead shell, of soul and thought forsaken,
Brought we but eyes like Mercury's,
In thee what songs should waken !

Compare this poem with the following

THE ORIGIN OF THE HARP.

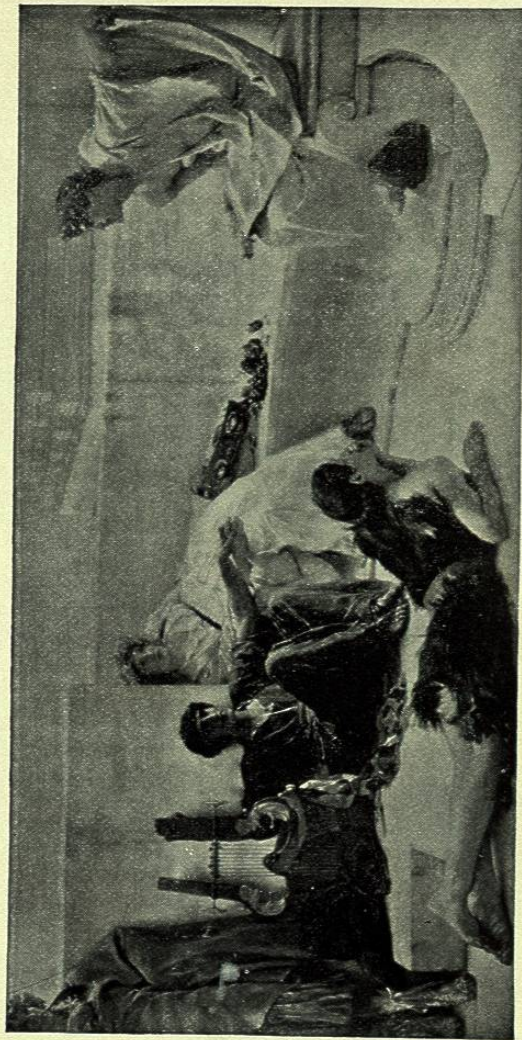
THOMAS MOORE.

'Tis believed that this Harp, which I now wake for thee,
Was a Siren of old, who sung under the sea,
And who often at eve, through the bright waters roved,
To meet on the green shore a youth whom she loved.

But she loved him in vain, for he left her to weep,
And in tears, all the night, her gold tresses to steep;
Till heaven looked with pity on true love so warm,
And changed to this soft Harp the sea-maiden's form.

Still her form rises fair — still her cheeks smile the same —
While her sea-beauties gracefully form'd the light frame,
And her hair, as, let loose, o'er her white arm it fell,
Was changed to bright chords utt'ring melody's spell.

Hence it came, that this soft Harp so long hath been known
To mingle love's language with sorrow's sad tone
Till thou didst divide them, and teach the fond lay
To speak love when I'm near thee, and grief when away.



"Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne."