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MUSIC NOTES.

Homeric Hymns.

Our most authentic music of Ancient Greece is that sung by the Greek Rhapsodists to that body of Greek poetry commonly known as the *Homeric Hymns*. The music was inscribed on tablets of marble in the third century B. C., and they were discovered in Delphi, 1893, by the French Archaeological School.

The *Homeric Hymns* were commonly attributed by the ancients to Homer, with as much confidence as the *Iliad* and *Odessey*. It is the inclination of all modern critics however, to deny that any of these *Hymns* belong to Homer, though they are certain that they are extremely ancient and were probably written soon after the *Iliad* and the *Odessey*. The period from 750-500 B. C. marks roughly the limits of their origin.

They are about thirty-three in number: some are long, some are short—and they vary greatly in poetical merit. There is scarcely one amongst them that has not something to interest us.

It was usual for the Homeric Rhapsodists to preface the recitation of their poetry by an address to some god. If he was reciting at a festival, for instance, this address would be made to the god of the festival. The *Homeric Hymns* therefore, are simply a collection of such preudes drawn up for the use of the Rhapsodists. Twenty two out of the thirty-three Hymns end with a verse in which the singer says that he will now pass from addressing the god, to the theme of his song. Hardly two of the whole collection, probably, are by the same hand.

The first and longest and most celebrated is the *Hymn to Apollo*. It is, however, less complete than those to Mercury and Venus. There is a want of unity in some parts which might lead us to suspect that it is a compilation of two or three separate poems. The first part tells how Apollo was born in Delos and how his great festival was established there. The second part tells how Apollo came down from Olympus to seek a shrine on earth, how he wandered to Delphi, where his temple was founded.

The *Hymn to Mercury* is humorous. It tells how Mercury steals the cattle of Apollo from the hills and transfers them to his own pastures of Arcadia. In this *Hymn*, Mercury is given the character of a rogue among the gods—stealing their goods, playing them tricks and telling such enormous lies to screen himself from detection that certainly no human thief could think of rivalling them on earth.

This Hymn tells how Mercury was born in a cave about day-break; by noon he had made a lyre

out of the shell of a tortoise and had learnt to play upon it; and that same evening he stole and drove away some fifty cows belonging to Apollo; he killed and dressed two of them, made a fire and ate of them, then crept home about the dawn into his cradle again. The *Hymn* says: "Now he obliquely through the key-hole passed, Like a thin mist, or an autumnal blast. Then to his cradle he crept quick and spread The swaddling clothes about him, and the knave Lay playing with the covering of his bed."

His mother suspects him of some mischief and predicts that Apollo will find him out and punish him. To all of which he answers that should Apollo make any disturbance about the cows he will do something very much worse. Meanwhile Apollo misses his cows, suspects Mercury, follows the foot-marks and enters the cave. Mercury rolls himself up into a little ball, puts his head under the covers and pretends to be asleep. Apollo searches every key-hole and corner in the cave, then looks into his mother's wardrobe and lights upon the little Mercury, and addresses him thus: "Little cradled rogue, declare Of my illustrious heifers—where they are!"

To which Mercury answers: "Why come you here to ask me what is done With the wild oxen which it seems you miss?"

* * * * *
An ox-stealer should be both tall and strong,
And I am but a little new-born thing,
Who, yet at least, can think of nothing wrong;
My business is to sleep, and fling
The cradle clothes about me all day long,
Or half asleep, hear my sweet mother sing,
And to be washed in waters clear and warm,
And hushed and kissed and kept secure from harm."

Apollo however, catches the boy in his arms—and the boy behaves in such a way that makes it difficult for me to describe the adventure. Finally they both go to Olympus and Apollo lays his complaint before Jupiter. They both speak and Mercury accompanies his speech with winks of his eye and nods of his head to let Jupiter know the exact state of the case. The end is, that Jupiter bursts into a violent fit of laughter to see his son lying so skillfully about the cows and says that he has now done enough to establish his reputation, that it is time to confess to Apollo the exact truth. Mercury does this and in addition gives Apollo his treasured lyre and then swear eternal friendship.

By far the most beautiful of the *Homeric Hymns* is the one to Venus. It is said that no poet ever surpassed the richness and ele-

(Continued on page four)

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