

**THE GREAT
MUSICIANS; ENGLISH
CHURCH COMPOSERS**

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The Great Musicians; English Church Composers by Wm. Alex. Barrett

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WM. ALEX. BARRETT

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MUSICIANS; ENGLISH
CHURCH COMPOSERS**

THE GREAT MUSICIANS

ENGLISH CHURCH COMPOSERS

The Great Musicians

Edited by FRANCIS HUEFFER

**ENGLISH
CHURCH COMPOSERS**

By WM. ALEX. BARRETT

MUS. BAC. OXON.; VICAR CHORAL OF ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL



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ENGLISH CHURCH COMPOSERS.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

ENGLISH church music began to assume a definite shape and character soon after the Reformation. The encouragement given to the practice of music by the successive sovereigns of the Tudor dynasty, both by their precept and example, laid the foundation of a school of music distinctly national, which would probably have had its due influence over other schools had it been suffered to develop itself without interruption. Beginning with the humblest and most simple forms, the Church Composers from time to time, at no very great intervals, expanded these germs into growths of such unexpected beauty that, though arrested in their full progress, they remain the admiration and wonder of posterity. The English school has the merit, if such it be, of having outlived, in point of relative duration, the majority of the other schools which have been founded

have flourished, and have decayed. In the long period preceding the Reformation, the names of English musicians occupy positions as honourable as any of those of other countries.

An Englishman, John of Dunstable, who died in 1458, is credited with having been an accomplished contrapuntist, if he was not actually the inventor of the art of *punctum contra punctum*. Probably contemporary with him was Thomas de Walsyngham, Prior of St. Albans, the author of a *Tract on Music*, in which he deprecates the "new character, of late introduced, called a crotchet, which would be of no use would musicians remember that beyond the minim no subdivision ought to be made." A statement in which he was etymologically correct, for there can be nothing smaller than the smallest (minimum).

In the centuries long before, history records the names of Englishmen who had attained some degree of eminence as musicians, such as John of Salisbury, the friend of Thomas à Becket; Adam of Dore Abbey, in Herefordshire, in the time of King John; Gregory of Bridlington, who, in 1217, wrote a treatise, *De Arte Musices*; and Walter Odington, a Benedictine monk, of Evesham, in Worcestershire [c. 1240], a writer on *Mensural Music*, who is credited with the invention of the minim by some writers, but whose claim to that distinction is somewhat doubtful; and others. One of the oldest pieces of music extant¹ with English words attached, has been asserted by Ritson (*Ancient Songs and Ballads*), to belong to the middle of the thirteenth

¹ Harleian MSS., British Museum, No. 978.