

**SOME
FORERUNNERS
OF ITALIAN OPERA**

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Some forerunners of Italian opera by W. J. Henderson

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W. J. HENDERSON

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BY

W. J. HENDERSON

AUTHOR OF

"THE ORCHESTRA AND ORCHESTRAL MUSIC,"

"WHAT IS GOOD MUSIC," "THE
ART OF THE SINGER," ETC.



NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1911

TO HER

*“In a land of sand and ruin and gold
There shone one woman, and none but she.”*

SWINBURNE

P R E F A C E

THE purpose of this volume is to offer to the English reader a short study of the lyric drama in Italy prior to the birth of opera, and to note in its history the growth of the artistic elements and influences which finally led the Florentine reformers to resort to the ancient drama in their search for a simplified medium of expression. The author has not deemed it essential to his aims that he should recount the history of all European essays in the field of lyric drama, but only that of those which directly affected the Italians and were hence the most important. For this reason, while some attention is given in the beginning to the French and German liturgical plays, the story soon confines itself to Italy.

The study of the character and performance of the first Italian secular drama, the "Orfeo" of Poliziano, unquestionably a lyric work, is the result of some years of labor. The author believes that what he has to offer on this topic will be found to possess historical value. The subsequent development of the lyric drama under the combined influences of polyphonic secular composition and the growing Italian taste for luxurious spectacle has been narrated at some length, because the author believes that the reformatory movement of the Florentines was the outcome of dissatisfaction with musical conditions brought about as much by indulgence of the appetite for the purely sensuous elements in music as by blind adherence to the restrictive laws of ecclesiastic counterpoint.

With the advent of dramatic recitative the work ends. The history of seventeenth-

century opera, interesting as it is, does not belong to the subject especially treated in this volume. The authorities consulted will be named from time to time in the pages of the book.