

II.

Stringed Instruments

WITH A KEYBOARD.

FROM the Pianoforte of to-day, the household orchestra as it has been termed, to its remote prototype is a long, long way. Yet the steps by which the Dulcimer of the ancient nations has become developed into the Pianoforte are not difficult to trace, although we cannot say for certain who was the inventor of each one of the improvements found in the popular instrument now placed at the service of Music.

Historically the pianoforte dates back to Assyrian times—its ancestor was the dulcimer, apparently a favourite instrument of this people. In the Assyrian room at the British Museum will be found some of the massive stone sculptures brought by Layard from the mound of Kouyunjik. This portion of Nineveh was built by Sargon 700 B.C. On some of the slabs are seen processions in which musicians play an important part; among these are performers on the dulcimer. For the convenience of marching, the instrument is attached by a string to the waist, and the players appear to be striking the strings with hammers at the end of sticks held in their hands.

A dulcimer may be defined as a quadrilateral sound-box across which strings are stretched resting on bridges; this